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International Communication Research Journal - Brief History

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Special Thanks
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Editor's Corner……

It is a privilege to welcome you - friends and colleagues - to our rebranded International Communication Research Journal (ICRJ). As I welcome everyone in my capacity as the new editor of ICRJ, I pay homage to our past editors and their teams for keeping the journal intellectually robust over the years.

This edition, a special package that addresses music, entertainment and political messaging across cultures, emerged from the pre-conference panel of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, organized by the International Communication Division of the association in Toronto, Canada, this past August.

Our menu of articles includes an assessment of the stylistic transformation of Chinese rapper, GAI, perhaps executed to avoid further harassment from media censors in his country; the role of Betar Kendro (Radio Station) in motivating Bengali freedom fighters and nationalists during Bangladesh's independence war, through songs and music aired by the station; how a talented and charismatic lady, Mercedes Sosa, used her sonorous voice and compelling music to challenge dictatorships in her country, Argentina, and indeed the entire Latin America; and in Guyana, how calypso music maestro, Geoffrey Phillips aka Mighty Rebel and Anthony Blaze, used their songs to set the agenda for public discussions in 1992 and 2018, two critical junctures in their country's political history.

I most heartily urge you to visit our website, https://icrj.pub/, encourage you to submit manuscripts for evaluation and possible publication, and invite colleagues in your professional network to do the same. Please see our publication guidelines on our website or at the inside back cover of this edition. Our aim is to publish mass communication research from all over the globe, in line with our journal's international character.

My editorial team will appreciate your support in elevating our journal to higher grounds in international communication research.

Contents

Rapper GAI, Style and Hegemony in China: Examining a Transformation from Jianghu Liu to Xinhua Liu

Zhaoxi (Josie) Liu[1]

Unlike several studies on rap musicians and the lyrics of their songs, this study examines both obvious and obtuse meaning embedded in the styles of Chinese Rapper, GAI, and their implications for hegemony in his country. Following state censorship, GAI changed his style from that of a gangster to a patriot. On the surface, the style change indicates sustaining the hegemony upheld by the CCP (Chinese Communist Party). However, this study argues that the state crackdown on hip hop culture, its styles included, engenders a paradox for hegemony in China.

Keywords: GAI, Chinese hip hop, style, hegemony, obtuse meaning, signification

In 2017, rap musician GAI won China's première rapping competition, "The Rap of China" (hereafter, *The Rap*), streamed on iQiyi, China's Netflix equivalent. He quickly became the face of China's burgeoning hip pop culture. In early 2018, he was invited to a major singing television show, "The Singer" (hereafter *Singer*) on Hunan TV. After the first round, he quietly disappeared, although he was not voted out (Zhang, 2018). His disappearance was significant: just when it appeared that rap had finally moved from the subcultural realm to China's mainstream entertainment arena, it was pushed back. As Hall (1982) points out, popular culture is the site of struggle of meaning between the dominant and subordinate groups; "where hegemony arises, and where it is secured" (Hall, 2006, p. 487). The present study therefore examines rapper GAI's styles, rather than his lyrics, in order to highlight the peculiar challenges style can pose for hegemony in a political system.

Background: The Rise and Fall of GAI and Hip Hop Culture in China

GAI is musician Yan Zhou's stage name. He was born in 1988 in Neijiang, Sichuan, a small city next to Chongqing, China's fourth provincial-level municipality. He was a bar singer in Chongqing before joining GO$H, a local hip hop label and started writing and performing rap songs (Da, 2015). GO$H was one of the underground hip hop groups that mostly performed at nightclubs and released music through the internet. From the 2000s, hip hop not only gained popularity and tremendous following among the youth in Chongqing, but also in many large cities in China. This "wild growth" is largely attributable to the influence of hallyu (the Korean wave), American hip pop, Taiwan and Hong Kong singers (Barrett, 2012; Clark, 2012; Hu & Lai, 2004; Jia, 2018; Lin, 2017). Consequently, some independent labels began to release rap records, hip hop dancing classes appeared in colleges, and *rap battles* where underground rappers competed in improvising "free style" were held in Shanghai and Beijing (Amar, 2018; de Kloet, 2005; Khiun, 2006; Liu, 2010).

However, what turned the underground hip hop into a pop culture phenomenon was the 2017 internet show, *The Rap*. iQiyi invested more than 200 million yuan (about US$30 million) to produce the show, which was first streamed online in June 2017 (China National Radio, 2017). After several rounds of competition

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by hundreds of rappers, GAI and another rapper from northern China, PG One, became co-champions as they won the same number of votes cast by the studio audience and the judges (Liang, 2017).

The Rap was an internet sensation, garnering more than 1.3 billion views (Amar, 2018). GAI, PG One and other participating rappers became instant music celebrities. After the competition, GAI appeared in several mainstream entertainment shows on national TV, including *Singer*, a hit show in which professional singers compete for the title of "the Singing King." The success of *The Rap* and GAI's subsequent appearance on mainstream TV shows largely signified that hip hop was no longer an underground musical phenomenon (Jia, 2018; Sina Entertainment, 2018; Zhi, 2017).

On January 4 and 5, 2018, three prominent national institutions, *China Women's Daily*, the Youth Communist League, and China's Xinhua News Agency denounced via Weibo (China's social media platform) PG One's 2015 song, *Christmas Eve*, for containing drug references ("pure white powder") and insulting women ("bitches"), citing complaints from netizens. Following the denunciations, all of PG One's songs were removed from stores and online streaming platforms (Amar, 2018; He, 2018, "PG One," 2018).

On January 12, 2018, the first episode of *Singer* was aired and GAI performed a rap version of "Cang Hai Yi Sheng Xiao" ("Blue Sea Laughter"). GAI was ranked 3rd among the seven singers competing in the first round, and advanced to the next round (He, 2018). On January 18, 2018, a day before the second episode was to be aired, the *Chutian Metropolis Daily* confirmed that GAI was "requested to withdraw" from the competition (Zhang, 2018). The next day, *Sina Entertainment* posted an online notice issued by China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) that clearly stated that TV shows could not feature artists with tattoos or use "hip hop culture, subculture and dispirited culture" (An, 2018; Amar, 2018; Quackenbush & Chen, 2018). Thus, after several years of free growth, hip hop in China faced a major government crackdown.

Main Themes in Literature on China's Hip Hop: Authenticity and Counterhegemonic Voice

Hip hop in China has attracted considerable scholarly attention, one of the main themes being that Chinese hip hop lacks authenticity. Some scholars argue that due to the dominance of foreign artists in China's hip hop scene in the early 2000s (Jing, 2006), China's hip pop is a "cultural pollution" that clouds both the Chineseness and purity of the music genre (de Kloet, 2005).

However, the impression that Chinese hip hop as just copycat began to change when Chinese rappers, particularly those in Chongqing and Chengdu, two mega cities in Southwest China, started to rap in their local dialect rather than Mandarin. This gave Chinese hip hop a unique flavor and sense of originality (Amar, 2018; Barnett, 2012; Jing, 2006; Kahn, 2009; Khiun, 2006; Liu, 2014; Starman, 2019). China has hundreds of different dialects which differ in tones, pronunciation and sometimes vocabulary. Many rappers mixed Mandarin, English and their local language in their work, offering Chinese rap a "form a multimodal, hybridized semiotic ensemble," which allows the rapper to "articulate authenticity on his own terms" (Wang, 2015, p. 236).

The present study does not focus on this issue of authenticity, but the hegemonic implications of hip pop culture in China, which is another main theme in the literature. For Chinese youth, the biggest appeal of hip hop lies in its opportunity for self-expression and individualism (Barnett, 2012; Steele 2006), and a forum to resent China's rigid education system (Amar, 2018; Wang, 2009). Hip hop culture offers young Chinese "ready-made ways to assert individualism in a society that still emphasizes public displays of conformity" (Fackler, 2002).

Several rap songs also criticize social issues, asserting "an oppositional, counterhegemonic voice against the … mainstream discourse" (Liu, 2014, p. 266). Some of the songs complain about the urban chaos and moral decline brought by the migrant workers (Liu, 2014), marginalized status of some citizens (Steele, 2006; Kahn, 2009), social injustices (Liu, 2010; Wang, 2009), and a sense of being left out of China's economic boom and their desire for success (Barnett, 2012; Lin, 2017; Liu, 2010; Steele 2006; Wang, 2009).

Most of the studies mentioned above focus on the counterhegemonic expressions in their lyrics. In this study, the focus is on another essential element of hip pop culture: style, using GAI as the subject of analysis. Since political messages conveyed through lyrics are very risky in China and many rappers are wary of that (Kahn, 2009; Liu, 2010), the non-verbal discursive elements, such as style, bear significance and deserve close examination.

Style, Signification and Hegemony

In this study, the author attempts to establish the connection between signification and hegemony in the analysis of GAI's style. Hebdige (1979), who provides a key study on the style of subculture, does not provide a clear definition of style, but offers ample clues for understanding the concept, such as the "most mundane objects—a safety pin, a pointed shoe, a motor cycle" that take on a symbolic dimension and convey certain meaning that usually carry "subversive implications" (p. 2). Besides the most mundane objects, Hebdige (1979) examines outfits and accessories that convey "the dreams and the disappointments of an entire generation" (p. 41). Style could also be about non-objects, body language, expressions, postures and gestures, all of which could mean defiance, contempt or acceptance etc.

Style is also an integral part of hip hop culture in China. These include oversize parkas, low-rise baggy jeans, necklaces, basketball boots and body piercing that set the fashion trend among young people (Clark, 2012; Fackler, 2002; Hu & Lai, 2004). Wearing AndI sports shoes and playing basketball on the streets express a different identity than wearing Nike or Adidas (Clark, 2012). Hair style is another form of expression, be it blonde colored hair or dreadlocks (Fackler, 2002; Liu, 2010). In short, hip hop style "lets Chinese young people express themselves physically and visually" (Liu, 2010, p. 151). As such, hip hop style has meaning and political implications.

Signification of Style

As Hebdige (1979) observed, "objects are made to mean" (p. 3). This process of "made to mean" is signification. Drawing on the works of Barthes (1977), Hebdige (1979) and Kristeva (1973), the current study analyzes GAI's styles at two levels: the "obvious meaning" and the "obtuse meaning."

Subcultural style could be read as signs (Hebdige, 1979). "A sign is anything… that stands for something other than itself" (Danesi, 2004, p. 4). The object (of style) is the signifier, and its meaning is the signified. The Stoics, considered the first to formulate a theory about the sign, placed signification "in the position of necessary relation" between "the out-there and that which speaks it, the thing and the word" (Kristeva, 1973, p. 26). In conventional semiotics, "the process of signification is, thus, the relation X=Y itself" (Danesi, 2004, p. 12).

Subcultural styles deliberately appropriate objects from various sources and turn them into signs. For instance, "lavatory chains were draped in graceful arcs across chests encased in plastic bin- liners. Safety pins were taken out of their domestic 'utility' context and worn as gruesome ornaments through the cheek, ear or lip" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 107). Through such a style, the punks "were able to restate their position to dominant values and institutions" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 116), which is a position of resistance and contempt. In this manner, the meaning of the signs (e.g., the lavatory chains and safety pins) is rather obvious. "It is what the author wanted to say" (Barthes, 1977, p. 54). At the level of the obvious meaning, the signifier corresponds with a definite signified.

However, the signifier does not always have a definite signified. When examining certain elements of punk style more carefully, Hebdige (1979) found the signified elusive. Therefore, conventional semiotics, which intends to establish a fixed connection between the signifier and the signified, cannot fully explain the meaning of subcultural style. "Any attempt at extracting a final set of meanings from the seemingly endless, often apparently random, play of signifiers in evidence here seems doomed to failure" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 117). Instead, Barthes (1977) proposes an additional way of reading style, that of the "obtuse meaning" (p. 54).

The idea of the obtuse meaning breaks the "relation of necessity" (Kristeva, 1973, p. 28) between the signifier and the signified, and opens "the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely" (Barthes, 1977, p. 55), as the obtuse meaning is "polysemous" (Barthes, 1977, p. 56). Obtuse meaning exists "when the text is read (or written) as a moving play of signifiers, without any possible reference to one or some fixed signifieds" (Barthes, 1977, p. 10). The current study examines both the obvious (clear correspondence between the signifier and the signified) and obtuse (uncertain, polysemous) meaning of GAI's styles.

To further complicate the matter, style is rendered meaningful through "dialectic between action and reaction" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 2). Action is the style itself, reaction is how society responds to it. Eventually, how the style comes to mean and what it means is a "process of meaning-construction" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 118), which involves the "manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it [message of a symbol]" (Barthes, 1977, p. 17). The current study also examines this action-reaction dynamic in the case of GAI.

Hegemony

The meaning of subcultural style bears complicated implications for hegemony. In Gramsci's writing, hegemony means the "cultural, moral and ideological leadership over allied and subordinate groups" (Forgacs, 2000, p. 423). Hegemony is a special kind of power. It is "the power to frame alternatives and contain opportunities, to win and shape consent, so that the granting of legitimacy to the dominant classes appears not only 'spontaneous' but natural and normal" (Clarke et al., 1976, p. 38).

A hegemonic cultural order prescribes "not the specific content of ideas, but the limits within which ideas and conflicts move and are resolved" (Clarke et al., 1976, p. 39). Gramsci is also clear about the importance of "culture and thought" to the "moment of hegemony and consent" (Forgacs, 2000, p. 195). These points apply to hip hop culture as well.

To win the spontaneous consent of the subordinate groups, the dominant group has to take into account their interests and tendencies (Clarke et al., 1976; Forgacs, 2000). The site of consent is civil society, which is "the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private'" (Forgacs, 2000, p. 306), in opposition to "the state (political society) which is a site of coercions, dictatorship, domination" (Forgacs, 2000, p. 224). Coercion or direct domination is used when "spontaneous consent has failed" (Forgacs, 2000, p. 307). "So hegemony cannot be taken for granted… It has to be won, worked for, reproduced, sustained" (Clarke et al., 1976, p. 40).

In China, the dominant group is the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its top leadership. It rules through its massive network of party organizations and state institutions, including media control mechanisms. The hegemony in China could be called the Party hegemony. The Party and state systems are in the hands of a group of political, business and intellectual elites (de Burgh, 2017; Khiun, 2006; Zhao, 2008), whereas the common people could be considered the subordinate group. Rappers, who are mostly marginalized urban youth, are part of the subaltern (Liu, 2010; Liu, 2014; Steele, 2006; Kahn, 2009; Wang, 2015).

The signification of hip hop style can be connected with hegemony, in that hip pop style, with its obvious and especially obtuse meanings, poses a unique challenge to the Party hegemony. Consequently, the present study attempts to provide answers to the following research questions (RQs):
1. What is the obvious meaning of GAI's styles?
2. What is the obtuse meaning of GAI's styles?
3. What are the implications of these meanings for the Party hegemony in China?

Method

Data for this study are from videos of GAI's performances. His rise to prominence in China's hip hop culture makes him a good case for this study, especially due to the fact that he is one of first—perhaps the only one—rappers to emerge from the underground to the mainstream stage, only to be censored by the state.

Seven videos from three different stages of GAI's career were chosen to analyze his style. These are videos of his most popular songs or performances highlighted in the media, and are still available on YouTube. Below is a brief description of the seven videos (see Appendix for links to the videos):

Stage 1: Before *The Rap*, 2015 – June, 2017.
- *Chao Shehui* (Gangsta) music video, released in 2015. It established GAI's fame as a Chongqing dialect rapper (Starman, 2019).

Stage 2: From *The Rap* to the state ban, June 2017-January 2018.
- Three live performances during *The Rap* competition: *Tian Gan Wu Zao* (second round); *Kong Cheng Ji* and *108* (final round), June-September 2017.
- Performance on the China Central Television (CCTV) show, *I Want to Be*

on Chun Wan: Hou Guo Di Liao (Hot Pot Soup Base), December 2017. *Chun Wan* is the CCTV Chinese New Year Gala, a five-hour live variety show consisting of singing, dancing, acrobatic display, comedy sketch and many more. Performing at the gala is the benchmark for recognition as a mainstream artist. *I Want to Be on Chun Wan* is a talent show to choose some performers at the gala.

• Performance on *Singer: Cang Hai Yi Sheng Xiao* (Blue Sea Laughter), January 2018. The song is a popular pop song in China, first released in 1990. GAI added a rap segment to it.

Stage 3: After the Ban in May, 2018.

• *The Great Wall* music video, released in June 2018.
  Each video was viewed multiple times by this author, to identify and review the style as carefully and closely as possible. Drawing on Hebdige's (1979) and Hall & Jefferson's (1976) analysis of subcultural styles, this study focuses on the following aspects of the rapper's styles:

• Outfit: clothing, jewelry and other accessories, including tattoos.
• Facial expression: expressions rendered by mouth, eyes, and so on.
• Body language: movements of body, arms, legs, and feet, and hand gestures.
• Demeanors: specific behavior and attitude.
• Vocal style: particular vocal characteristics, sounds and utterances.

On the basis of the above factors, this researcher then proceeded to do a qualitative textual analysis of GAI's style at two levels: the obvious and obtuse meaning. This method of analysis is essentially where researchers "evaluate the many meanings found in texts and we try to understand how written, visual and spoken langue helps us to create social realities" (Brennen, 2017, p. 204). To further contextualize and triangulate the analysis, clips from *The Rap*, documentaries about China's hip hop, one-on-one media interviews with GAI and other related material were examined by this researcher.

Findings and Analysis

This section first describes GAI's styles in the three different stages, then offers the obvious and obtuse meaning of the styles, followed by a discussion on their implications for hegemony.

GAI's Styles: From Jianghu Liu to Xinhua Liu

During Stages 1 and 2 of GAI's career, from his pre-*The-Rap* years to after the competition but before the state ban, he was labeled as the lead man of *Jianghu Liu* rap (Feng, 2017). The Chinese word, *jianghu*, translates to big river or lake. In Chinese literature, *jinaghu* is used as a metaphor for the world out there, or more specifically the social realm outside the mainstream establishment; the world of swordsmen and outcasts. The world of *gangstas* is a typical *jianghu*. "Liu" means flow or style. *Jianghu liu* therefore means *jianghu style*, a reference to China's version of gangsta rap. This style is evident in GAI's early music video, *Gangsta*, and his performances on *The Rap* and *Singer*.

In those performances, GAI's outfit is mostly loose t-shirts and jackets, paired with

white sneakers or black boots, and occasional pair of round-shaped sunglasses. He usually wears a gold chain, gold earrings, and eyebrow slits. His hair is always extremely short. In the "Gangsta" MV and his live performance in clubs, he often goes topless, revealing the tattoos on his neck, chest and arms (Amar, 2018; Shi, 2015; Starman, 2019).

His facial expression is sometimes disdainful, amplified by exaggerated lifting of one corner of his mouth, head tilting up while looking down with eyes squinted (*Gangsta*), or staring intensively with eyes wide open (*The Rap; Singer*).

GAI's body language mirror his facial expression, as he waves hands violently, shakes his head wildly, swings his arms forcefully, kicks his legs high, and stomps ferociously. He shows his middle fingers in the Gangsta music video, but not in the shows. He walks with a wobble and big arm swings, described in Chinese as "da yao da bai" (big strut, swaggering).

His demeanor is that of a *bad boy*. In *Gangsta*, he holds a cigarette in one hand and wields a long butcher's knife in another. He squats in the street while rapping, drinks beer, and plays cards bare-chested. During a pre-show interview on *The Rap* he points his finger at the camera, with his signature head-tilting-looking-down gesture, threatening those contestants who he calls "fake" and "technical garbage," telling them to wait for him to "clear all of them out of the show." He adds, "Let me burn, and bomb them to death" (*Tian Gan Wu Zao*).

GAI's vocal style is consistently forceful, very loud and powerful. He sings, literally, at the top of his lungs, and at times shouts angrily. In Gangsta he repeatedly shouts: "Laozi is from the street!" "Laozi" is a vulgar slang for "I" in Chinese, usually used by hooligans, gangsters and people with little education, indicating rudeness and toughness.

Overall, the *jianghu* style, evident in Stages 1 and 2 of GAI's career, is a style of *gangsta* swagger. It is rough, tough, raw, and vulgar. It is arrogant, aggressive, energetic and passionate. However, there are visible style changes between the *Gangsta* music videos and televised shows. On those shows, he is fully clothed to cover up his tattoos. He reverently bowed and thanked the judges and audience; no more mouth-twisting and face contortions. The closer he is to the mainstream, the softer his style becomes. When he stands on CCTV's stage, the center of China's mainstream media and entertainment, his *jianghu* style is tuned down to nearly zero. On that show, his clothing is rather fit than baggy and completely covers every trace of his tattoo. He does not wear the gold chain and earrings, his trademark throughout *The Rap*. His hand waving is much softer. There is no kicking or stomping, only CCTV-choreographed happy dancing; no staring or sneering, but cheerful grin. His vocal is also softened and tuned down. The *gangsta* persona disappears.

Yet, mellowing down his gangsta swagger did not earn him a place on the Chinese New Year Gala. Instead, like other rappers, he was banned from television altogether. For a few months after the ban, he slowed down his work and got married to his longtime girlfriend. When he resurfaced with a new single in May 2018, he had transformed from *jianghu liu* to *xinhua liu* (Ifeng Music, 2018; Sina Entertainment, 2018). "Xinhua" means new China. GAI now wears a new China style. The new single, "The Great Wall", and its music video mark a clear departure from GAI's *jianghu* style.

In the new music video, GAI wears a sportswear from Li-Ning, a Chinese brand. His jacket has the character "China" printed at the front. In some scenes he dons a Chinese style kong fu suit with a big cape. The sun glasses and gold chain are still there, making him look like a rapper, but his tattoos are completely concealed. He still tilts his head up and looks down his nose, but the sneering is no more. His body language retains the waving, kicking and head shaking, but not as wild and fierce as in previous videos. His swagger is turned down a notch. His cigarette or long knife now give way to a giant Chinese ink brush writing calligraphy all over the floor. His vocal is still forceful and powerful, but instead of screaming about his personal aspirations, he shouts about national pride.

From the tattoo-showing, knife-wielding, and sneering rapper squatting in shabby streets in the *Gangsta* to the fully clothed, straight faced rapper standing on top China's scenic Great Wall in *The Great Wall*, GAI had migrated from *jianghu* to the mainstream style.

Signification/Meanings of the Styles

In this section, the meaning of GAI's varying styles is explored at two levels: the obvious and the obtuse.

The Obvious Meaning: From Grassroots Identity to National Identity. The obvious meaning is what rapper GAI wanted people to get. Some elements of the *jianghu style*—the tattoos, sneer, middle finger, etc.—are signs, and their signified is a grassroots identity. GAI is a migrant from a small city (Neijiang) trying to make it in a huge metropolis (Chongqing). He made a living by singing pop songs and later rapping in bars and clubs and often ran out of money. He said he used to fight people "in order not to be bullied" and was beaten by the police as a teenager (Da, 2015). In a 2015 interview, GAI sided with the urban poor: "There is a big disparity between the rich and the poor in China. Why are there people in China who wield knives trying to kill people? That is because you don't let them live…He cannot get what he wanted; no education, no connections, and family background is not strong. Just like me" (Da, 2015). Therefore, the tattoos, gestures, and behavior signify his grassroots identity: rough, tough, aggressive and unyielding. Such a style allows him to "convey directly the most ordinary social topics and values" (Feng, 2017), to depict "the most realistic, the so-called social groups [unemployed idlers]" (Tencent Entertainment, 2017). He wanted people to see him as someone from the streets.

In contrast, the *xinhua* style uses a different set of signs: the outfit by a Chinese sportswear brand, the "China" print on it, the ink brush, kong fu suit, and above all, the Great Wall. The signified of these signs is a national identity. Speaking of the motivation for writing *The Great Wall* GAI said: "I feel that the country is really great, and I just want to showcase my patriotism" (Sina Entertainment, 2018). As patriotism is a mainstream value promoted by the Party, such a change could also help with marketing and sales of his music. His change of style—concealing tattoos, wearing a straight face, restraining from cussing, and better behaving—is also intentional; he wants people to notice his new identity. "With *xinhua liu*, I want to make it a new direction for China's rap," GAI explained (Sina Entertainment, 2018). He told *Sina Entertainment* that he has always tried to integrate Chinese cultural elements with foreign music styles, and that he wanted to celebrate

Chinese culture (Ren, 2019). From the *jianghu* style to the *xinhua* style, the obvious meaning of the change is to move from a grassroots identity to a national identity.

The Obtuse Meaning: Polysemy of the Swagger. Some elements of GAI's styles, such as tattoo, clothing and hand gesture can be analyzed as signifier with clear signified, but some are signifiers without clear signified. Most of his swagger—the waving, kicking, stomping, headshaking, staring, and powerful vocal—fall under the latter category, as the signified of those signs are not clear. For GAI the swagger, whether as part of his *jianghu* or *xinhua* style, is very likely a trademark. He uses a style to establish "an alternative identity which communicated a perceived difference: an Otherness" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 88-89). This identity is that of a rapper, of hip pop culture, which sets himself and fellow rappers apart from other musicians and entertainers. The swagger is also part of the entertainment that appeals to the audience.

Nonetheless, due to the lack of clear signified, the polysemy of the signs, his swagger could be interpreted quite differently. Some view his swagger as toughness, "the most fierce, aggressive and yet free roaming" (Feng, 2017), or as bringing "abundance of defiance and wildness" (Tencent Entertainment, 2017). The *jianghu* association has also been interpreted as inheriting the "rebellious cultural heritage" (Feng, 2017) of grassroots heroes like the 108 rebels in *Water Margin*. Such readings are problematic for the state, which further deems such a style, and by extension the person who displays it, as a threat, even though GAI himself does not necessarily mean to challenge the political order. When he kicks, stomps and stares on stage in *The Rap* and *Singer*, it is really hard to say that he is threatening anybody in particular. He is just a performer.

As earlier discussed, the meaning of style is assigned by both action and reaction. When the authorities banned GAI, they essentially pointed to resistance as the meaning of his *jianghu* style. In reality, GAI might not have wanted to be seen as a rebellious grassroots hero, yet the crackdown made it officially so. As the rapper suggested, "Music is music. Just be the best of myself is enough. Don't think about other things" (Tencent Entertainment, 2017).

Implications for Hegemony

Both the obvious and obtuse meanings of GAI's styles have complex implications for the Party hegemony in China. After the crackdown, GAI voluntarily abandoned the jianghu style, substituting it with the xinhua style, moving from the grassroots identity to establish a national identity (obvious meaning). This suggests victory for the Party hegemony. However, a closer examination reveals that the ban and its impact may have engendered a paradox for the Party hegemony, whereby hegemony is simultaneously maintained and undermined.

Paradox of the Crackdown. As already discussed, the realm of hegemony is civil society, in contrast to the "direct domination or command exercised through the state and juridical government" (Forgacs, 2000, p. 306). Direct domination is not hegemony. By ordering GAI off air and banning the hip hop culture altogether from broadcast, the government resorted to coercion, direct demand and dominance, rather than spontaneous consent. The crackdown therefore is not a hegemonic move. Even if hip hop culture in China, including GAI's celebration of a grassroots identity through the *jianghu* style, does contain counterhegemonic expressions, it

cannot obliterate hegemony from the system. Instead, counterhegemonic voices tend to reproduce and sustain hegemony. So, it is in the interest of the dominant group to incorporate counterhegemonic voices into the mainstream, rather than shut them out with a sweeping ban (Hebdige, 1979). A clear indication of the weakening of a hegemonic order "is the shift in the exercise of control from the mechanisms of consent to those of coercion" (Clarke et al., 1976, p. 40).

Since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, ideological control has been heightened across the Chinese society, including pop culture (Agence France-Presse, 2018; Amar, 2018). President Xi wants pop culture to convey the "positive energy" of socialist values, while rap, with its vulgarity and gangsta swagger, appears to contradict these values (Amar, 2018). On the surface, the crackdown on hip hop appears to maintain hegemony, but underneath, the application of coercion could actually undermine hegemony.

Paradox of the Impact of the Crackdown. In a way, the crackdown worked. The "abrupt official backlash against hip hop culture has tamed the swagger of artists" (Agence France-Presse, 2018). GAI abandoned his *jianghu* style and went for the *xinhua* style. He now sings about nationalism rather than individualism, concealing his tattoo and behaving himself. Even the Youth Communist League now praises him for conveying the "positive energy of traditional spirit" to the younger generation through rap (Tencent News, 2019). Reacting to the ban, GAI said, "I respect all the arrangements of the state." His fame and financial gain has given him a sense of security, which he very much cherishes. "I don't rebel my current life," he said (Sina Entertainment, 2018). This is GAI's spontaneous consent. The censorship therefore worked "to bring hip-hop back into the Chinese cultural conversation, and also to demonstrate that no style of music, however popular, is exempt from toeing the Party line" (Amar, 2018, p. 112). The dominant group thus appears to have succeed in containing the subordinate groups "within an ideological space" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 16).

But, has it? The crackdown triggered some backlash online among rap music fans. Some of the comments include: "SAPPRFT is so trashy! They didn't want to give Chinese hip pop singers any chance of survival! We can go back to ancient times" (Quackenbush & Chen, 2018); "I have always believed that an evil establishment is not going to be satisfied with our appeasement" ("How to View," 2018). In Gramscian terms, this is the moment of collapse of the spontaneous consent.

The crackdown also created a chilling effect among the rappers, who now face "more careful screening" for "ideological mistakes" in their music (Agence France-Presse, 2018). The space for hip hop artists in China is even tightly squeezed and such tight control generates discontent. "We've gotta find a way. But we don't want to have to 'find a way' to express ourselves. We just want to express ourselves," says Shanghai rapper, Naggy (Agence France-Presse, 2018). What people in power cannot deny is that "young people with lower socioeconomic status appreciate rap and hip hop because it expresses their feelings, emotions, and attitudes, and, more importantly, it helps make their voices heard" (Liu, 2010, p. 151).

To win spontaneous consent, the dominant group has to recognize the interests and the tendencies of subordinate groups (Clarke et al., 1976; Forgacs, 2000).

The disadvantaged urban youths has the need to express themselves through hip hop. Rapper Mr. Wang said "rapping helps him deal with bitterness that comes with realizing he is one of the millions left out of China's economic boom" (Wang, 2009). Hip hop allows young people to vent dissatisfaction with the adult society. This helps "alleviate (the) psychological pressure laden on them" (Hu & Lai, 2004), and "to some degree has social amendment function" (Feng, 2017). Such pressure-release function helps to maintain the consent of the subordinate groups, and also hegemony. Cracking down on hip hop seals this safety valve and social pressure keeps accumulating. When people are left with no channel to express discontent in non-confrontational ways, they may be forced into open confrontation, thus threatening hegemony.

Hip hop also provides a route to success—from rags to riches (Hebdige, 1979)—for young people who are otherwise "losers" in society. "Many underground kids hope to change their life and future through music," says GAI (Sina Entertainment, 2018). That is perhaps why thousands of rappers flocked to *The Rap*. On the show, many rappers sang about their hard life as underground rappers, their desire for recognition, earn money and live a better life. The rappers hope the show and television appearance would ultimately lead to fame and finance gain. However, the state ban took away their hope, and likely their consent. When consent fades away, hegemony tends to be undermined (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Meanings of GAI's styles engender a paradox for the Party hegemony
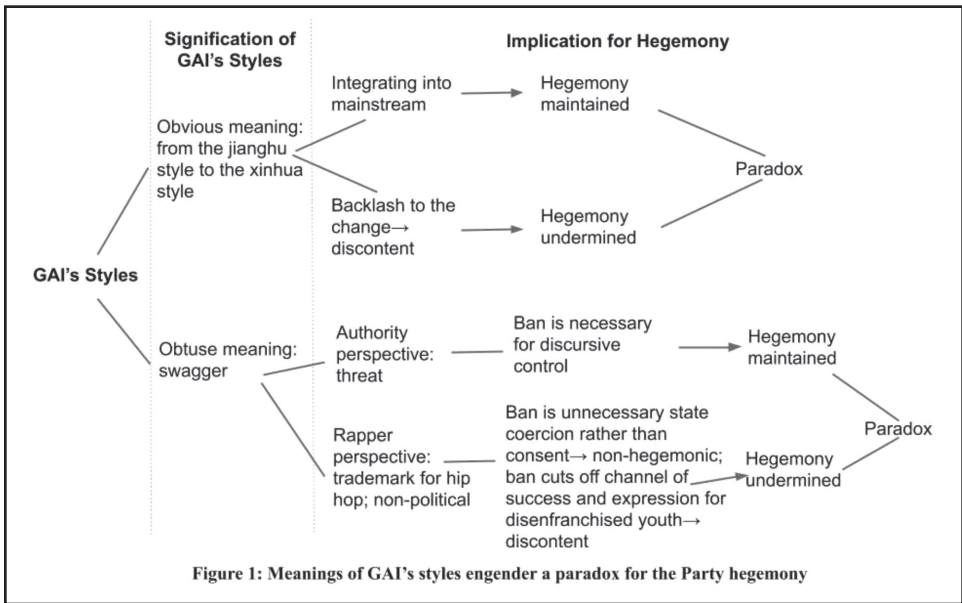
Conclusion

This study demonstrates that rapper GAI's style and hip hop in general pose peculiar challenges to China's Party hegemony. From being an underground rapper, participating *The Rap* and other mainstream shows, to being banned and resurfacing with patriotic songs, GAI's style has evidently morphed from the *jianghu* grassroots style and identity to the *xinhua* nationalism style. His swagger, whose

meaning is more obtuse than obvious, could be read as differentiating (hence the hip hop label), threatening (hence the ban), or nation loving (hence the official endorsement). The obtuse meaning of the swaggering style is polysemous.

The polysemy of his style is further enhanced by the dialectic of action and reaction. On the surface, GAI has been tamed by the state crackdown, as reflected by his style change, and the Party hegemony has been maintained. This study, however, argues that the crackdown itself is about coercion, which subverts hegemony. Without the subaltern's spontaneous consent toward the dominate group, hegemony faces a peril. GAI's style transformation has therefore engendered a paradox for the Party hegemony, whereby the Chinese state has won the battle but is losing the war over hegemony.

By making a connection between signification of style and hegemony, this study makes a theoretical contribution that opens a new line of inquiry with respect to the meanings of subcultural styles, which are more often obtuse than obvious, and pose a peculiar challenge to hegemony. Such an inquiry is particularly relevant in today's media landscape, as the plethora of media in a digital age only broadens and deepens the polysemy of subcultural styles. Is state censorship still effective in the face of such polysemy? Is it still possible to maintain the Gramscian hegemony in a fragmented media world? The study calls for reconsideration and reconfiguration of hegemony in relation to subcultural styles.

This study has limitations, the most prominent being that it only highlights the hegemonic implication of the hip hop style in China. In this regard, it needs to be noted that the hip hop culture, even in China, has very broad social, economic, cultural and political implications, which provide vast researchable areas for future studies to explore.

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Appendix: List of Videos Analyzed

Song	Type	URL
Gangsta	Music Video	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4GWF8_MgK4
Tian Gan Wu Zao	Performance on "The Rap of China"	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jeo8tf0ZMkw
Kong Cheng Ji	Performance on "The Rap of China"	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3wFfzWtlz0
108	Performance on "The Rap of China"	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtODEsdIp8Y
Hot Pot Soup Base	Performance on "I Want to Be on Chun Wan"	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTezYyU_zbU
Blue Sea Laughter	Performance on "The Singer"	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PazbAYoHK8
The Great Wall	Music Video	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8A4JCbf-2dY

Music, political messaging and the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro (Radio Station): Revisiting Bangladesh's war of Independence

M. Delwar Hossain, Uche Onyebadi and Mohammad Delwar Hosen

In this study, the authors evaluated the role played by the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro (radio station) during the Bangladeshi independence struggle, through the political messaging embedded in the songs and music aired by the station. Through interviews and textual analysis, the authors determined that the radio station provided a reliable source of news and information about the war to the Bengali people, to counter the massive propaganda waged by the invading Pakistani military; that the songs contained signals and codes encrypted for the benefit of the Bangladeshi soldiers stationed at the battlefront. The songs were also avenues to inspire the embattled Bengalis and foster the nationalistic spirit among them. Besides, the radio station used the songs to provide some form of entertainment and succor to a people desperately fighting to assert their right to enjoy freedom and independence.

The dissemination of political messages through songs and music during wars of independence is an historical phenomenon. During the American Revolutionary War of Independence (1775-1783) for instance, several songs were composed to invigorate American soldiers in their fight against colonial Britain. Prominent among such impactful songs was Chester, composed by William Billings. Its fourth stanza declared that:

> The Foe comes on with haughty Stride
> Our troops advance with martial noise
> Their Veterans flee before our Youth
> And Gen'rals yield to beardless Boys

During Kenya's war of independence, the indigenous *Mau Mau* liberation army used a variety of songs between 1952 and 1960 to mobilize the Kikuyu people in their fight against the British colonialists who had occupied and seized their arable lands (Gakahu, 2017).

Overall, these patriotic songs and music were used by freedom fighters in colonial Kenya and America to cultivate anti-imperialist fervor, motive public opinion, justify and promote the cause for independence.

In this study, the authors examined the use of music and songs by the *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro* (The Radio of Independent Bangladesh) as a catalyst for political action during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. The radio station provided a forum for the voiceless Bengali agitators for political independence at

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a time the Pakistani army seized and occupied all radio stations and censored broadcasts in what was East Pakistan.

Bangladesh's Liberation War and the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro: A historical perspective

Bangladesh's liberation war was fought at the height of the cold war between the Eastern and Western hemispheres. Consequently, the two superpowers - United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union) - used the war to showcase their political power, military strength and the extent of their global alliances. Thus, the ideologically socialist and indigenous Bangladesh Awami League was supported by the Soviet Union, while the United States which opposed the war sided with its ally, Pakistan, to ensure that Bangladesh did not fall into the Soviet orbit of influence. It is therefore appropriate to suggest that pre-independence Bangladesh was a pawn in the international struggles for global influence by the United States and the Soviet Union.

It is also important to note that the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh occurred towards the dusk of British colonial imperialism around the globe (Jahan, 1995). Between the 1940s and 1970, former British colonial territories, from India to several countries in Africa, had gained their independence from Her Majesty's government in London. Thus, Britain's global power was waning, just as the Soviet Union and the United States were the new, rising and dominant global super-powers, with each of them seeking to expand its alliances. Bangladesh provided a theater for this quest for global dominance by the superpowers.

British colonialism in the Indian subcontinent effectively ended with the "Two-Nation Theory" that saw the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947. This colonial theory was premised on the idea that religion, not language or ethnicity, was the most crucial factor in creating separate countries for the people of the Indian subcontinent. So, India and Pakistan were created based on two religions, Hinduism and Islam respectively. Although the two constituent parts of Pakistan (East and West) were 1,400 miles apart, both regions were lumped together as one country, Pakistan, because a majority of the people in both areas were Muslims. However, in terms of culture, ethnicity, and history, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) shared more in common with the Indian state of West Bengal than with the rest of Pakistan. In other words, East and West Pakistan practically had little in "common" other than the Islamic religion. But, for their own administrative and other conveniences, the British colonial rulers implemented their historically known "divide and rule" policy and amalgamated both East and West Pakistan. This administrative merger meant that the Bengali people of Bangladeshi origin suffered tremendously as a minority group under Pakistan, and continued to do so even after British colonialism in the sub-continent ended in 1947.

Like minority groups all over the globe, East Pakistanis began to experience discriminations under the indigenous (West Pakistani) rulers. Soon after the creation of Pakistan, its prime minister, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, unilaterally declared that Urdu, the language of the minority people in West Pakistan, would be the state language for the entire Pakistan. This decision immediately sparked political tension in the entire country, with the Bengali people of East Pakistan forming the Bengali Language Movement in 1952. Members of this group held protests, defied

curfews and clashed with the police on February 21, 1952. Several protesters were shot and killed by the West Pakistani security officers. Decades later (1999), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared the 21st of February as the *International Mother Language Day*, partly in recognition of the killing of the Bengalis who were agitating for the right to freely use and speak their mother language.

The Bengali Language Movement was to be the forerunner to the independence movement of Bangladesh.

From independence in 1947 to the separation of East Pakistan in 1971, Pakistan was mostly ruled by military dictators. So, although the Bangladesh Awami League led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibar Rahman won majority parliamentary seats in the 1970 general election, the Pakistani leaders refused to hand over power to the winning party. Rather, the Pakistani army seized power and declared martial law in Bangladesh. Consequently, on March 7, 1971, Sheikh Mujibar Rahman addressed Bengalis and asked them to prepare to fight for their independence.

Unknown to the Awami League leaders and Bengalis in general, the Pakistani army secretly prepared and launched its "Operation Searchlight" against the pro-independence movement and people of East Pakistan on March 25, 1971. The main purpose of the operation was said to be the elimination of the Bengali intelligentsia, students, and minority Hindu people in major cities in Bangladesh, including the capital, Dhaka. However, while *Operation Searchlight* was in progress, and before his arrest later by the Pakistani army, Sheikh Rahman declared Bangladesh's independence on March 26, 1971. He and his supporters formed The Provisional Government of Bangladesh in Mujibnagar on April 17, 1971. Later, the provisional government relocated to Calcutta, capital of Indian state of West Bengal. India supported the independence of Bangladesh and joined the war. On December 16, 1971, the Pakistani army surrendered to the India-Bangladesh joint force and the country known as Bangladesh was born.

Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro (Radio Station)

The Bangladesh government-in-exile established the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro (radio station). In its inaugural broadcast on March 26, 1971, the station announced that, "The Sheikh has declared the 75 million people of East Pakistan as citizens of the sovereign independent Bangla Desh," (Rahman & Jalal, 2014). Later that evening, local Awami League leader, M.A. Hannan, read an English translation of that independence speech by Sheikh Mujibar Rahman. As noted by Rahman and Jalal (2014), the initial declaration was not heard by millions of people around the world. It was the evening broadcast that truly announced the birth of the new nation to the global community.

Following the independence broadcast, the Pakistan Army moved in, seized the radio station in Dhaka and renamed it the "Radio Pakistan Dacca." Consequently, some pro-liberation employees at the station went underground and continued to broadcast their programs from another radio station, the Kalurghat Radio in Chittagong, south east of Bangladesh. The rebels re-named the Kalurghat station, "The rebellious radio station of independent Bangladesh." Later, the station was given a new name, the "Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro (The radio station of independent Bangladesh)" (Charity, 2018).

Right after its inauguration, Betar Kendro or radio station as it will also be

referenced in this study started a propaganda war to counter the claims of the Pakistani army regarding their victories. According to Rahman and Jalal (2014), "For the next four days, the radio station engaged in a propaganda battle with the Pakistani army. While the Pakistani army claimed that all was calm in Bangladesh, the clandestine radio station declared liberation forces were marching on the capital and Pakistani army were surrendering." The Pakistani army did all it could to silence the radio station. Charity (2018) noted that, "The Kalurghat radio center (as Betar Kendro was previously known) was heavily shelled by the Pakistani military on March 30, 1971. However, three of the activists – Rashidul Hussain, AM Sharfuzzaman and Aminur Rahman – managed to save the 1KW transmitter from the bombardment and carried it to Bagafa forest in Agartala, India from where the center resumed broadcasts on April 3."

On the political front, the *rebel* Bangladesh government was formed at the Mujibnagar area on April 17, 1971. Its top officials and managers of the radio station requested India to provide support for the radio station. As a result, they received a high-frequency transmitter (50 Kilowatt Medium Wave). Gradually, all the employees of Betar Kendro and other pro-liberation artists and technicians of Radio Pakistan Dhaka came to Mujibnagar. The "new" station had its inaugural broadcast on May 25, 1971, the birthday of poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. Later, the radio station was transferred to the same building that housed the Provincial Government of Bangladesh on 57/8 Baligonj Road in Calcutta (capital of West Bengal State in India).

From its new home, Betar Kendro began to transmit regular broadcasts, including popular propaganda programs such as Charampatra (The Extreme Letter) and *JalladerDarbar* (The Cabinet of the Butcher), a satirical in which Pakistan's General Yahya Khan was depicted as a butcher. According to Rahman (2015), *JalladerDarbar* "proved to be immensely popular. It evinced exceptional sense of humor and a nationalist spirit that helped keep the morale of the freedom fighters high."

Music and Political Action: A Review of Literature

As an influential form of communication, music can "reconfigure one's relationship to a moment, an idea, and outlook" (Elavsky, 2009, p. 403). It is also powerful because, as a form of symbolic communication (Miell, Macdonald, & Hargreaves, 2005), it transcends barriers such as language and national boundaries. It can also be polysemic in the sense that it can be used to disseminate multiple meanings (Dewberry & Millen, 2014), especially where other types of communication could prove difficult to use in an environment of tension and conflict. In this instance, the communication process requires shared meaning between encoders and decoders of information.

National anthems, social movements, and political campaigns provide examples of how music is used to achieve political objectives. Mattern (1998) asserted that musical communication could incite deliberative, confrontational or pragmatic political action. This is possible because music is a "powerful tool for political communication" (Onyebadi, 2016, p.1). Elavsky (2009, p.403) added that music could "foster new conceptions of power (that) would be applicable in cultures by offering various communication apparatuses."

Several scholars such as Cote (2011) and Pedelty and Keefe (2010) underscored the role of music as an alternative outlet for expressing political views and motivating the musicians' fans and followers for political action and activism. Music also helps to galvanize the process of nation-building. Anderson (2006), for instance, argued in this regard that a country's national anthem could motivate people to uphold their patriotism and national sovereignty.

Musicians have been using different genres of music to motivate people for socio-political action. After conducting a study of American and German music, Franke and Schiltz (2013) observed that "a mood of alienation and disenchantment" for rejecting political institutions was largely inspired by musicians and their songs. Popular agitations such as the Workers Movement and Civil Rights Movement considerably used music to foster and promote their cause (Cote, 2011; Dewberry & Millen, 2014; Dreier & Flacks, 2014; Elavsky, 2009; Eskew, 2013). According to Street (2007, 2013) music can be used to deliver political values as it offers ethical judgment of the social order. Political candidates have also used music to build positive images for themselves during presidential and parliamentary elections (Dewberry & Millen, 2014). For instance, in the United States, Franklin Roosevelt used "Happy Days Are Here Again" in 1931, John F. Kennedy used Frank Sinatra's "High Hopes," in 1960, and George McGovern used Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water" in 1972 to promote their candidacies for political office.

Dreier and Flacks (2014), Elavsky (2009), Street, Hague, and Savigny (2008), and Tausig (2014), all mentioned the use of music for social causes around the world from late 20th to the early 21st centuries. For example, Bob Geldof and Midge Ure used the *Live Aid* musical performances to raise funds in aid of famine victims in Ethiopia. The 2005 Live 8 performances was also held for humanitarian purposes around the world. In Thailand, music was used for fundraising and advocating political reforms in the country in 2005. Also in this regard, the *Concert for Bangladesh*, organized by George Harrison and Ravi Shankar, raised funds for the Bangladeshi refugees in 1971 (Hossain & Aucoin, 2017). And, in reference to the use of music for political issues in the U.S., Roy (2010) noted that, "Social movements in America have used music and other cultural forms to simultaneously express distinctive identity and cultural commonality."

Mattern (1998) mentioned that music could arouse three types of political action: confrontational, deliberative, and pragmatic. He identified protest music as an instrument for confrontation. Also in this regard, Eyerman and Jamieson's (1998) classification of music for political action can be described as confrontational. The same can be said of Onyebadi (2017, p.1) who argued that music can be used as "a challenge to the status quo; an unrelenting musical onslaught against injustice and oppression; a call for the transformation of society; and a crusade to overhaul the socio-political system and its attendant forms of the travesty that sustain the powerful and undermine the welfare of the majority of the people."

The series of music played by Betar Kendro to galvanize Bangladesh's independence were clarion calls for political action, and confrontational actions against Pakistani rule.

Method

This study is qualitative in orientation, and consists of a historical examination of the role of Betar Kendro during Bangladesh's liberation war, a textual analysis of some of the songs aired by the station, and in-depth interviews with some of the nationalist fighters, organizers and workers at the station at its inauguration or shortly thereafter, as well as its listeners in the same period.

The in-depth interviews were conducted and analyzed in the oral history tradition. In this method, historical information is collected from people about events in their lives, usually through video and/or audio taping, and organized interviews. According to Greke (1999), "For some oral historians the practice is the collection of interviews for archival purposes, to provide a record for future. For others it is the conduct of interviews for particular publications or public history projects, and for still others it is a pathway for community empowerment" (p.881).

Part of the data collection for this study was through the conduct of in-depth interviews with activists who worked for Betar Kendro, freedom fighters, and members of the civil society in Bangladesh (who are still alive) to determine the impact of the music aired on the radio station during the liberation war. The interviews took place from May 20 to June 20, 2019 and involved five prominent interviewees: four university professors and a prominent member of the civil society. Three of the interviewees were freedom fighters and actively participated in the liberation war of Bangladesh. Each interview lasted about 45-60 minutes. The interviewees are: (a) Anupam Sen, vice-chancellor of Premier University; (b) Abul Momen, advisory editor of the daily *Amader Shomoy* (influential Bengali language newspaper); (c) Md. Anwarul Azim Arif, chairman of the Social Islami Bank of Bangladesh; (d) Hossain Kabir, former dean of Social Sciences Faculty, University of Chittagong, and (e) and Professor Siraj Doullah, of the Department of Public Administration, University of Chittagong.

The textual analysis method was used to infer meaning from the songs. Textual analysis involves describing the content, structure, and functions of a text (Given, 2008). McKee (2001) advocates the use of the method to gain insights into the underlying meaning in messages. According to Frey, Botan, and Kreps (1999), communication researchers use textual analysis to explain and construe the features of a recorded or visual message. Berger (2016) pointed out five different methods of textual analysis, and described one of them, rhetorical analysis, as a system of breaking down non-fiction work into parts and then explaining how all the parts fit together to create an outcome. This outcome is designed to persuade, entertain or inform people. Essentially, the rhetorical approach is used to interpret works disseminated on radio, television, and film. It also examines how people use words, phrases, images, gestures, performances, texts, films, etc. to communicate with others. The authors adopted the rhetorical analysis method to examine the lyrics of the songs used in this study.

Several patriotic and motivational songs were aired on Betar Kendro during the war of liberation in Bangladesh. For this study, the authors obtained ten most prominent songs aired on the radio station during the war from a Bangladesh news portal, *Banglanews24* (2019). Thereafter, authors presented the songs to all interviewees who lived through the war and they identified seven of them as those they considered most prominent and impactful during the war. Those seven songs

identified below were analyzed in this study.

In examining the songs, the authors primarily focused on their inner and general meaning as well as their nuances. We also searched for the metaphors used in the lyrics, and in particular the elements of firmness, inspiration, revolt, vision, mission, and nationalism that were expressed in those songs. For the purposes of this study, the songs were translated into English by one of the authors, a Bangladesh national, who is fluent in spoken and written Bengali, as well as in English language.

The songs were classified and analyzed along these themes: leadership, independence struggle, commitment to the war, victory and gratitude for the martyrs of the liberation.

Inspiring Songs and Themes

The songs and music aired by Betar Kendro were generally aimed at stimulating and sustaining Bengali nationalism, and inspiring and boosting the soldiers' morale at the battlefronts during the war of independence against Pakistan. The songs had heavy political content and reminded Bengalis how their forebears historically and gallantly fought and defeated previous invading armies. The songs selected for this study and corresponding themes are discussed below:

The Leadership (Sheikh Mujibar Rahman)

The primary role of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibar Rahman in Bangladesh's independence struggle is unquestionable. Perhaps, he is best known for his independence declaration speech. Several songs in this period clearly articulated his role and how his leadership, personal struggles and sacrifices inspired hundreds of thousands of Bengalis. One of the songs in this genre was, *Shono, ekti mujiborer theke lokhho Mujiborer konthoshorer dhoni* (Listen, hundreds of thousands of voices are being multiplying from the voice of one Mujib), written by Gouri Proshonno Majumder and composed by Aunshoman Roy. Some of the lyrics say this about Sheikh Rahman:

> Shuno, ekti Mujiborer theke lokkho Mujiborer konthoshorer dhoni
> Protidhoni akashe batashe ute roni, Bangladesh amar Bangladesh
> *[Listen, hundreds of thousands of voices are being multiplied as those echo to the air and sky from the voice of one Mujib*
> *Bangladesh, O' my Bangladesh]*

This song asserts that Bangladeshis have been echoing the declaration of independence by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibar Rahman and acknowledge his leadership. According to the song, Sheikh Rahman's speech was so powerful and impactful that even the sky and wind metaphorically echoed his independence declaration. His leadership was unassailable.

The Struggle

Some of the songs articulated the struggles of the Bengali people in their fight against Pakistani military rule. Quite typically, the song, *Mora ekti phulke bachabo bole juddho kori* (We fight to save a flower) metaphorically compared motherland Bangladesh, to *phole* (flower). Written by Gobindo Halder and composed by Apple Mahmud, the lyrics read in part:

> Mora ekti phulke bachabo bole juddho kori

Mora ekti mukher hasher jonno oshro dhori
[We fight to save a flower
We hold the arms for bringing a smile to a face]

In this song, Bangladesh was compared to mothers (flowers) whose good and obedient sons were fighting to save them from the oppressors. The main purpose of the war was to bring smiles (independence) back on to the faces of these mothers.

In another song titled, *Jonotar songram cholbei* (The struggle of the people will continue), writer Sikandar Abu Zafar urged Bengalis not to relent in their fight against Pakistan, even if it meant shedding *a river of blood* for freedom. It advocated the continuation of the struggle instead living a humiliating life of slavery under Pakistani rule. The lyrics of the song read:

Jonotar songram cholbei, amader songram cholbei, jonotar songram cholbei
Hoto mane opoman noi, shukh sommane bancbar odhikar karte, dashotter nimork charte, ogononito manusher pranpon juddho cholbei, jonotar songram cholbei
Diyechi to shanti, aro debo shosti, diyechi to sombrom, aro debo osti
Proyojon hole debo ek nodi rokto
[The struggle of the people will continue, our struggle will continue, the struggle of the people will continue
Without losing values and honor; to snatch the right to live happily with honor
To leave the chain of slavery, the battle of countless people will continue, the struggle of the people will continue
I have already given up peace; I will give up comfort too
I have already lost honor; I will sacrifice myself too
If requires, I will give a river of blood]

The Commitment

A few of the songs hailed the boundless commitment of Bengalis towards achieving independence. The song, *Tir hara oi dheoyer shagar pari dibo re* (We will cross over the sea without boundary), told of an uncertain future for Bengalis, but noted that the people were determined to overcome all obstacles with their unified spirit of nationalism. The main part of the lyrics read:

Tir har oi dheyer sagar pari dibo re
Amra kojon nobin majhi hal dorechi shogto hate re
Jibon kate juddho kore praner maya shango kore
Jiboner swad nahi pai – ghor barir thikana nai
Din ratri jana nai, cholar thikana sotik nai
Jani shudhu cholte hobe, e tori baite hobe
Ami je sagar majhi re
[We will cross over the sea without boundary
We are few inexperienced boatmen, taking hold of the boat strongly
We are spending the life fighting without hope for life
There is no room for a taste of life; we do not have the address of our home
We could not recognize the days and nights, we do not have the right path to go

We only know that we must continue to move, we must run the boat
As we are the boatmen of the sea]

In this song, the freedom fighters are metaphorically compared to some novice sailors struggling but committed to reaching their destination. The sailors do not know when their voyage (fight) will end, and in spite of the turbulent sea, they will never stop sailing until they reach their destination. Like the sailors, the Bengali nationalist soldiers have been fighting without fearing death and living a miserable life at the war front. And, they are determined to fight the battles just like the sailors would keep on navigating until they come ashore. In other words, commitment to the independence struggle was unshakeable.

Another inspirational song is *Purbo digonte surjo uteche, rokto lal, rokto lal, rokto lal* (The sun has risen in the eastern horizon, blood-red, blood-red, blood-red)" by Gobindo Halder. Shomor Das composed its music. Some of the lyrics read:

Purbo digonte surjo uteche, rokto lal, rokto lal, rokto lal
Joar esheche jono shomudre, rokto lal, rokto lal, rokto lal
Shushoner din shesh hoye ashe, ottocharira kape aj trashe
[The sun has risen in the eastern horizon, blood-red, blood-red,
blood-red
The tide has come in the sea of men, blood-red, blood-red, blood-red
The days of exploitation has come to the end and exploiters have
been shivering with fear]

This is also a metaphorical song. Bangladeshi independence was compared to the inevitable, blood-looking rising sun. The song speaks of a mass uprising (like the rising sun) by Bangladeshis, while the autocratic rulers of Pakistan scamper away in fright. Like the sun, the Bengalis were full of vigor, with an unwavering spirit to fight the oppressive Pakistanis.

The Victory

Some of the songs envisioned independence victory for Bangladesh. The "Victory of Bengal" was the inaugural song at Betar Kendro, and it was played daily during the war. It was written by Gazi Mazharul Anwar, composed by Anwar Parvez, and performed by Shahnaz Rhmatullah. It holds the record as the most played song by the radio station. The lyrics of the song include:

Joy Bangla, Banglar Joy
Hobe hobe hobe, hobe nishchoy
Koti pran ekshate jegeche ondhorate
Notun surjo utar eito shomoy
Joy bangla, banglar joy
Joy bangla, banglar joy

Banglar proti ghor bhore dite chai mora onne
Amader rokto togbog dulche muktir dipto tarunne
Nei bhoy
Hoy hok rokter prochotpot
Tabu kori kori korina bhoy
Joy bangla, banglar joy

Shashoner name chole shushoner shukotin jontro
Bojrer hunkare srinkhol bhangte songrami jonota otontro

Ar no tile tile Bangalir ei porajoy
Ami korina korina bhoy.
Joy bangla, banglar joy

[The joyful Bangla, the victory of Bangla
Will happen, will happen, will happen, and it will happen
Millions of lives have woken up in the dark of night
This is the time of a new sunrise
The joyful Bangla, the victory of Bangla
The joyful Bangla, the victory of Bangla

We want to provide plenty of food for every home in Bangladesh
Our blood is flowing like a fume of bright youthful freedom
No fear
Even if there is a canvas of blood
Yet we do not fear, we do not fear
The Joyful Bangla, the victory of Bengal

The steamrolling machine of oppression has been running in the
name of ruling
The rebellious people are determined to break the chain with the roar
of thunder
No more this gradual defeat of Bengalis
Yet I do not fear]

This song is full of optimism for Bangladesh's independence and the joy of freedom. The writer wanted to assure the 70 million people of Bangladesh that victory was achievable and independence was sure to come, in spite of the *steamrolling machine of oppression* by Pakistan. It speaks to the people's tenacity and hope for a new sunrise, even if it metaphorically takes *a canvas of blood* to achieve it.

The Gratitude

Some songs were also written after the liberation war to show gratitude to the Bengali martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the cause of independence. Lyricist Gobindo Halder, for instance, wrote the song, *Ek sagor rokter binimoy baglader swadhinota anlo jara* (Those who brought the freedom of Bangladesh exchanging a sea of blood) in praise of the martyrs of the struggle. It was performed by Swapna Roy. Its lyrics say in part:

Ek sagor rokter binimoye banglar swadhinota anle jara
Amra tomader bhulbo na, bhulbo na, bhulbo na
Dussho e bedonar kontok poth beye shoshoner nagpash chirle jara
Amra tomader bhulbo na, bhulbo na.
[Those who have brought the freedom of Bangladesh exchanging a
sea of blood
We will not forget you, will not forget you, and will not forget you
Those who have broken the chain of poisonous exploitation
We will not forget you, will not forget you]

This song is a tribute and gratitude to the martyrs of Bangladesh's liberation war; people who sacrificed their lives to break the *chain of poisonous exploitation* by the Pakistani overlords. It was also a pledge that present and future generations

of Bangladeshis will not forget those patriots who spilled *a sea of blood* for the liberation of their motherland.

The Role of Shawdhin Bangla Betar Kendro (Radio Station)

A number of themes emerged from our interviews regarding the role of the *Shawdhin Bangla Betar Kendro* (radio station) during the liberation war. All five interviewees acknowledged that the radio station was the main source of trustworthy news, inspiration, and team spirit for Bengalis during the war. It was also the main source of information about the war from the Bangladeshi perspective to the rest of the world.

The themes that emerged from the interviews are discussed below.

Authentic Source of News

All interviewees agreed that Betar Kendro was considered by Bengalis as the only credible source of news and information about the war, since both national radio and television stations in Dhaka were controlled by the Pakistani army. To Bengalis, those stations were mouthpieces used by Pakistan to continuously broadcast fake news and propaganda materials against the Bengali freedom fighters. The Pakistani rulers also controlled the print media and used them to publicize their version of news about the armed conflict.

Hossain (2014) noted that although some local news outlets operated by Bengali nationalists outside the war zones and places not occupied by the Pakistani army published information about the war, Betar Kendro remained the main source of reliable news and information to Bangladeshi people in the homeland and those who lived as refugees in India, as well as the freedom fighters at the battle zones. In our interview, Abul Momen, Advisor Editor of the *Daily Amader Shomoy*, said of radio station: "Our job (during the war) was to find out where to get news about Bangladesh…We used to regularly listen to the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro to get news about our government, our fight."

A number of foreign journalists also obtained news about the war from Betar Kendro to balance what they heard from official Pakistani sources.

Signal /Code to Bengali Soldiers

Abul Momen also revealed that sometimes, music aired on the radio station was not just for entertainment, but served as secret codes and signals to the Bengali soldiers at the battlefronts. He told of an incident in which the song, *Rabindra Sangit (Songs of Rabindranath Tagore)* had coded messages for the freedom fighters to attack the Pakistani naval ships that had docked at the Chittagong port, full of ammunition for the Pakistani army. Momen explained that the song literally talked about swimming in the Karnafully River, the largest river in Chittagong, with instructions for a pleasant swimming experience. However, when in was aired on Betar Kendro, it was a signal to the Bengali soldiers that the enemy ships had docked by the river, with cryptic instructions on how the freedom fighters should approach, attack and destroy them. A small number of Bengali guerrilla fighters followed the instructions in the music and successfully blew up the Pakistani warships.

Spreading Nationalism

Like several societies, music and songs are integral parts of Bengali history and culture. Siraj Doullah, another interviewee and professor of public administration at Chittagong University, contented that, "Music is a crucial part of Bengali history and Bengali national uprising. Even before the independence war, we wrote and sang a lot of uprising songs." He explained that during the liberation war, music helped to create nationalistic fervor and awareness among Bengalis, especially their right to independence and self-rule. His compatriot and interviewee, Anwarul Azim Arif, a former vice-chancellor of the University of Chittagong, reiterated the role of music during the liberation war. He also asserted that those pre-independence patriotic songs still inspire patriotism and nationalism among Bengalis to this day.

Connecting People

The songs aired by the radio station served another purpose: bringing Bengalis together to fight for a common cause. According to Anwarul Azim Arif, "The lyrics of those songs were so easy that people at all social levels in the country could understand them and realize their inner meaning, and committed the spirit of those songs in their hearts."

Source of Inspiration

All interviewees acknowledged that the music, songs and some programs broadcast by Betar Kendro served as sources of inspiration among the freedom fighters and Bengalis in general. Dr. Anupam Sen, the vice-chancellor of the Premier University, said in this regard that, "The songs played in the Shawdhin Bangla Betar Kendro were so vibrant, which ultimately helped the freedom fighter to stand against the powerful Pakistani Army. Those songs inspired the nation and made us believe that we could achieve independence from Pakistan."

Source of Entertainment

The interviewees also agreed that all music and songs played by the radio station were a great source of entertainment during wartime. Hossain Kabir, a renowned civil society personality in Bangladesh, commented that, "We were stuck in the village and we had a radio. We used to listen to the Shawdhin Bangla Betar Kendro regularly. We liked the music most. Those songs were easy to understand by the people of all ages, and all levels." Sen also observed that, "In a war-torn country like Bangladesh, that music was a great source of entertainment." Arif agreed and added that the "Freedom fighters and their associates used to listen to the music for their entertainment. They were living far away from their families, and they were fighting against the powerful Pakistani army. At that time, the future of that war was unknown to them. Under that critical situation, music was their great source of entertainment."

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conceptualized to explore the role of the music and songs aired by the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro (radio station) during the Bangladeshi liberation war of 1971. We suggest that by broadcasting the patriotic songs, the radio station helped disseminate political messages that may have motivated and encouraged

Bengalis to wage their independence war against the more heavily equipped and well-drilled Pakistani military. In the end, the Bangladeshi patriots embraced victory and proclaimed their independence.

We not do not suggest that the patriotic songs and music aired by Betar Kendro were the sole or primary factor that made victory possible for the Bengalis fighting for the independence of Bangladesh. A combination of factors resulted in the freedom fighters succeeding in the war against Pakistan. We therefore opine that music and songs and the radio station were also contributory factors in winning the war. As Anderson (2006) argued, the influence of the media in imagining and building a sense of nationalism is powerful.

As testified by our interviewees, Betar Kendro provided the Bengali nationalists and people with what they considered as authentic news and information about the war, and a platform to tell their stories to the world. Because the radio station was a believable channel, our interviewees were in agreement that it helped spread the spirit of nationalism among Bengalis, connected and inspired them during war, served as a conduit to provide cryptic messages to the soldiers at the battlefront and also provided some entertainment to the people to cushion their wartime privations.

The radio station may have also personalized the war for many Bengalis and made them invested in winning it. As one of the interviewees said, "We used to regularly listen to the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro to get news about our government, our fight." Here, the emphasis is on the ownership of the war and the determination to win it, as expressed in the use of the words, "our fight."

Our analysis of the lyrics of the songs aired on the radio station is that they were largely patriotic and inspirational to Bengalis as they were designed to motivate confronting Pakistan, the enemy. They were also used to extol the leadership of Sheikh Rahman, define the struggle as a fight for freedom to save the flowers (mothers) of Bangladesh, enkindle a sense of optimism that freedom (the Joyful Bangla) was in the horizon, and an expression of gratitude to the unforgettable martyrs who shed their *sea of blood* to free their compatriots. The importance of the songs was eloquently articulated by one of the interviewees who summarized it as follows: "Those songs inspired the nation and made us believe that we could achieve independence from Pakistan."

While we acknowledge that a sizeable number of prior research has produced literature on Bangladesh's liberation war, none of them was specifically designed to explore the contributions of the revolutionary radio station and the songs it played towards the successful prosecution of the war. This is the major contribution of this study towards research on the Bangladeshi war of independence.

We admit that in spite of the relevance and importance of this study, it has some shortcomings that need to be addressed by future research in this genre. One of them is to examine a more expanded number of songs in this era and do a more robust textual analysis of their content to fully appreciate the role of these songs in the liberation process. Another area is to use more stories and narratives from Bengalis who lived through the war to more fully understand how the songs and music impacted them. We only interviewed seven of such people.

For future research, it might be necessary to study the present state of radio broadcasts in Bangladesh to determine how the music and songs they air

contribute to national harmony and engender feelings of patriotism among the people, just as the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro did when Bangladesh fought for its independence from Pakistan.

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A Political Voice & Activist: Mercedes Sosa and the Silent Majority in Latin America - From Poetic Song to Political Act

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Mercedes Sosa's music has the ability to engage communities across national borders by building communities without borders with universal sociopolitical messaging. Not only does her music blend traditional Argentinian folk rhythms with its African roots, but it blurs the boundaries between entertainment and politics, lyricism and resistance against dictatorships, ethics and political agitation. Sosa became a voice for the masses of disenfranchised voiceless and continues to have appeal with newer social struggles. Sosa's politically focused music, effective stage performance and artistry, all of which are embedded in the triad of music, culture and politics, amply show how successful she was in framing her message, being relevant and connecting with her audience in challenging the powers that be and fighting against injustice and oppression.

Keywords: New Song Movement, Argentina, musical political messaging, framing theory, relevance theory, protest / revolutionary songs, Latin American music

With her roots in Argentine folk music, Mercedes Sosa became one of the most prominent exponents of *nueva trova*, the New Song Movement of the 1970s through the 1990s. She was known for the depth and beauty of her contralto voice, carrying a message of hope and defiance to people without a voice. In the 2013 documentary on the songstress titled, *Mercedes Sosa: The Voice of Latin America*, David Bryne noted that, "even a very poetic song became a political act" (in Vila, 2013).

Mercedes Sosa, the Voice of the Voiceless, revered for her mestizo heritage of French and Quechuan ancestry, was affectionately nicknamed *La Negra* by her fans for her dark skin and dark hair. Sosa's concept albums (Cantata Sudamericana and Mujeres Argentinas) and popular songs would shine a spotlight on the atrocities of the military dictatorships that swept Latin America at the time. Hers was a comforting and supportive voice to a suffering people, but above all, Mercedes Sosa the performer was both acclaimed and feared for her larger than life stage presence. Her popular songs spoke the language of the people, both in their words and the themes that they explored. Her booming voice and charismatic presence framed her political positions against murderous governments in the region. And, perhaps most importantly, Sosa's political messaging was enhanced by her stagecraft. What was most compelling in her live performances was how she communicated with an audience—excellent rapport with her fans and identifying with their fate. Off stage and performance, Sosa also shared a bond with her fans in the sense that like them, she also suffered from persecution by the government and was a passionate, strong, unwavering voice against the military government's strongman tactics. Her performances superseded her discourse as she became the icon of democracy in a continent beleaguered by dictatorships.

New Songs'[1] lyrics were action-in-discourse texts that denounced retribution

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to protest and uplifted cries for social justice. Music and the public performance spectacle thus became powerful tools for political messaging to move an audience from passivity to action, from the distractions of the performance to consciousness raising of real-life problems framing the performance itself. Codified messaging, gesturing, posture, a stance of defiance, audience inclusion and involvement, facial expressions, voice inflections, stage presence, political messaging, national folkloric instruments, hands clasped in prayer—these were the defining features framing each of Sosa's performances. They went beyond the typical protest song of complaint and were raised to the level of revolutionary song of defiance and action.

During the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America, songs with political messages often resulted in many musicians suffering great personal losses, imprisonment, and exile. In her lifetime, Sosa received death threats, was arrested on stage, imprisoned, and ultimately forced into exile to France. Suffering and survival were the bywords for this brave Argentine-born woman, who not only performed sold-out concerts around the world — from New York's Carnegie Hall to Rome's Coliseum — but also stood up against the brutal dictatorship of Argentina's Jorge Videla.

Taking into consideration everything mentioned above, the aim of this paper, in the context of *Nueva Canción* (The New Song Movement), which is also known as *canción política* (political song), *canción popular* (popular song) or *canción comprometida* (committed song), is to analyze the influence of these socially engaging songs on the development of social movements in Latin America. The framework of such songs are the numerous revolutions and totalitarian dictatorships in the region. Lyrical discourse presents a theme of anti-imperialism in the corpus of songs of Silvio Rodríguez (Cuba), Víctor Jara and Violeta Parra (Chile), Mercedes Sosa (Argentina) and Alí Primera (Venezuela). The time period covered in this work encompasses the gathering of people in Havana in 1967, known as *Encuentro de la Canción Protesta*, which defined this music genre until the death of Alí Primera in 1985. *Nueva Canción* has become popular again in our time. Alí Primera's songs became background music of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, while Violeta Parra's song, *Gracias a la vida*, became the official anthem of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine.

Such developments have raised a whole range of research questions including: (1) Is language a barrier to associating protest songs with social movements and social changes? (2) To what extent does international discourse prevail within the corpus of *Nueva Canción?* The international recognition and musical diversity of Mercedes Sosa provide some insights into these questions. Sosa's song discredits the widespread myth that popular songs are fixed in a cultural temporality and impervious to change. Rather than being a static presence with a message limited by time and national boundary, Sosa's music allowed her the depth and breadth to adapt to new expressive sociopolitical pathways.

Performance Mode and Political Messaging in Music

Music is inextricably linked to the context in which it is produced, consumed and taught. Whether to entertain or play a crucial role in ceremonial rituals, music practices cannot be separated from the environment in which they exist. Such is the case with the sociopolitical environment in which Mercedes Sosa grew up. From

the outset, Sosa became involved in forging the New Song Movement in Mendoza, Argentina, in 1963. Its manifesto claimed a search for a new national music based on innovative content. Traditional instruments and musical styles were used and experimented with, from *folclor* to *tango*, without commercial interests or attempts by the market to create niche audiences and divisions. While aspiring to a national music, the movement eschewed a "closed regionalism" in its early stages aiming to exchange ideas with artists and movements throughout Latin America. Finally, the New Song Movement in its political Manifesto claimed it would:

> "...struggle to convert the Argentine people's current support of a national music into an inalienable cultural value. [We] affirm that art, like life, should be in permanent transformation, which is why popular song seeks to integrate with the creative process of the people, to accompany the people in their destiny, expressing their dreams, their happiness, their struggles and their hopes." (Broderick, B. 2009, October 21)

This statement of political opinion or policy was intended to be a catalytic document to serve as an agent of political change through the impact it had on its audience. It was the love that exuded from Mercedes Sosa toward her audience and they toward her, coupled with her spirit of resilience that became an engine of political change in her music. Commenting on political manifesto music, Courtney Brown states that such music is informed by a "perspective on politics, society, or even the human condition...[that] may also play the activist role whereby it serves as an agent that triggers significant change in our political world" (2008, p.29). Sosa's subtle approach to portraying her country's inner turmoil is not to drive home a political message to her audience, but rather to invite them to discover the complexity of this turmoil within the context of a musical experience delivered with authenticity and passion.

The New Song Movement (originally referred to as New-Folklore) allowed singers a platform on which to address the social injustices experienced by the laboring class. It was influenced by Argentine folk songwriters/musicians such as Atahualpa Yupanqui as well as Chilean artists Víctor Jara and Violeta Parra. In turn, the New Song musicians inspired and worked with songwriters and artists throughout the continent, from Daniel Viglietti in Uruguay, Carlos Mejía Godoy in Nicaragua, to Cuban Nueva Trova singers Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez, and Puerto Rican salsa innovator Willie Colón. New Song's eclectic nature allowed it to combine traditional song forms with sophisticated poetry with an emphasis on social themes. Mercedes Sosa was an original voice yet also a gatherer of voices from diverse musical backgrounds. She was a craftswoman and artist who taught one generation of artists and learned from another. Sosa translated popular experience into a wider, more politicized and more largely middle-class audience. Yet, her music remained embedded in a living popular/folk culture which was itself evolving and being transformed in the context of the political process of the region, producing its own new forms. The first tended to freeze the folk form, the latter to press it toward continual change within a more global context. Sosa became a star in the mid-1960s by reinventing herself as an embodiment of an abstract essentialist indigeneity. She crafted this performance style by drawing on contemporary trends in North American folk music as well as on a tradition

forged by earlier Argentine musicians who packaged their art to appeal to the sensibilities of their European audiences. In her new persona, she appealed to the cosmopolitan middle class, winning her a multinational record company deal, which gave her the platform that she needed to reach audiences worldwide, thus globalizing her music and its political message. The indigenous element became Argentine national identity. Subsequently, in the 1970s Mercedes Sosa forged a revolutionary Latin Americanism that brought a re-imagination of continental identity to youth with a persona and musical style crafted in dialogue with images and ideas in vogue at the time from Europe and North America.

Performing as Storytelling:
Social Movement Narratives and the Musical Performance

Narratives in social movements impact and often shape public perspectives through their encouragement of solidarity among diverse social groups. Narrative analysis and the qualitative lyrical examination of the songs composed by other artists of the New Song Movement and sung by Mercedes Sosa demonstrate that hers was a unifying craft of social messaging with cultural meaning. The structure of formula stories became for her a model for determining the effect of her music through symbolic and emotion codes present in lyrical melodramas. These melodramas of musical performance demonstrated the need for protest followed by revolutionary change through civic engagement, by serving as passionate calls to action behind which diverse audiences could rally in solidarity. Inspired by a phrase coined by Argentine revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara ("New Man"), New Song used folklore as a weapon to fuel social revolution by giving voice to the marginalized. But social movements require malleability, their rallying techniques evolving in appeal to current culture, adapting in response to and in accordance with the very societal transitions they incite. Songs become a means to unite diverse masses and therefore form a noteworthy component of social movements. Protest and revolutionary songs have, by their very nature, formidable appeal to the emotions of audiences and their ability to project common messages across various genres of music and levels of society. Rosenthal and Flack (2012, p. 94) observed that music is "a way of identifying ourselves," and thus a way to create solidarity in the thought processes of "group members and outsiders, often through reference to a collective... past that serves to frame the present." The authors also say that music can both celebrate and reinforce identity values, and can combat opposition by reinforcing "identities that are being redefined and reclaimed" from their once socially stigmatized positions. Sosa's renditions of the new song repertoire united the urban working class, rural peasants, and marginalized indigenous peoples by their message of a common theme of hope over despair, and empowerment over powerlessness. Songs in public spaces gave voice to generations of oppressed and silenced people.

In *Musical Performance: A Philosophical Study*, Stan Godlovitch focuses on music as an inherently performing art comprised of "a complex network of relations linking together musicians, musical activities, works, listeners, and performance communities... the interactive features of the total performance environment." (1998, p.1). Just as these musical interrelationships were important, so too were the many facets of the live performance. Jane W. Davidson (2005) asserts that the

communicative power of gesture in speech is only amplified in body movements and social codes and how they are interpreted and responded to by audiences. In other words, in order to understand the impact of a song, we must go beyond examination of lyrics alone and examine the context the audience provides, for "[w]hat an individual brings to a song is at least as important as the manifest content the song brings to the individual." (Christianson & Roberts, 1998, p.92). The role of the participant-observer in music making and music reception is not static, particularly in settings that lend themselves to social agitation. An audience member might be a listener on one occasion and a performer on another. Audience members are rarely entirely passive particularly during live performances, as they hum or sing along, or keep time to the musical beat in either voluntary or involuntary involvement. In this vein, the melodramatic emotion in social movements parallels that conveyed in popular music. Taking into consideration how music is received beyond its mere existence contributes to a more complete understanding of activist music. Protest songs designed to inspire audience members to take action, like the political movements that feed them, need to be contextualized within a social ambience. In other words, the techniques utilized in the music must be considered alongside the ideologies and identities of the music and its writer's/performer's target social group and audience. Music in public locations with diverse audiences in filled-to-capacity performance spaces often takes on an energy in the moment that becomes contagious and endures well beyond the confines of the concert hall or outdoor venue. Diverse groups of people share a common bond and often come together to address a common social justice cause as a result of an engaging performer such as Mercedes Sosa.

   The French sociologist Emile Durkheim refers to the concept of *collective consciousness* as developing from a sense of common group identity (Cummings, n.d.), where one's consciousness aligns with those of others in the same group. Durkheim's collective consciousness can thus lead, via the energy of music, to his concept of collective effervescence and the belief that ritual "makes us think that others have the same views and the same feelings that we do." (Horsfall, 2013, pp.51-52). Indeed, Mercedes Sosa with her indigenous roots made her songs deeply rooted in imagery of the mother earth (Pachamama), an ancestral cry of the subconscious. She identified with a suffering people and attributed her songs to her audience, their "author," those who provided her with the energy to take poetry and to transform it into a political act. The song "When I think of my country, I bleed a volcano" links her musical messaging not only to Latin America but to the world during such conflicts as the wars in Central America and Vietnam. She was able to perform to thousands in Argentina and throughout Latin America, and continued to perform works of well-known artists for over twenty years, winning three Latin Grammys and numerous music and social justice awards from around the world.[2] Over the years, Sosa's music transformed with a rock n' roll, hip hop and then rap flavor as she sang with such diverse musicians as Luciano Pavorotti, Joan Baez, Shakira, and Sting. Life itself became a song filled with cultural references, a narrative of personal joys and sufferings, laughter and tears, hope and despair. When she would forget the lyrics to her songs in impromptu offstage performances toward the end of her life, the audience would sing along with her, taking ownership of their songs. As a performer who suffered from a debilitating stage fright, she

would close her eyes and focus on individual faces and draw energy from the masses at each public space. This onstage "meditation" endeared Sosa to her audiences and further underscored the urgency of her political messaging.

Communication Theory and Performance Artistry:
Music, Culture and Politics

Framing, Relevance and Coding

The song performance of Mercedes Sosa's music is a subversive act, a revolutionary cry in political messaging, for it asserts the existence of a collective memory of which the lyrics are fragments. Her song is framed by her daunting presence on stage as The Singer of the People, The Voice of Latin America. The titles of these songs—"To be an Indian," "Peasant song," "One remains while others come in sorrow," "Song is urgent," "If the singer is silenced," "Raise the flag of love," "All I ask of God," "When I think of my country, I bleed a volcano," "Loneliness as a giant, multicultural bird," "Like a free bird," "When they have the land," "The song with everyone," "Song for a child in the street"— all demonstrate the relevance of her music to social realities. She used her stage presence to empathize with the downtrodden about whom she sang. Such songs frame popular music for social change much like a text in theatrical performance. Emotion codes and symbolic codes in language create meaning germane to her audiences who have experienced what she references in linguistic code (examples: bleeding a volcano, loneliness as a giant multicultural bird), and thus communicating imagery at both linguistic and emotional levels.

Mercedes Sosa applies and then places the concept of framing[3] by focusing attention on certain events in her songs and then placing them within a field of meaning, making them relevant to her diverse audiences. Such songs can be thought of as storytelling devices or narratives that say something about social life. According to Ewick and Silbey (1995), narratives are socially organized phenomena that involve both how society produces and sustains meanings, as well as the power relations embedded in those meanings. Ellis et al (2002) added that such narratives can be personal stories we tell to make sense of our own lives, or they may be the collective stories that make their way into the broader culture. Because narratives are situationally produced and interpreted, they have no necessary political or epistemological valence but depend on the particular context and organization of their production for political impact.

Subversive narratives, such as those sung by Sosa and other artists of the New Song Movement, challenge long-standing sociopolitical hegemony by making visible and explicit the connection between particular lives and social organization — indigenous, peasant, laborer, and marginalized lives in Latin America and across the globe. These narratives are social acts of defiance that rely on not only the tenor of their production but also on the identity of their producer — the singer who represents the voice of the many. Stories are told not in a vacuum but within a context of specificity — the when, what, how, and why of the narrative framed within the context of sociopolitical situations and then extended to similar situations across the globe. It is a public poetry put into music that not only questions the prevailing discourse, but also enters the world of real history and

personal memories, immersing itself in the experiential more than the political with its all-inclusive messaging.

Musical Content and Production: The Song and the Singer

Who was Mercedes Sosa? Why did she play such an important role in the New Song Movement and its aftermath? The subject of Rodrigo H. Vila's biographical documentary, *Mercedes Sosa: The Voice of Latin America*, Sosa tells us how afraid she was to look at her audience and how important it was to learn how to do just that, especially with an audience who could not speak her own tongue. As one of her longtime friends explained in the documentary, Sosa was not just a folk singer, but a global phenomenon. Her song, *Balderrama* was featured in the 2008 film Che, starring Benicio de Toro.

Sosa turned out to be the icon of her generation, a passionate and unstoppable activist giving thanks to life and devoting herself to the world. She replaced the gun of her compatriot Che Guevara with the guitar, and the bullet with music, her voice crying out to whomever would listen and take up the cause for social justice. Here is an example:

> Si uno se pone a cantar / If one begins to sing
> Un cochero lo acompaña / A driver will join in
> Y en cada vaso de vino / And in each glass of wine
> Tiembla el lucero del alba / Trembles the morning star
> Zamba del amanecer / Zamba of the dawn
> Arrullo de Balderrama / In adulation of Balderrama
> Canta por la medianoche / Sing through the Night
> Llora por la madrugada / Cry by the morn

A fighter of leftist causes all her life, Sosa endured through death threats, exile and the onslaught of depression. Musician Charly García, noted in the documentary (Vila), that Sosa empowered people in her generation and beyond, strong and defiant in the face of oppression. It was the defiance of a woman who refused to let fear silence her voice, deter her actions. It naturally followed that Mercedes Sosa became a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2009. Often referred to as *the singer of the people*, Mercedes Sosa capitalized on her extraordinary voice and commanding performances of songs that contained a pronounced political subtext. Sosa's private drama entered into dialogue with her public experience to be shared with her audiences.

Sosa: "The voice of the silent majority"

The songs *Sólo le pido a Dios* (I only ask God), *Todo cambia* (Everything Changes), *Cuando tenga la tierra* (When I have land), *Hermano, dame tu mano* (Brother, give me your Hand), *Los niños de nuestro olvido* (Forgotten children), *Sufrida tierra* (Suffering land), and *Vientos del alma*, (Winds of the soul) — all have very defined and repetitive rhythm with only a guitar and steady beat of crowds of people stomping or clapping in unison at live performances. The simple arrangement of *Sólo le pido a Dios* for example, serves the purpose to define people of simple backgrounds, working together towards a better life, and united as one to achieve their goals. In this song, Sosa has a very powerful, rich voice, communicating her presence even when listening to a recorded rendition of the song, as if she were

physically present at a live performance. It became a matter of praying to God to find the value of life and not simply giving up, without having at least to put up a fight. Sosa was really just expressing the lack of hope and willpower people had to contend with under the unfair and brutal regime of the Argentine military dictatorship in this musical piece. This song, representative of countless other arrangements sung by Sosa, questions the audience of the time, whether people were truly willing to give in so easily and let the hopes of freedom, democracy and life slip away. The monster to which she refers is abusing the innocence of the people making them cold hearted, indifferent to death, dwindled in hope, belittled in faith, regretful of luck.

Sólo le Pido a Dios conveys a message of hope that there are heroes among those who listen to its words and heed them. The lyrical recipients are stronger in numbers, have more faith than ever, and will not let themselves be crushed by this monster. The song gave people the hope to look forward to the future, to become united and to fight for one another in present and future moments. Lyrics combined with performance technique place it in more than a protest song category. It is a protest song written by Argentine songwriter León Gieco that incites civil disobedience, heroism in the face of oppression and repression, revolution.

> Sólo le pido a Dios / I only ask God
> Que la guerra no me sea indiferente, / That war doesn't make me indifferent
> Es un monstruo grande y pisa fuerte / It is a large monster, and it crushes fiercely
> Toda la pobre inocencia de la gente. / All the poor innocence of the people.
> Sólo le pido a Dios / I only ask God
> Que el futuro no me sea indiferente. / that I will not become indifferent to the future.
> Desquiciado está el que tiene que marchar / Distraught is he who must leave
> A vivir una cultura diferente./ To live a different culture.

Perhaps the most important topics that Sosa sang about were poverty, injustice and corruption. In Argentina, dictatorships prohibited artists to express themselves; however, this did not silence her song. She continued to produce and sing her songs, leading to her arrest and subsequent exile in 1980 referenced in the final verses of *Sólo le pido a Dios*. The radical separation between self and world is the most ravaging component of exile and is echoed in the *nueva canción* of the time. Nostalgia is located in the past and recalled above all through song. Private pain is rehearsed in the public domain in a language of collective experience and as an instrument of mobilization. Indeed, Sosa was a powerful woman who gave her society the strength needed to demand democracy. Her words were simple, concise and relatable. Through the power of storytelling in song, singers have been able to give countries such as Chile and Argentina the ability to recover from years of repressive military rule and the enormous damage that it caused to its people and their sense of self. Sosa was the voice for all those people, for she conveyed the people's thoughts and did not fear the reproaches she received. Her voice was the voice for millions of people worldwide not just Latin America. They identified with her overwhelmingly.

The song *La maza*, was composed by Cuban folk singer Silvio Rodriguez. In its performance version by Mercedes Sosa, it is truly beautiful, poetry set to music. The word *maza* can refer to a mallet for a drum, or a drum stick. The definition varies according to country. The word *cantera* can mean *talent*. The question in the song becomes, *What would a drum mallet be without the talent behind it?* Obviously, a musical instrument is nothing without the talent of the player behind it. It is just a tangle of cords and tendons. The theme of the song is, "What would I be, if I didn't believe in all the beautiful things I believe in?" What use is the sculpting hammer without the rock (or cantera or quarry) used for material?

> If I didn't believe in the madness of the mockingbird's song,
> If I didn't believe that the mountain conceals melodies and fright,
> If I didn't believe in balance, in the logic of equilibrium,
> If I didn't believe in delirium, if I didn't believe in hope,
> If I didn't believe in what I promote, if I didn't believe in my own way,
> If I didn't believe in my music, if I didn't believe in my silence,
> (Refrain): What would I be? What would the hammer be without its "quarry?"
> A mass of cords and tendons, a jumble of flesh and wood
> an instrument with no more brilliance than tiny lights set up for the stage.
> What would I be, oh heart? What would the hammer be without its "quarry?"
> The front man to the betrayer of applause, one who serves up the past in a new glass, an eternalizer of waning gods, joy boiling over in rags and spangles.
> If I didn't believe in the toughest struggles, if I didn't believe in longing,
> If I didn't believe in my convictions, if I didn't believe in something pure
> If I didn't believe in each assault, if I didn't believe in she who comes around [death],
> If I didn't believe in what it means to become a brother to life,
> If I didn't believe in those who listen, if I didn't believe in the pain,
> If I didn't believe in what endures, if I didn't believe in the fight…

In a similar vein, the musical composition *Todo cambia* affirms that everything in life is defined by change, progression, transformation. But one thing that remains steadfast is the love of the singer for her country and countrymen.

> The weather changes as the years go by
> The shepherd changes his flock
> and just as everything changes
> the fact that I change it's not in the least strange.
> But my love doesn't change
> no matter how far away I find myself
> neither the memory nor the pain
> of my country and my people.

At the 1993 Festival de Viña in Chile, Mercedes Sosa sang this song and during the performance, spontaneously took her white kerchief in hand and began to dance the Chilean cueca,[4] the national dance of Chile that became symbolic of the defiance of the *Women of the Disappeared* in that country. The dance, coupled

with the lyrics and the defiance in her voice signaled to the audience that change was inevitable, even in the worst of circumstances. The white handkerchief and the dance itself became a visual code for peaceful revolt, steadfastness in the face of adversity, and the constancy of love of country and countrymen. Sosa could never be silenced, despite her plight — threats on her life, arrest, harassment onstage and off, and, finally, exile. In the performance piece of the song "Si se calla el cantor" (If the singer is silenced), Sosa underscores the revolutionary resilience of song and the singer by speaking the refrain rather than singing it, abruptly interspersing spoken speech with sung verses (some of which are in duet form with the guitarist, Horacio Guarany, Argentine folksinger and composer of the piece.)

> SUNG Verse (Mercedes Sosa):
>> If the singer goes quiet, then life goes quiet
>> because life itself is a song
>> If the singer stops singing, dies of fright
>> so too do hope, light and joy.
> SPOKEN Verse (male performer, Horacio Guarany):
>> What will happen to life, if the singer
>> doesn't raise his voice to the tribunes
>> for those who suffer, who have no reason
>> that will urge him to go without a blanket.
> SUNG Verse (Mercedes Sosa):
>> May the singer not be silenced, because the coward
>> silence leaves the evil that is oppressed
>> they don't know the singers of those who bowed their heads
>> will never stop singing against the criminals.
> SPOKEN Verse (male performer, Horacio Guarany):
>> May all the flags be raised
>> when the singer stays with his scream
>> may a thousand guitars bleed at night an immortal song
>> to infinity.
> SUNG Verse (Mercedes Sosa):
>> If the singer goes quiet ......then life goes quiet.
>> Duet: Sosa & Guarany)

Although not a songwriter herself for the most part, Mercedes Sosa gave her own original renditions of the songs composed by her contemporaries with fervent denunciations of the oppression of the rural and urban masses. Through such passionate pieces, she expressed hope for a better future. Sosa's forceful renditions of such authentic materials as *La maza, Sólo le pido a Dios, Hermano, dame la mano, Cuando tenga la tierra* and numerous other songs left no doubt as to where her sympathies lay. Sosa's robust and expressive voice was well-suited to the instrumentation and styles of the New Song Movement, and she quickly became known as a prime interpreter of *nueva canción*. Sosa's inimitable interpretations of songs of struggle, love, celebration and hope sung with the gusto of an unforgettable voice and onstage performance presence, are her trademark. The song *Cuando tenga la tierra* (When the land belongs to me), performed for a Peace Concert in Managua, Nicaragua in 1983 is an example of her political

revolutionary discourse in song form as she celebrates the prospect of land reform alternating between lyrical and speech discourse, singing and shouting with joy, "I will sing... forming an orchestra with the crickets" in clear identity with the throngs of elated and hopeful (but war weary) peasants in the audience during the free open-air concert. Indeed, the chanting and applause of hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans assembled in the main square appeared to have sown the seeds of revolution in the moment, for the song and how it was performed was an anthem to agrarian reform.

In the twentieth century, an intense period of modernization led to the demise of popular culture in Latin America. Popular culture was disavowed as part of a strategy that entailed the rigid exclusion of the working class. Concurrent with this decline was an international movement to preserve and perpetuate folk traditions, particularly folk music. Mercedes Sosa was part of this movement in support of folk music but with a novel twist of political messaging leading to activism and social change. With such respected standing as an entertainer, it is hard to overestimate Sosa's popularity and importance as a standard-bearer of folk music and political engagement through folk music. But to Sosa, artists are not political leaders. The only power they have is to draw people into the theater or concert hall and reflect the aspirations of the concert-goers. Although not defining herself as a political activist, Sosa asserted herself in the *nueva canción* (new song) musical movement of the 1960s and 1970s that blended traditional folk rhythms with politically charged lyrics about the poor and disenfranchised. This "new song" movement, formed by singers, poets and songwriters with Marxist leanings, cast light on the struggle against government brutality and the plight of the downtrodden throughout the hemisphere. Many of the songs favored by Sosa drew upon the rich heritage of Latin American poetry and literature to score their political messages. This gave her music and that of the movement a far more enduring fascination than protest songs in the United States during the same period, whose blunt, direct lyrics were part of their political efficacy, but also limited their long-term poetic appeal. For example, the lyrics from *Todavía Cantamos* (We're still singing) which she sang accompanied by the large Andean drum called the *bombo*, still resound in the 21st century due to the song's lack of temporal and geographic reference: "I was killed a thousand times. I disappeared a thousand times, and here I am, risen from the dead….Here I am, out of the ruins the dictatorship left behind. We're still singing." And "Vientos del alma" (Winds of the soul) combines ancient belief in the timeless earth goddess in Inca mythology with upbeat rock and roll music, giving it a unique flair of the past blending seamlessly with the present. This is one of the few songs composed by Mercedes Sosa.

> Soy Pachamama, soy tu verdad / I am Pachamama, your truth
> Yo soy el canto, viento de la libertad / I am song, the wind of freedom
> Vientos del alma envueltos en llamas / Winds of the soul wrapped in flames
> Traigo palabras con el sonido y luz de tu destino /
> I bring words with the sound and light of your destiny
> Antigua raza y rostro de cobre / Ancient race and face of copper
> Traigo la luna con su rocío / I bring the moon with your dew
> Traigo palabras con el sonido y luz de tu destino /
> I bring words with the sound and light of your destiny

Over a career that spanned fifty years, Sosa sold millions of records, performed thousands of concerts all over the world, and left behind an incredible legacy as an artist who went beyond the borders of music to become one of the most influential - and loved - personalities of the 20th century. She had an impact on both the musical and political heritage of Latin America and the world by her haunting voice and powerful stage presence that unified diverse social groups across generations and geographic boundaries. Sosa superseded her role as protest singer and political activist, for she was the embodiment of cultural identity for her people, the symbol of sociopolitical activism, the sound of poetic eloquence, and, above all else, the voice of the silent majority in Latin America and throughout the world. Her use of political messaging in song stressed strong political narrative and empowerment of the voiceless emphasizing humanist values, championing social justice. Her performances were engaging, inspirational, transformative. She based her music on the foundations of the rich heritage of Latin American poetry and literature in order to communicate her political messages. On many occasions, particularly in her later years, Sosa performed with a four-piece band providing an eclectic mix of flamenco, jazz, Andean folk and rock music as a canvas. Her live performances allowed her to lead what at times might seem like a revival, a soul-stirring combination of musical styles and political messages. One minute Sosa sounded like an Indian priestess, and the next minute she evoked the smooth but sultry presence of a jazz singer. She sometimes would sit while singing, but at other times she would dance on stage. She often would bang on a hand drum or clap in rhythm as she sang. But, regardless of how she performed her music, Mercedes Sosa always exhibited the capacity to speak to the heart and touch the soul of her audience as much as by her persona as by her performance.

Endnotes

1. Nueva Canción or New Song is the term denoting a range of protest songs which emerged throughout the Latin American region in the 1960s as a reaction to the political, social and philosophical aspects of society. Accordingly, the basic motives of the songs were encouragement for people to fight imperialism (songs such as "Madre, déjame luchar/" Mother, let me fight) and provide support to the leftist politicians and revolutionaries, such as Che Guevara and Allende (songs such as "Comandante amigo" / My comrade friend; "Venceremos" / We shall overcome) or are a warning against social injustice. Therefore, Victor Jara believed that Nueva Canción songs should not be defined as protest songs, but as revolutionary songs.
2. Her awards included the Diamond Konex Award in 1995, as the most important personality in Popular Music in Argentina. The Latin Grammy Award for Best Folk Album was bestowed on her in 2000, 2003 and 2006. A month after her death in 2009, her album Cantora won Best Folk Album and was nominated for Album of the Year.
3. The concept of framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. Mercedes Sosa focuses attention on certain events in her songs and then places them within a field of meaning, making them relevant to her diverse audiences. The sociologist Donileen R. Loseke defines

emotion codes as "sets of ideas about what emotions are appropriate to feel when, where, and toward whom or what as well as how emotion should be outwardly expressed" (2009, p.498), and intercultural communicative devices or symbolic codes as "complex systems of ideas about how the world works, how it should work, [and] of the rights and responsibilities of people in the world" (p.498). The artists of the New Song Movement used both codes — emotion and symbolic— in their stage performances.

4. *La Cueca* is the national dance in Chile. It is a couple's dance, and everyone dances it for Independence Day, September 18. Dancing *la cueca* with an imaginary partner is also a tradition. The Chilean cowboy, whose girlfriend is far away, waves his handkerchief high and low, and stomps his feet hard, as if to attract attention. The moves are lively and flirtatious. For the Families of the Disappeared, *la cueca sola* became a dance of painful longing, a way to denounce the senseless loss of sons and lovers arrested by the secret police in the dark of night during the nearly two-decades of military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. In this touching, symbolic protest, it was the women who often danced alone.

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Consent, Contention and Musical Commentary on Guyana's 1992 National Elections and the 2018 No-Confidence Motion

Carolyn Walcott[1] and Rhonda Hamilton-Weekes[2]

This is a thematic analysis of the role of music as both entertainment and critical narrative of two distinct occurrences in Guyana's political evolution - its transition to electoral democracy in 1992 and the vote of no confidence in December 2018. The authors determined that during the transition, the main themes in the *Calypso* song, *Desi Yuh Wrong*, which dominated the political discourse were *power, naivety* and *misplaced trust*, while *Political betrayal* and *malice* were evident in *Charandas Seh No*, a soca-dancehall fusion produced in the wake of the no-confidence vote against the government. Further findings suggest that Calypso music remains the dominant entertainment platform for political critique in Guyana.

Keywords: political commentary, Guyana, music, vote of no-confidence.

This study was conceptualized as an examination of the intersection of music, songs and politics at two significant crossroads in the political history of Guyana, a former British colony situated on the northern coast of South America. Guyana gained independence from imperial Britain on May 26, 1966.

With a population of less than one million (746,955 persons, according to the Guyana National Bureau of Statistics, 2019), and a complex composition of six major racial/ethnic groups - Africans, East Indians, Amerindians, Chinese, Europeans and people of mixed descent - Guyana's political divisions are rooted in, and impacted by, long-standing tensions between the country's two dominant racial groups: the *Indo Guyanese* of East Indian ancestry who constitute 39.8 percent of the country's population and the black African, *Afro Guyanese* that make up 29.3 percent of the people.

Historically, the *Indo Guyanese* and *Afro Guyanese* racial groups are respectively aligned to the country's two major political parties, the People's Progressive Party (PPP), established in 1950 by Cheddi Jagan, and the People's National Congress (PNC) founded by Forbes Burnham in 1955.

Two significant events occurred in the country's political history in 1992 and 2018. In the general election of October 5, 1992, the People's Progressive Party won 28 out of the 53 parliamentary seats in the country's legislature, thus ending the 28-year political dominance of the ruling People's National Congress. In December 2018, the same People's Progressive Party, then out of government as the opposition party, introduced a no-confidence motion in the National Assembly. The motion passed by a slim 33-32 margin, bringing down the multiracial, multiparty coalition government of two political parties, A Partnership for National Unity (APNU).

Upon appeal, Guyana's Chief Justice, Roxanne George-Wiltshire, on January 31, 2019, upheld the validity of the outcome of the no-confidence vote. However, a subsequent ruling by Guyana's Court of Appeal on March 22, 2019, overturned

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the chief justice's decision. This ruling was subsequently upheld by the Caribbean Court of Justice on June 18, 2019.

The sociopolitical climate in the country in 1992 and 2018 were manifest in the commentaries embedded in the music and songs of two top Guyanese musicians: calypso maestro, Geoffrey Phillips aka *Mighty Rebel*, with his hit 1992 general election song, *Desi Yuh Wrong* and Anthony Blaze whose song, *Charandas Seh No* was popular in the wake of the no-confidence vote of 2018.

What were the thematic significance and possible impact of the musical commentaries and songs by these famous musicians at both two important landmarks in Guyana's political history? This is the overarching question that underlines this study.

Literature Review

Musical commentary and linkages between political discourses have long been established through various scholarly writings (Weij & Berkers, 2019). Research shows that music has shifted from just being appreciated for its aesthetic qualities to emphasis on lyrical content which is often used for political support, challenge to the political establishment, generate or support conflict, encourage activism or to rhythmize propaganda (Bergh, & Sloboda, 2010; Pitner, 2014; Weij & Berkers, 2019). Other studies have highlighted the use of music to add meaning to political campaigns through popular tunes. Thus, pop-culture music is utilized as a political backdrop during campaigns to lyrically respond to political opponents or to silence instances of bigotry in cases where the gender of a political candidate is subtly or overtly attacked (Deaville, 2017; Gorzelany-Mostak, 2017).

In the Caribbean, music has been a potent component in a political mix that is sometimes laced with race politics. Specifically in Guyana, public reaction to decisions made by people in authority is often musically contextualized through genres such as calypso. It is within such musical creativity that the voice of the people is unequivocally expressed in the form of their consent or contention (Hinds, 2010).

In this literature review section, we focus on: (i) Music from war to peace, (ii) Music as entertainment platforms for political messaging, (iii) Music as social commentary, (iv)The Caribbean and Guyana, and (v) Framing theory.

Music and Politics: From War to Peace

In times of war, music has been used as a form of communication and in other instances as a psychological weapon (Trotter, 2005). Governments also use music to convey nationalistic identity and political agendas while attempting to bolster patriotism (Bergh, & Sloboda, 2010). Moreover, it has provided hope to listeners during the World Wars (Bergh & Sloboda, 2010). Compositions such as American sheet music echoed the call for patriotism and preparedness for war while others provide solace with songs for fallen heroes (Gier, 2013).

For some governments, the call for patriotism seemed more extreme as exemplified in Nazi Germany. Control of music to fulfil the ideals of the regime resulted in a ban on music that was deemed 'undesirable' and 'dangerous' by the Nazi authorities (Pinter, 2014). This led to the promotion of their version of popular

music that aligned with the views of the party to stir up public excitement for the Nazi political agenda or spread fear through propaganda (Pinter, 2014; Bergh & Sloboda, 2010).

Music is also used as a tool to promote peace. Lyricists, composers, and singers have often responded to violence and other conflict with messages of peace through music. Music and peace, as two concepts, have a unique relationship where music can be characterized as a peacemaker (Bardia, 2010). Thus, it leaves ideological imprints on those individuals or groups targeted by its messages.

Music as Entertainment Platform for Political Messaging

Music as entertainment platforms for political messaging is often used in political campaigns. In the United States, music has become normalized as a feature of political campaigns (Schoening & Kasper, 2012; Deaville, 2017; Gorzelany-Mostak, 2017; Patch, 2017). Popular music is used to identify key party messages and to generate favor for one candidate over the others (Schoening & Kasper, 2012). There is therefore a connection between musical entertainment and political messaging (Gorzelany-Mostak 2017). This connection is illuminated when "candidates deploy myriad strategies to harness the sounds, symbols, and rhetoric of pop culture to communicate their identities, values, and visions to an eager electorate" (Gorzelany-Mostak, 2017, p.6).

Other examples of music as entertainment platforms for political messaging include situations where music is deliberately composed to sing the praises of political leaders. For instance, when Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's former patriotic leader, later turned dictator, was alive and in power, music was used to frame and present him to his compatriots as baba, the father of the nation, and as the only true leader that could govern the country (Guzura & Ndimande, 2015). The songs fueled much resentment among the populace over the government's record of corrupt practices.

Song choice, and by extension the soundtrack of political campaigns, are also carefully selected not only to convey political messages but to communicate the sonic identity of political candidates (Blankenship & Renard, 2017).

Music as Social Commentary

The use of music for social commentary transcends national boundaries. It is used to highlight issues of politics, race, and social justice among others. It also provides meaningful articulation of political discourse through the beats, sound and lyrics (Nærland, 2015). Blair (2016) discussed music as the sounds of transgressive geographies. He explained that the inherent nature of music to cross boundaries, whether literally or metaphorically, speaks to the fact that it can "reconfigure space" with its mobility of messages. Hence, the messages in music can create the potential for the "resistance of dominant cultural formations" (Nærland, 2015; p.19).

Social commentary in music often has strong ideological imprints that may lead to conflict or ideological hegemony. Mckerrell (2012) determined that messages embedded in music (specifically cultural performances in Scottish sectarian songs) can possibly generate sectarian difference among listeners. McKerrell (2012) noted that sectarianism in Scottish songs led to violence and in 2012, the Scottish government placed a ban on the singing of such songs at public events. Similarly,

Titus (2017), alluded to innuendos within protest music in Nigeria as potential sources of conflict given the emotiveness of the lyrics. However, Titus (2017) also shows that the proliferation of protest music for civic agitation in Nigeria resulted in changes on economic and other topical issues in the country.

Music as social commentary also advances radicalism and activism as Hill (2013) pointed out with respect to music and politics in America in 1968. Various genres (folk, soul and rock) embodied radical ideologies on racism, violence and politics. However, each musical imprint "represented a new freedom for corporeal enjoyment and intellectual stimulation" (Hill, 2013; p. 63).

The Caribbean and Guyana: The Logic behind their Lyrics

The Caribbean is a melting pot of cultures through which various musical genres represent its collective soundtrack. These genres, *namely calypso, soca, chutney-soca, chutney-parang, soca-parang,* and *reggae*, among others, have roots in colonial and postcolonial times, and even in the more contemporary era (James, 2001). Musical commentaries that address political issues are largely expressed through these genres. However, the most popular and enduring genre used to disseminate political messages is calypso. Calypso is versatile in its lyrical content and can be sung to address any issue. With its origin from Trinidad in the 17th century, Calypso offers humor, catchy lines and cleverness while serious and light issues are rhythmically addressed.

Calypso became popular in Guyana during the 1940s and was employed as a tool to address social and political issues. Through calypso and other music forms, "…Guyanese musicians demonstrated the capacity to shine the spotlight on the dark corners of the society and, in the process, call for accountability and demand effective and efficient use of the nation's scarce resources" (Cambridge, 2015, p. 296). In addition, calypso was often used as the sonic identity for political parties, which selected tunes of popular calypsonians that were in concert with their political campaign agendas (Cambridge, 2015).

When Calypso is used to frame issues of politics and race, it gives a voice to marginalized and poor people, records and articulates the views of political activists, and plays the role of the political critic (Hinds, 2010). The songs tell stories about political corruption, government's ineptitude and irrational decisions, race politics, and social injustices. For the composers of such lyrics, "their music released tensions and resisted oppressive political contexts" (Cambridge, 2015, p. 291).

The paucity of literature on the interplay of musical entertainment and politics in Guyana, especially from the comparative thematic lenses that focus on genre specific music as commentary and critique, prompted us to undertake this study.

Theoretical Framework

Framing theory was introduced as a sociological perspective by Irving Goffman (1974) who posited that people interpreted their spheres through natural and social frameworks. The theory is historically used "to describe the way that [picture] frames organize information and provide a perspective through which message receivers come to understand the subject" (Shah et al, 2009, p.85).

Over the years, framing theory has attracted multidisciplinary scholarship including sociology, psychology and media studies, to explore the textual significance of messages to particular audiences. The theoretical development of framing and its significance to political communication and news are attributed to Robert Entman (1993) who defined frames as "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful and memorable to audiences" (p.53). Entman (1993) also posited that frames "register the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text" (p.55). He also theorized that texts function as symbols to coalesce with audiences' belief system thus influencing interpretation.

Frames are also presented as the way an argument is packaged (i.e., what the argument includes and what it leaves out), so as to make accessible and encourage a particular interpretation of a given issue (Entman, 2007) and an interpolation between media [content] and audiences (Scheufele, 2000).

Notwithstanding this study's focus on texts situated in music, rather than news, the political context of the lyrics analyzed is best understood through theoretical framing lenses. The textual significance of lyrical iterations, the identity of actors and the salience of messages themed around Guyana's political occurrences in 1992 and 2018 also ground this study. Thus, we relied on framing to identify texts and locate meaning in the context of Guyana's politics and musical critique.

Methodology

Research Design

This research is structured in a qualitative design which facilitates the exploration of the nature of political messaging in Guyana. A qualitative approach to this study allowed for an understanding of the subtle and explicit meanings individuals attribute to social issues, and, more specifically to political matters (Creswell, 2009).

Using a qualitative research design is most appropriate for this study, since it satisfies our goal to analyze the political commentaries expressed in music at two important junctures in Guyana's political history. Given our research context, the qualitative approach will facilitate an understanding of the imprints of the political commentary through music in Guyana, and the lyrical significance of the two songs we identified. This understanding will put into perspective how each unique political occurrence (the 1992 National Elections and the 2018 vote of no-confidence was symbolized, interpreted and expressed musically through political commentary. As Maxwell (2012) explained, it is important to "understand how events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances in which (they) occur" (p.221).

To support our inquiry, we adopted an "interpretivist" philosophical position. Interpretive philosophy "allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants [whose] reality is socially constructed" (Thanh, & Thanh, 2015, pp. 24-25). Applying this philosophical position, we were interested in exploring the deeper meaning embedded in the musicians' lyrical content, and how they made sense of the issues they sang about, while constructing their own realities at both crossroads in Guyana's political history.

Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis

Our interest in this research is to analyze the songs that were composed to specifically address the change in government after the 1992 National Elections and the 2018 vote of no-confidence. While assessing the pool of music composed as political commentary after the 1992 election (in concert with the country's 1993 calypso competition), we noted that *Desi Yuh Wrong* was the only calypso song that addressed the major change in Guyana's politics.

In the case of the 2018 vote of no-confidence, four songs were composed in genres such as chutney, calypso, and dancehall. The first song, *Charandass Seh No*, was released within 24 hours after the No-Confidence vote and received over 100,000 views, with numerous shares and likes on Facebook. The song was later published on YouTube on December 23, 2018 and by August 2019, it had received 19,603 likes, thus becoming very popular across social media platforms around Guyana. We therefore employed the criterion sampling technique which allowed us to explore the phenomenon of interest by making comparisons and addressing similarities and differences (Palinkas et al, 2015).

Charandas Seh No was retrieved from the social media platform *YouTube*, while *Desi Yuh Wrong* was obtained from a local radio station. Given our study design and research goal, we executed a thematic analysis which is a method used for unearthing themes from data through identification and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The authors, both Guyanese, transcribed the lyrics of the songs and analyzed them, guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How does *Desi Yuh Wrong* construct Guyana's historical political landscape for audiences in the wake of Guyana's transition to electoral democracy?

RQ2. In what ways did *Charandass Seh No* reinforce existing constructs about Guyana's political landscape for audiences in a post-democratic era?

RQ3. What messages do *Desi Yuh Wrong* and *Charandass Seh No* convey about the evolution of music and commentary on Guyana's historical and contemporary politics?

Findings

Research Question 1

Our findings revealed three emergent themes articulated in the song, *Desi Yuh Wrong*. We found evidence of political power as a key theme, iterations of naivety, and misplaced political trust constructed by the performer. As a renowned Guyanese calypsonian, Geoffrey Phillips aka *Mighty Rebel* earned the coveted title of calypso monarch for several years based on his stage performance and ability to fearlessly critique social and political issues while challenging political thought and decision-making.

Following the 1992 national elections, Phillips took on the persona of the ghost of Guyana's former president, Burnham, and appears to president Hoyte to berate him for conceding to free and fair elections. Phillips' stage performance for the 1993 calypso competition not only earned him even greater notoriety but revealed an articulate fusion of musical commentary and political debate between the living and the dead. Thus, the role of cultural beliefs and practices are magnified as

the calypsonian provided lyrical critique on a major issue at the crossroads of Guyana's political history.

In his opening lines, Phillips, as the Ghost of Burnham, illustrates the extent to which Hoyte's decision disturbed him from eternal rest in the grave he occupied alongside Guyana's Governor General, Sir David Rose, who informed him about the news of the PNC's defeat. In the first verse of *Desi Yuh Wrong*, Phillips walks in to an upbeat calypso tempo that segued for Burnham's invocation as he sang:

> Meh neighbor David Rose he come to me
> Only recently with a sad story
> Bid me pay attention I didn't want to hear
> Cause ah done dead and gone and ah mining me own affair
> But when he tell me de doctor gone back in power
> On the 5th of October
> Ah started to shiver
> But when he tell me Mr Desmond agree to all de doctor plan
> So ah come tonight to tell Desmond where he wrong
> Look ah hear ya fighting elections as a clean and decent man
> Desi ya wrong x2

Constructing power, naivety, and misplaced trust in *Desi Yuh Wrong*

Theme 1: Power. In the opening verse of Phillip's song, *power* is magnified as a major theme expressed around Burnham's fear of Jagan's return to the presidency. Phillips establishes Burnham as a man who rested comfortably, only if his party remained in government. The fear associated with Jagan being in power is also evident as Burnham's ghost is vexed by what transpired under his successor, Hoyte, thus rekindling memories of Guyana's political battleground during the 1950s between Burnham and Jagan of the PPP and PNC respectively. In the discourse with Hoyte, Burnham is clearly aggrieved by Hoyte's spirit of political compromise which suggests that he, Hoyte, was oblivious of Burnham's non-comprising political stance which enabled him to retain power until his death in 1985.

Burnham's phantom appeal suggested that fairness and transparency were not hallmarks for contesting elections in the country, but rather a recipe for failure. Hoyte's defeat represented a significant loss for the PNC. In addition, Burnham implies that decency ran counter to electoral victory, thus reinforcing the view that the PNC, under his leadership, rigged elections to remain in power. This was reflected in Burnham's declaration to Hoyte:

> Look ah hear ya fighting elections as a clean and decent man
> Desi ya wrong, Desi ya wrong.

As Phillips develops his narrative, he allows Burnham to reveal the importance of craftiness as a political tool. The hilarity of Phillips' incantations increased as he provided the living Hoyte with prescriptive political measures, founded on a battle plan, to avert defeat. By drawing attention to the "battle plan" that was required to face elections, Phillips not only conjures up the historical tensions associated with elections in Guyana but insinuates the political craftiness that Hoyte was required to adopt to maintain political power. He sang:

> Andy Jacobs left de commission
> Rudy Collins carry out de plan

Desi ya wrong x 2
But as president of the land
You fail to set up a battle plan
That is why you wrong, wrong, wrong, Desi ya wrong

Theme 2: Naivety. Further evidence of political subversion is revealed as Phillips introduces political *naivety* as another key theme. As Burnham continued to express disappointment in Hoyte's defeat due to poor planning, he also attributes the responsibility for failure to Hoyte's naivety and lack of political foresight. At the same time, the audience is presented with a clandestine politician, an attribute Burnham cited as necessary to win contested elections for years. Phillips again provides the audience with an even deeper critique of Burnham's life as he continued:

If you really want to be a veteran in politics
You gotta be smart and have plenty tricks
Never put all yuh confidence in yuh fellow man
Especially when you fighting an election

Theme 3: Trust. Another key theme Phillips integrates into his calypso narrative is *trust*. The line "Never put all yuh confidence in yuh fellow man" reveals the level of cynicism with which Burnham navigated his political career. As someone who espoused socialist principles, Burnham often mistrusted western powers and excluded them from the socio-political and economic affairs of Guyana, particularly after declaring Guyana a cooperative /socialist republic in 1970. Phillips' allusions to trust therefore reinforced the dogma that occupied Burnham's politics in post-independent Guyana. As a performer, Phillips thus manages to resurrect Burnham's character traits by giving a retrospective view of his leadership style.

Anti-trust sentiments are further directed toward the Atlanta-based Carter Center as Burnham continued to express mistrust. He overtly suggested that the United States, via the Carter Center, was known for its work in toppling administrations. Notably, as the political leader who led Guyana to independence in 1966, Burnham was, in effect, reminding Hoyte of Washington's role in democratizing socialist and communist countries considered unsympathetic to capitalism particularly during the cold war era. Instinctively, Burnham tells Hoyte that in hindsight he, Hoyte, was blindsided by his misplaced trust as the following lyrics suggested:

I hear they say that the doctor
Tell you to bring observer
And so from America yuh bring Mr Carter
But listen brother Desi, you shoulda neva eva agree
You coulda come and lemme advise you properly
The observers from overseas
You bring to scrutinize Guyanese
Desi ya wrong x 2
Anywhere they send Mr Carter, the opposition tek ovah
Desi ya wrong x 2

As a leading Caribbean orator who formed part of a wave of Anglo-Caribbean politicians to pursue self-governance, Burnham's advisory role in shaping Caribbean regional identity and politics is also articulated in *Desi yuh Wrong*. He

recalled advising leaders within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) about mechanisms to maintain power by discrediting free and fair elections. At the same time, Burnham urged his regional counterparts to be aware of the surreptitious nature of opposition political actors. In recounting the events of previous elections in contrast to the 1992 polls, Phillips captures the contentious nature of tabulating ballots and invites audiences to consider the machinery that Hoyte failed to utilise. As Burnham, he sang:

> I hear de ballots had to be counted
> At the place of poll in the evening
> Desi ya wrong x 2
> On de night deh hold de election
> De list was still in confusion
> Desi ya wrong x 2

With Hoyte out of power, the ghost of Burnham cries out in agony, *that is why ya gone, gone, gone, Desi ya gone*. However, Burnham appears to recover from his initial state of disbelief and fear. Phillips introduces Cheddi Jagan as rightly deserving of leadership and presents him as a man of virtue. Burnham clearly has admiration for Jagan as he sang:

> Ah really admire doctor Cheddi Jagan
> For all his patience, wit and determination
> For 28 long years he waited patiently
> To rise again and defeat the PNC

Phillips' inference to Jagan's political victory is replete in the final lines of his song as he alluded to Hoyte's failure. While Hoyte is presented as a man who consented to Jagan's political maneuvers via the Carter Center and other electoral observers, Jagan is hailed as a phoenix rising from the ashes of 28 years of solitude in the political opposition to defeat the PNC. For Phillips, the critique of Hoyte's "mistake" is one everyone has to accept as Jagan clearly understood the political machinations required to return to power. In the words of Burnham's ghost, Phillips sang:

> Is only now desi know he fate
> From all dem chances he take
> Well is now presi get to learn from he own mistake
> Cheddi is president oh de land
> No use you fret and frown
> Desi ya wrong x 2
> De man is a true born politician
> That is why he win de election
> Desi you wrong x 2

In the end, Hoyte is assigned to the mausoleum, the place of burial where Burnham's remains are located. Burnham invites Hoyte to join the annals of history suggesting that his career was over. At the same time, Burnham resigns himself to the fate that a new era was upon Guyana as political power shifted from the PNC to the PPP after the PNC's 28 years in power.

Research Question 2

In our analysis of *Charandas Seh No*, we found political betrayal and malice as key themes articulated by the singer who also infused metaphor to describe the actions of the parliamentarian, Charandas Persaud. As a newcomer to the music scene, Anthony Blaze provides online audiences with a contemporary upbeat genre that appears to be an ensemble of Caribbean soca and dancehall music. Blaze produced *Charandas Seh No* within 24 hours of the December 21 vote of no-confidence in which Persaud voted along with the opposition PPP to unseat the coalition administration.

Reflections of political betrayal, metaphor and political malice in *Charandas Seh No*

Theme 1: Betrayal. The opening theme of the song is *betrayal* as Blaze personifies Persaud as the biblical character Judas. As a lead-in discourse, Blaze narrates the events of December 21 to his friend as follows:

> Yo AJ, is Judas de man Judas de ting bai?
> Bai (boy) but he gah know cause in de end everybody still gah wuk
> (has to work)

The music begins as Blaze tells the audience about Persaud's refusal to heed his fellow parliamentarians' advice to say no to the motion. Blaze presents the parliamentarian as a blameless politician whose decision to cast his yes vote was, in fact, his democratic right. The singer clearly establishes the *gain and loss* theme around betrayal as he constructs Persaud's vote as a gain for the opposition PPP and a loss for the APNU coalition. In the following lines, Blaze succinctly captures events surrounding the no-confidence vote:

> Charandas sah (say) no X 2 No no
> Charandas seh yes now everybody vex x 2
> Dem call eh traitor but den he answer
> No bribe no money no sponsor
> He never tek no gram from de other side
> And now he ready to resign with full pride
> Not a mistake what a heartbreak
> Next 3 months election ah tek place
> But ah begging yuh fuh keep ya nerve
> Cause in the end everybody still have to work

Immediately following Persaud's vote, speculations and public opinion emerged about his motives for voting with the opposition. However, before fleeing the country in the wake of the vote, Persaud maintained that his action was transparent. As recited by Blaze, Persaud justified his consent as a departure from the norm and the tendency to agree with his colleagues against his own convictions. As an elected representative of one of Guyana's rural constituencies where the sugar industry was downsized under the coalition government, Persaud confessed to being aggrieved on account of the plight of the sugar workers. His reaction triggered notions of racism which Blaze does not address directly in his song.

Blaze also presents Persaud as an honest parliamentarian. Being cognizant of the eventuality of national elections, the singer also urged the audience to be calm

thus highlighting the fears, conflicts and social upheavals that punctuated previous elections in Guyana.

Metaphor. In the second verse of his composition, Blaze introduces metaphor as he describes Persaud's vote as a "bomb" undetected and unforeseen by everyone including the coalition. The singer also insinuates that the coalition was blindsided by Persaud as he fraternized with his fellow ruling coalition MPs on the corridors of parliament hours before casting the vote that triggered a political pandemonium in the country/. In Blaze's words, the entire country felt the effects of Persaud's December 2018 vote:

> Well this one drop like a bomb
> For 3 years straight eh was going on strong
> Even admit that he was a yes man
> And he used to agree even though it feel wrong
> Oh yes, but then he had a change of mind
> Why wait till now when is voting time
> Shock de whole country town to west side
> Just like GPL when deh cut off we light

Theme 2: Malice. Apart from framing Persaud's vote as a surprise, Blaze indirectly comports *political malice* as a theme as he asks, "Why wait till now when is voting time?" He infers that Persaud's actions were calculated to trigger early elections ahead of its constitutional due date of 2020. However, the singer does not linger on this theme but segues to his next line by repeating an appeal for calm and continuity as he sang, "ah begging yuh fuh keep ya nerve cause in the end everybody still have to work."

This appeal to peace aligns with the characterization of Persaud's vote as a surprise and illustrates the fragile nature of political coalitions that have emerged with one-seat majority governments in countries like Guyana where race continues to be at the bedrock of national politics. Blaze's song also illustrates the skepticism with which Guyanese citizens view their political leaders due to their unfulfilled promises. While reminding the audience that life continues, Blaze infers that elections that result in new governments do not necessarily produce betterment for ordinary citizens as he sang:

> It ain't matter who win from outside
> Cause is right back to work from 9 straight to 5
> New government don't mean better life

Since coming to office in May 2015, the coalition government faced public criticism regarding the composition of the government. The absence of young people in the administration is clearly articulated as a concern that Blaze puts the following way:

> Send de old folks home leh de youths dem shine
> Tell dem before is young people time
> 21st century and deh cant get it right
> Mr President ah hope you recover just fine

At the end of his three-minute song, Blaze presented a voice clip of Persaud as he expressed no confidence in the AFC as part of the coalition government. In the final analysis, Persaud insisted that no maleficence was involved in the

no-confidence vote, but rather an end to the consenting political culture that he had embraced as a government MP. Ultimately, Blaze's song conveyed the complexities involved in a fragile democracy by magnifying the enduring shadows of racism within Guyanese politics.

Research Question 3

On face value, the lyrics in the songs being examined convey the impression that both wit and dishonesty are required to successfully navigate the Guyanese political terrain. While Phillips forces the audience to contemplate the ill-fated decision by Hoyte during the 1992 elections, Blaze questions Persaud's motives ahead of national elections precipitated by the no-confidence vote.

In contrast to Phillips, who provided audiences with deeper social commentary using calypso as a vehicle to critique national politics, Blaze offered a public opinion immediately following the vote rather than an analysis or survey of Guyana's political history or milieu. By highlighting the events of December 21, 2018 Blaze focused on that single event rather than the entire history of Guyana's politics.

In his composition, Phillips implied that by conceding to hold free and fair elections in Guyana, and acquiescing to Jagan's request for the Carter Center to serve as electoral observers, Hoyte effectively relinquished power. Alternatively, Blaze suggested that Persaud's decision to vote against his party by saying yes to the no-confidence motion rather than no, showed moral courage and fearlessness in the face of political adversity. This represents a departure from fear and repression that scholars have associated with dictatorships. Moreover, calypsonians, unlike soca singers, have confronted various themes including political repression in post-colonial Caribbean societies as observed by Hinds (2010).

Abiding Mis[trust] in Guyana's Historical and Contemporary Politics

While the lyrics of both *Desi Yuh Wrong* and *Charandas Seh No* have addressed power, the certainty of change in a democratic era is clearly expressed, with the immediate post-1992 period represented as a resistant era and 2018 portrayed as a politically mature era for Guyana. Trust, or what we deem as mistrust, appeared to resonate across both songs as *Desi Yuh Wrong* situated Hoyte as an over trusting and somewhat naïve politician, while *Charandas Seh No* highlighted the political mistrust that emerged from Persaud's action which Blaze characterized as malicious.

Whereas in 1992 Hoyte led the PNC to the polls triggering a change in the political status quo, Persaud is presented as the mastermind behind the events of December 2018 that will again shift the political landscape of Guyana. Blaze presents a more nuanced approach to social commentary and falls short of addressing the racial contours of politics in Guyana. The image of an Indian baccoo, a folkloric creature of bad luck in Guyanese culture, is the only image that cued online viewers in on the role of racial betrayal.

As a genre, calypso delves into social commentary by highlighting current affairs in the political, social and cultural arena of the landscape in focus. The object of criticism may, therefore, be political personalities or decision-making that impact society and or outcomes as underscored by Hinds (2010). Moreover, when expressed as an experience it possesses the mnemonic power to highlight issues

from the distant past to current happenings as noted by Schoening and Kasper (2012).

Consistent with the notion that Guyanese music has historically delved into contentious political subjects (Cambridge, 2015), we found that *Desi Yuh Wrong* depicted the depth of political commentary engaged by Phillips as he narrated Guyana's controversial political history. In the process, Phillips provides the audience with political context and uses his message to reinforce the folly of political correctness that resulted in Hoyte's loss of power, and by extension, an end to the reign of the PNC party. While Blaze frames Persaud as a calculating politician, Phillips presents Hoyte as an outwitted politician, overtaken by his trust in political actors. Persaud is also framed as a stealth politician while Hoyte is portrayed as lacking foresight thus being outmaneuvered by Jagan. Both singers played the role of political critic consistent with Hinds' (2010) earlier observation that critique, apart from entertainment, is part of its interplay with politics and race.

Although Blaze suggested that Persaud breached his party's trust by crossing the floor of the national assembly to vote in favor of a no-confidence motion against the government, he portrays the parliamentarian as blameless. On the other hand, Phillips, as the ghost of Burnham, chides Hoyte for electoral defeat and blames him for the coming to power of the People's Progressive Party. Both singers have revealed the ebbs and flows in Guyana's political landscape incorporating critical appraisal and entertainment into their musical commentary on Guyana's historical and contemporary politics.

Conclusion

This study explored the role of music in political commentary with specific focus on Guyanese politics around two events - The 1992 general elections and the December 2018 no-confidence vote. We thematically analyzed *Desi Yuh Wrong*, a calypso genre performed by Geoffrey Phillips, and *Charandas Seh No*, a soca/dancehall fusion performed by Anthony Blaze. Our analysis revealed political complexities in both instances with Phillips' commentary taking a more retrospective critique of Guyana historical political context and the events leading up to its democratization.

As the literature suggests, calypso music functions as entertainment and political critique and reveals popular public opinion. Theoretically, the textual salience of political power and control is also evident in both songs analyzed. It was obvious that *Desi Yuh Wrong* lacked political subtlety with themes such as power, naivety and trust conveyed in the song, while malice and betrayal resonated in *Charandas Seh No*. Trust emerged as a dominant theme in both songs revealing a political culture fraught with misgiving on both sides of the political divide prior to 1992 and after that period.

We recognize that very little inquiry exists on music and political commentary in Guyana, and therefore suggest that future scholarship explore the use of other genres such as chutney that have emerged particularly in the last decade as political commentary. Moreover, Mahendra Ramkellawan's performance of *No No Charandas* and Basil Bradshaw's *Mouse in de House*, which were produced soon after the December 2018 vote of no-confidence, are useful for comparing themes centered on a single issue. Oppositional perspectives based on racial/ethnic and

political orientation are discrete in the lyrics of the songs and would certainly advance additional knowledge in the context of music as a political entertainment platform in Guyana.

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