Playing to the Crowd: The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation

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Music and politics have long been connected. One of the most recent examples was Live 8 in July 2005, when a series of concerts was used to put pressure on G8 leaders to change their policy on third world debt. While the connection is often observed, it is rarely analysed in any detail. This article is an attempt to provide some of that detail. It begins by asking whether participating in music can also mean participating in politics. It goes on to explore the conditions that are necessary for this conjunction of politics and music. It does this by comparing two UK examples of music-based political movements, Jubilee 2000 (which culminated in Live 8) and Rock Against Racism. It ends by arguing that the link between politics and music has to be understood along three dimensions: the organisation of the link, its legitimation and its cultural performance.

Introduction

On 2 July 2005, hundreds of thousands of people, at the instigation of their leaders, participated in political action. In the era of mass social movements, there is nothing unusual in this. Except that the 'leaders' included some of the western world's most famous pop musicians, and the political participation involved little more than watching an array of pop performers. The occasion of this mass politics was Live 8, the culmination of the campaign to 'Make Poverty History'.

Political action of this kind hardly bears comparison to drudging through city streets with a banner, chanting slogans and listening to speeches. It certainly does not seem to bear comparison with confronting water cannons or strapping yourself to a tree as the bulldozers move in. Nonetheless, Live 8 was represented and reported as an example of mass political participation, directed at changing the minds and actions of the world's most powerful politicians. The front page of the London *Times* on the day of Live 8 carried the headline: 'Rock stars' plea to G8—don't fail world poor' (*The Times*, 2 July 2005). Not only did these rock stars and their fans plead with the G8 leaders to change their policies on debt relief, they achieved their aims. Or at least, that is what they claimed. A few days after the concerts and after the meeting of the G8 leaders, Bob Geldof announced, 'A great justice has been done ... Mission accomplished frankly' (quoted in *The Guardian*, G2, 12 September 2005). Looked at like this, a series of pop concerts and the fans they attracted constituted a direct form of political participation that achieved its aims.

Nothing, of course, is this simple, and this article is an attempt to raise questions about whether and how the activities of musicians and their fans can indeed be

understood as a form of political participation, and if they are, how they might be studied and analysed. We begin by trying to establish, first, how musical performances might legitimately be incorporated into an account of political participation. From there, we look briefly at the ways in which music has traditionally been connected to forms of political participation, and argue that these accounts, though attractive and plausible, do not provide a sufficiently robust account of the processes and events that they describe. We argue that to understand—and to evaluate—the role of music and musicians in political participation, it is necessary to focus on the organisation and legitimation of the link between music and politics. Only then will it be possible to make sense of the mobilisation that results. Our argument is illustrated by two UK-based case studies. The first is Rock Against Racism (RAR) (founded in 1976), in which musicians were involved in a campaign to fight the rise of racism in Britain, and the other is Jubilee 2000 (founded in 1996), which was to form the basis, via Make Poverty History and other related campaigns, for Live 8.

From Participation to Partying?

In their major study of participation in Britain, Geraint Parry et al. (1992) defined their topic in a broad but conventional way. In the survey that forms the basis of their research, 'people were asked about the extent to which they had taken action such as writing to their Member of Parliament, working in a group to raise a local problem, going on a protest march or canvassing for a political party' (Parry et al. 1992, 3). This focus, the authors suggest, sets their study against those that concentrate on voting only. Instead, they are 'concerned with the more regular day-to-day patterns of citizen political activity' (ibid., 3). But in focusing on the everyday, they separate out—implicitly if not explicitly—the 'political' from other aspects of life. They write (ibid., 8): 'For the most part, politics touches people only in an indirect manner. Their interests are in their family, in their leisure, their work'. Parry et al. acknowledge that political decisions affect these areas of life, but argue that because the connection is 'obscure', it is not appropriate to include them in an account of political participation. 'Leisure' is contrasted with politics, and so events like Live 8 might seem to lie outside the definition of political participation. And yet Parry et al. (1992, 7) concede that 'most acts of political participation are directed towards persons who are in authority, and able to influence decisions'. So to this extent, Live 8, because it was explicitly directed towards the G8 Summit and the desire to see an end to third world debt, would seem to fall within a standard definition of participation.

Parry et al. go on to consider the 'impulse' to participate, distinguishing between instrumentalist, communitarian and expressive participation. Where the first two are linked directly to the perceived interests of the participant and their 'community', the last is defined as participation intended to 'express' the participants' 'feelings or display their stance about a matter' (ibid., 15). Such a definition would also seem to allow for events like Live 8, since the latter would seem to constitute a prime example of public expression of feelings about debt relief and global justice. However, while Parry et al. acknowledge that such expressive activity may constitute a form of political participation, they exclude 'the most symbolic of activities' because they broaden the definition of participation 'too widely' (ibid., 16). They

justify this exclusion on the grounds that, first, their adopted method does not allow them to capture expressive participation, and that, secondly, such participation is 'less relevant to policy formation' (ibid., 16).

In concluding their discussion of the definition of participation, Parry et al., therefore, opt for one that sees it as 'taking part in the processes of formulation, passage and implementation of public policies'. In adopting this definition they insist that participation must entail 'a form of action', and so it is not enough 'to show an interest in politics or to talk about it to members of the family' (ibid., 16). Looking at participation like this seems, on the one hand, to invite inclusion of events like Live 8, because they are directed at public policy, but, on the other, to exclude them because of the absence of 'action', as Parry et al. conceive it, and because of their symbolic/expressive form.

An obvious response to this exclusion might simply be to redraw the definition of participation to include the expressive and the passive, and thereby to bring Live 8 within its remit. This is tempting, but it may raise as many problems as it solves. If we treat Live 8 as an instance of political participation, should we also regard Live Aid as one? The difference is, of course, that Live Aid was about raising money for a humanitarian cause (the famine in Ethiopia), while Live 8 announced itself as being about 'justice, not charity'. Live Aid was not directed at government or global policy; Live 8 was. And if we concede that Live 8 is a special case, because of its policy orientation, who are the participants? The performers? The fans who attended the concerts? The ones who sat at home watching it on television? The 27 million people who 'signed up' to Make Poverty History by sending a text message? Those who wore the white bands? Or to take another tack: if we are going to recognise the possibility that leisure activities—listening to music—can constitute a form of political participation, then does this commit us to treating the buying of a record by Bono or Billy Bragg or Joan Baez as political—and if so, does the same apply to records by James Blunt or Celine Dion?

Such questions are not perhaps as impossible or trivial as they may first appear, but it is not clear that they can be addressed through the framework for understanding political participation established by Parry et al. From their perspective, the proliferation of questions above constitutes a good reason for avoiding participation of the symbolic kind; and indeed it is not clear how any survey-based approach, which focuses on individual attitudes and dispositions, could generate answers to them.

Public Spheres and Public Participation

For Parry et al., participation is a matter of *physical action*, of taking part in activities that have as their direct intention (if not consequence) the changing of public policy. There is, though, an alternative tradition, one associated with the literature on the public sphere, and in particular the work of Jurgen Habermas (1992). This tradition connects participation to talk as much as to action in the conventional sense. Nancy Fraser (1992, 110), for example, writes of how Habermas's account of the public sphere 'designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk'. Participation is seen here as involving debate and deliberation. Fraser's own account of the public sphere

diverges from Habermas's in that it introduces the idea of 'subaltern counterpublics' (Fraser 1992, 123) as a way of addressing the constraints on access imposed by the bourgeois public sphere. Nonetheless, she shares with Habermas the idea that political engagement is as much a matter of speech acts as of physical ones. For both, the public sphere represents that space in which 'private people come together as a public' and as such challenge 'the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor' (Habermas 1992, 27).

Seen like this public discourse is political participation, but it is political participation which has to be studied and understood in very different ways to that proposed by Parry et al. Here the focus is less on individual attitudes and dispositions, and more on the content and conditions of public discussion. The institutions that enable the public sphere are what matters, rather than what circulates within it. So it is that Habermas (1992, 32ff.) dwells on the rise of the institutions and practices that allow for the emergence of a public, and Fraser (1992, 123) refers to those elements that sustain, for example, feminist counter-publics: 'journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places'.

It is probably already apparent how the public sphere approach to participation sits more happily with the idea that Live 8 (and other such events) might constitute a form of political activity. The connection is, though, made stronger by the ways in which Habermas, and those who follow him, incorporate the cultural realm within the public sphere. For Habermas, the public sphere is not constituted simply by debate and deliberation about politics, but includes art, music and literature. For Habermas (1992, 36), a condition of the public sphere is the ways in which art and culture are separated from dominant religious and political structures as they become products made available through the market. Art and culture assume meanings that are not confined to their place in some pre-designated order. Accompanying this separation is the emergence of the cultural critic (and its associated media) to give voice to these meanings (Habermas 1992, 41–43).

Habermas illustrates this shift by reference to music. Until the end of the 18th century, Habermas argues (ibid., 39), music 'served to enhance the sanctity and dignity of worship, the glamor of the festivities at court, and the overall splendor of ceremony'. Musicians worked to commission and served their patrons. This changed with the emergence of public concert societies; music was no longer 'tied to a purpose'. 'For the first time', Habermas writes (ibid., 39), 'an audience gathered to listened to music as such—a public of music lovers to which anyone who was propertied and educated could be admitted'. And with this, people became free to judge what they heard and to participate in discussion of its meanings and values.

Although this connection between the worlds of culture and the public sphere does not form a major feature of Habermas's argument, it has been latched upon by those who have wanted to extend and revise his ideas (White 2006). Michael Warner (2005), for example, following Fraser, develops an approach in which the 'counter-public' is understood through the popular culture which gives form to it.

In summary, the public sphere approach to political participation, rather than excluding the symbolic and leisure, places them centrally within its account of participation. In doing so, the research focus shifts to the content of public discourse and the institutions that sustain it, and away from the attitudes and dispositions of individual participants. This switch of emphasis constructs a different notion of participation in which discourse, rather than physical action, is the key. For those committed to the alternative account of participation (and we are, of course, offering a stark, and necessarily crude contrast here to make our point), the opportunity for music to be important diminishes considerably. The crux is, however, that neither account of participation in itself demonstrates or explains the role of music in public action. They merely sketch out two sets of possibilities. So it is that we now turn to attempts to document the connection between music and participation.

Music and Movement

There is now a considerable literature which draws attention to the role of music and musicians in forms of public action. Many of these derive from studies of the former Soviet bloc, and argue that music and musicians were instrumental in giving expression to resistance to the regime and even organising opposition to it (Wicke 1992; Ramet 1994; Cushman 1995; Sheeran 2001; Szemere 2001; Steinberg 2004; Urban 2004). Although they differ in many respects, they tend to share a common feature. This is that music provided a means by which political resistance could be expressed and opposition organised. Such literature is not, of course, confined to non-democratic states. Considerable work has also been done on the role of music in political participation in democracies. Much of this has focused on the civil rights movement (Ward 1998; Saul 2003), but it also extends to the popular left in the US (Denisoff 1971; Denning 1997) and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in the UK (McKay 2006). Finally, there are more general surveys of the use of music in democratic and non-democratic politics (among the more recent are Garofalo 1992; Rosenthal 2001; Fischlin and Heble 2003; Randall 2005; Peddie 2006).

There is, of course, a danger in generalising about such a diverse range, but the tendency has been for the writers to draw attention to the fact of music's association with political causes and movements, identifying the particular music involved, the sentiments contained in the lyrics and the coincidence between the latter and the political goals of the participants. This leads to one of two approaches. The first of these is to use music as a way of 'seeing' the inner life of political participation. So, Brian Ward (1998, 6) explains, in his study of music's relationship to the civil rights movement in the US, that the music 'offers a glimpse into the state of black consciousness and the struggle for freedom and equality' at a given moment. The alternative approach is to present music as the *cause* of political participation. Sabrina Petra Ramet (1994, 1), for instance, opens her edited collection on music in the Soviet bloc with the claim that music is 'an unexpectedly powerful force for social and political change'. She goes on: 'Music brings people together and evokes for them collective emotional experience to which common meanings are assigned'.

What is striking, however, is that neither of these types of claim is itself theorised or tested empirically. This applies both to the political action itself and to the role of

music in it. Little attempt is made to examine how music—as organised sound—functions to reveal or to motivate political action. In other words, the literature tends to beg as many questions as it answers (this argument is developed more fully in Street 2003).

There are two exceptions to this general rule. The first of these is provided by Mark Mattern (1998) who offers a more systematic attempt to connect music to political action. He does this by highlighting the different uses to which music may be put in the organisation of political action. Three modes are identified: deliberative, pragmatic and confrontational. These represent contrasting forms of political action, for which music is used. So the confrontation use refers to music's application to a situation in which communities oppose each other; the deliberative use refers to the way music allows for debating collective identity; and the pragmatic use refers to the place of music in promoting a set of interests (Mattern 1998, 25–32). Music's role in these cases is seen primarily as a form of 'communication' about, or 'revelation' of, what already exists. Mattern writes, for example, that 'music reveals constituent elements such as beliefs, assumptions, and commitments that define the character and shape of the community' (ibid., 15). 'Music', he continues, 'provides a form of communication' (ibid., 15). And although he talks of music as both discovering and creating the commonalities of community, it is evident that its main purpose is communication; he talks, for example, of the 'messages of music' (ibid., 17). Thus, although Mattern seeks to theorise music's place within political action, he does so in a way which reduces it to the role of functionary in the political cause. It serves to communicate or convey what the political context requires.

The second exception to the general rule is provided by Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison (1998) in their book *Music and Social Movements*. Eyerman and Jamison connect music to political participation in a variety of ways and at a number of different levels. These include the suggestion that social movements provide a context for cultural expression and make available 'the resources of culture' as an addition to 'the action repertoires of political struggle' (ibid., 7). This is underpinned by the idea that musical expression in social movements constitutes 'a kind of cognitive practice' (ibid., 7). Music in this sense becomes, among other things, the articulation of a collective memory. This is at one with Eyerman and Jamison's general thesis that social movements should be viewed as 'knowledge producers'. Music is, therefore, to be understood as a form of 'knowledge and action'. Musicians, in turn, are to be regarded as 'truth bearers' (ibid., 21–24).

But while Eyerman and Jamison attribute some autonomy to music, politics is still the primary definer of its role and function—and indeed their account retains a functionalist logic in which the music feeds back into the goals and truths to which the movement lays claim. So while Mattern and Eyerman and Jamison set out to acknowledge the importance of music to political participation, they tend to reduce its role to that of literal transcription of pre-established political goals. Indeed all the accounts referred to so far might be said to have established only a 'weak' connection between music and public action.

It is weak in two senses. First, music is seen as representing or reproducing politics, as a way of communicating what already exists as a set of goals or values. The music is, as it were, a footnote to the movement. Secondly, the connection is weak in the

sense that little or no attempt is made to draw out the ways in which the connection is supported and sustained. The context in which music and politics come together is treated as a product of times and places, with little attempt to trace out the conditions that make the link possible. A stronger connection is one in which music's role is not merely illustrative, but constitutive of the public action, and this connection is forged not by coincidence or cultural 'climate', but the concatenation of specific processes.

Studying Political Participation: Organisation, Legitimation and Performance

We argue here that there are three aspects to the strong link between music and political participation that require attention if we are to have any hope of understanding the role played by music and musicians. We label these 'organisation', 'legitimation' and 'performance'. They represent the view that, if we are to claim that music and musicians do play a significant role in political action, three conditions have to be met. The musicians have to be regarded as legitimate or authoritative representatives of their cause. Secondly, there have to be processes—forms of organisation—that enable musicians and political activists or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to work together. And finally, there has to be some means by which the music not only conveys the message or sentiment of the movement or cause, but also motivates it.

Organisation

Habermas and Fraser focus on the infrastructural conditions that make the public sphere possible. A similar approach, we would suggest, is necessary to account for the link between (particular forms of) music and (particular forms of) politics. The impression created by many accounts of music's link with politics, as we saw earlier, is that the two just 'happened' upon each other, or that they are drawn together by the 'spirit of the times'. While such accounts pay considerable attention to the political conditions and context, they do not typically include an equivalent account of the conditions and context of the music. As Christian Lahusen (1996) has pointed out, the conjunction of musicians and movements requires a variety of forms of capital, not least financial, but also social and cultural capital for the link to be forged. Live 8 cost £11 million to stage. In other words, in understanding music's role in participation, we need to appreciate the infrastructural arrangements that make it possible.

Legitimation

Just as Habermas focuses on the role of art critic, so Eyerman and Jamison talk of musicians as 'truth bearers'. But where Habermas traces the emergence of the critic, attributing it to different institutional and market developments, Eyerman and Jamison say very little about how the musician acquires the authority to act as 'truth bearer'. The fact that they are 'popular' is not a sufficient condition of political

credibility. There are many performers who are popular, but whose political views are either not sought or not taken seriously. (*The Spectator* magazine once mockingly asked the Spice Girls for their views on the EU and European integration). The capacity to speak has to be produced; it can neither be assumed nor derived from general claims about popularity. The generation of this capacity, we suggest, is a product of mediation, in particular that of the ways in which the press and broadcasters report, represent or use musicians as 'authoritative' sources on political issues.

Performance

Although musicians do indeed make speeches and sign petitions, these form a relatively small part of events like Live 8 or movements like Rock Against Racism. Much more significant is the music. If Live 8 and RAR do indeed constitute forms of political participation, then the musical performances must also feature in the story. The political acts being described are those that occur when people strum guitars and sing, as well as when they shout slogans or deliver polemics.

Such claims are not as odd as they might first seem. As we have noted, Habermas's account of the emergence and character of the public sphere incorporates an account of the role of art and culture. The freeing of art and culture from pre-existing forms of power is part of the process by which a critical public is produced. But in observing this, we have to be wary of reducing art to political 'communication' or 'cognitive practice', in which its existence as sound or images (rather than words) is ignored or overlooked. As Robin Kelley (1997, 37) warns, there is a real danger in reducing music to a form of literal communication in which the pleasures that it generates and the forms in which it operates (as sound and rhythm, as well as words) are obliterated. If music has a role in political participation, our understanding of it must acknowledge its particular qualities and attributes *as music*. In other words, in writing about the musical performances that make up events like Live 8 and RAR, we have to do more than report the words spoken or indeed the lyrics sung. We need to acknowledge the other gestures and forms of expression that constitute the event.

Jane Bennett (2001, 131, 110–130), for example, talks of how music, particularly through its rhythmic patterns, can 'energise' our moral sentiments. The repetition within songs and the experience of singing, she argues, enchant us and conjure up new meanings, identities and collectivities. In a similar vein, Simon Frith (1996) argues that to like a piece of music, to respond to it, is to share the ethical values it encodes. Both Bennett and Frith suggest that music does more than reflect our moral and political sympathies; it actively engages them. In making her case, Bennett sets herself against those writers (e.g. Attali 1985; Adorno 2002) for whom the repetitive character of popular music is what kills its capacity to inspire political engagement or rebellion. The point is not which of these competing claims is right, but rather that both sides take seriously the power of music, and both believe that music engages with our system of values; that aesthetic values are also political values. To this extent, understanding music's place in political participation means, at the very least, asking how it seeks to move those who hear and perform it.

In summary, we suggest that, in studying the relationship between music and political participation, attention needs to be paid to the processes of organisation and legitimation, and to the performances themselves. In the final section of this article, we draw attention to aspects of all three as they emerge in our two case studies. The evidence presented here is based on a series of interviews with key activists and on searches of private and public archives belonging to Rock Against Racism and to Jubilee 2000 (and related organisations).

Rock Against Racism

Rock Against Racism was the result of a letter sent to the UK music press in 1976. The signatories—self-confessed music fans—were responding to a number of things then taking place in the UK, but the particular catalyst was racist remarks made by the rock guitarist Eric Clapton on stage in Birmingham. The letter demanded of Clapton:

> where would you be without the blues and R&B [rhythm and blues]? You've got to fight the racist poison, otherwise you degenerate into the sewer with the rats and all the money who ripped off rock culture with their cheque books and plastic crap ... Keep the faith, black and white unite and fight. We want to organise a rank and file movement against the racist poison in rock music—we urge support for Rock Against Racism (*New Musical Express*, 11 September 1976).

RAR took the form of countless small concerts up and down the country, as well as a series of high-profile events in London and Manchester in 1978, and a final one in Leeds in 1981. It was to be claimed that RAR did much to make racism 'unfashionable' and to thwart its rise in the UK (Widgery 1986).

Organisation

Despite the apparently spontaneous character of RAR, it was, of course, the result of a complex set of circumstances. It is not possible to trace these in detail here, or indeed to provide anything that passes for a definitive history. Those that have written RAR's story have tended to do so from a particular political perspective (e.g. Widgery 1986; Renton 2006). We have, though, contacted several of those who signed the original letter and those who organised RAR events in Manchester, Coventry and Leeds (among other places), and they tell a slightly different story.

It was widely assumed at the time that RAR was a client group of, or indeed a front for, the Socialist Workers party (SWP), a well-established Trotskyist organisation (previously the International Socialists). Many of the letters to the weekly music press expressed an anxiety about going to gigs whose politics were dictated by the SWP (*Sounds*, 8 April 1978). Certainly, the more structured and centralised Anti-Nazi League, which emerged in the spring of 1978 as a co-organiser of the first London RAR carnival, was indeed strongly marked by the principles and personnel of the SWP. Members of the party were involved with organising RAR and the gigs. Roger Huddle, one of the authors of the original letter, was a full-time employee of

the SWP, and the party provided printing and office facilities for RAR (Goodyer 2002, 27). And one of the key propagandists for RAR, and author of the first extended work on it, was David Widgery (1986), who was very close to, if not a full member of, the SWP.

But despite the presence of the SWP, it appears that RAR's politics extended more widely than the party with which it was associated. As Ian Goodyer puts it in his study of RAR's links with the SWP, 'much of RAR's politics were the common currency of Left, even liberal circles' (Goodyer 2002). Some of the alternative organisational capital brought to RAR was provided by long-established anti-racist and anti-fascist activity, dating back to the 1930s (interview, Manchester RAR activist, 2006). The Manchester Anti-Fascist Committee and the North Manchester Campaign Against Racism were both formed in the early 1970s. Similar accounts are given of the situation in cities such as Liverpool, Coventry and elsewhere (interview, Liverpool left activist, 2006; email correspondence, Coventry RAR activists, 2006; Renton 2006; see also http://wwwdkrenton.co.uk/anl/anl.html).

But while there were clear precedents for anti-racist organisation, and while the SWP's role has to be qualified in this respect, the question remains as to how and why these organisational resources would lead to such an impressive anti-racist movement in the late 1970s, and especially how the movement would involve music and musicians in it. The answer—or at least part of it—lies, not with pre-existing political networks alone, but with musical networks as well, and the intersection of the two. Interviews with RAR activists in Manchester, Coventry, Leeds and London reveal how musical scenes were as important as political ones. For example, RAR in Manchester in 1976 was closely associated with the first Deeply Vale festival, a four-to-five-day, free, outdoor event. Deeply Vale was held every summer until 1979. The festival linked the emerging punk scene with remnants of the hippy and 'crustie' scenes, and those who ran Deeply Vale were to go on to run RAR in Manchester. One of the principal organisers of Deeply Vale provided the sound equipment for many RAR gigs and for the major RAR carnival in Manchester in 1978. For him, the link with RAR was obvious: 'it was just part of what was going on around us' (interview, Manchester RAR activist, 2006). The political events, it seems, were as much an extension of the music scene as of political activism. One of the performers at Deeply Vale who went on to compère one of the first major RAR gigs in Manchester at the Free Trade Hall made it clear that the formal political organisations were of no relevance. He would refuse 'to hang all the party paraphernalia', arguing that 'we're anti-racist and that's that' (interview, Manchester RAR activist, 2006). Or as the manager of the Buzzcocks said of the party activists associated with RAR, 'They know a lot about propaganda but nothing about rock and roll. If the people who are organising this are the revolution, then I'm emigrating' (*NME*, 22 July 1978). It was not this simple, of course, but it is evident that the networks which forged the music scene—the venues, the retailers, the local media—were instrumental in organising RAR.

Manchester was not untypical. In Coventry, it was reported, RAR was constituted, not by party edict, but by a coalition of local cultural actors: 'lumpen intelligentsia; teachers, social workers, semi-employed, self-employed, artists, writers and musicians' (email correspondence, Coventry RAR activist, 2006). In London, one of the

signatories of the original letter was loath to link RAR to a single specific group: RAR, he insisted, was a movement 'of fans' (interview, Red Saunders, 2006). Most of the leading activists within the London RAR scene saw themselves as part of the '68 generation, and were connected to cultural politics through their work in photo-agencies or art departments or theatre groups (interview, Roger Huddle, 2005; interview, Red Saunders, 2006). In short, RAR came out of networks or scenes in which formal political organisations were only peripheral players. Couched in the language of political participation developed earlier, RAR emerged as part of a counter-public, organised at a local level and depending on non-mainstream media and networks.

Legitimation

RAR began as a letter to the music press, and the music press was deliberately targeted by the organisers of RAR, if only because they knew that they would be ignored by the mainstream press (interview, Red Saunders, 2006). (The only mainstream press reference to the Manchester carnival in 1978 was that it caused the 'biggest traffic congestion in the history of the city' (quoted in *New Manchester Review*, July 1978).) But while RAR may have chosen the music press for its message, it did not follow automatically that it would be taken seriously. This depended on changes in the music press. In the period prior to and following RAR, some elements of the music press became more and more receptive to the idea that music and politics should be linked. Individuals like Neil Spencer, who was to become editor of the *NME* in 1978, increasingly politicised the coverage of music (Gorman 2001; interview, Peter Jenner, 2006). In doing so, they encouraged their readers to see music as political and musicians as politicians. In 1976, under the heading 'Is Rock and Roll ready for 1976?', the *NME* argued that 'this almost total isolation of the artist from his audience must result in his or her music becoming, no matter how good, somewhat irrelevant to what is going on in the outside world' (*NME*, 1 January 1976, 8). The *NME* legitimated and promoted the idea that musicians had a right and a responsibility to engage with politics, and in doing so fused the worlds of musical and political performance.

Performing Participation

The final element to the political participation that is represented by RAR is the way it was performed. Perhaps given its form and its link with the music press, RAR was not so much reported as reviewed. Style was as important as content. As one account of an RAR event said,

> And if rebels are chic it doesn't necessarily make them any less rebellious. You could argue that the British Left ... has suffered from a lack, not a surfeit, of trendiness and style (Oh, sorry, I forgot that style is determined by the capitalist mode of production. zzzzzzz) (Review of Manchester RAR carnival, Salford Working Class Movement Library).

The anti-racist message was carried in the fact that black and white musicians performed together (Gilroy 1987). One key RAR activist explained that the idea was:

not only to use the music as a weapon but also the environment and the atmosphere: a palace of throbbing anti-racist propaganda! We've made up the best banners you've seen, twenty foot long with huge lettering in yellow on red, red on green, plus lots of six foot blow-ups of photos of kids dancing in clubs, enjoying themselves (Red Saunders, quoted in *The Leveller*, January 1977, 12–13).

The politics of performance found expression in other ways. Carol Grimes, one of the first musicians to sign up to RAR, sacked a member of her band for making racist statements. The letters page of *Temporary Hoarding*, RAR's house journal, fuelled a debate as to whether a particular group (the Fabulous Poodles) was an appropriate act to represent the cause because of its sexist lyrics. Politics conducted in this way was necessarily more confused and ambiguous than that of the more traditional kind. In Coventry, for example, people were seen wearing both RAR badges and National Front badges (email correspondence, Coventry RAR activist, 2006). This does not, though, detract from the idea that in part this participation was constituted and expressed as performance, and that aesthetic and cultural choices were expressions of political value and allegiance.

In summary, the political participation associated with RAR was a product of the organisational links between musical and political scenes, the legitimation of musicians as representatives of political causes, and of the performances that embodied the RAR cause. There is, we would suggest, evidence that RAR created an anti-racist counter-public, in which particular organisations and forms of communication were crucial. The contrast with Jubilee 2000 is revealing in the sense that the same dimensions of legitimation, organisation and performance construct a mainstream public through the use of musicians and music.

From Jubilee 2000 to Live 8

Jubilee 2000 was founded in 1996, 20 years after RAR. It brought together, in a loose coalition, a number of organisations, all of them committed to debt relief (Mayo 2005). It was formally wound up at the end of the millennium, but its legacy continued in the guise of bodies like Jubilee Debt Research and Make Poverty History, and its personnel re-emerged to carry on the campaign within organisations like Oxfam and Debt AIDS Trade Africa (DATA).

Organisation

A key problem with which Jubilee 2000 wrestled was how to get its message across (Mayo 2005, 176). As one of its leaders commented, 'It's not apartheid; we don't have Nelson Mandela behind bars. It's a really hard issue to make visual' (Ann Pettifor, *Rolling Stone*, 11 November 1999). In attempting to address this problem, Jubilee 2000 (as is now common practice in many NGOs) committed resources to liaising with celebrities, particularly those in the music business. They created a post for which the main responsibility was to telephone musicians or their managers in an attempt to recruit them to the cause. Many of these calls went unanswered, but one musician in particular became interested: Bono, lead singer of U2. Bono was

himself already sympathetic to the cause (not least because of his involvement in Band Aid and Live Aid a decade earlier), but he, like all such celebrities, was inundated with calls (interview, Jubilee 2000 organiser, 2006; interview, Richard Constant, 2006).

As part of its strategy to recruit musicians, Jubilee established an informal music industry steering group. Two key figures on this were Richard Constant, a senior executive in the Universal Music Group, and Marc Marot, the head of Island Records, U2's label. The presence of these two powerful music industry players was crucial to advising on a strategy to recruit musicians and in creating networks into which Bono was drawn (interview, Jubilee 2000 organiser, 2006).

One illustration of how this translated into practice occurred in 1999, when at that year's Brits Award ceremony (the British music industry's equivalent of the Oscars), Jubilee 2000 received a special award. Named after the lead singer of Queen, the Freddie Mercury award had previously been given to War Child's *Help* charity record and to Elton John for his charity single, 'Candle in the Wind'. In 1999, Bono made the award speech and Muhammad Ali accepted the trophy on behalf of Jubilee 2000. From that moment onwards, Jubilee 2000 became 'fashionable' in the music industry, and the organisation had no further difficulty in recruiting musicians (Jubilee 2000 Report, 2000; interview, Jubilee 2000 organiser, 2006; interview, Richard Constant, 2006).

Behind the event was, however, a complex sequence of meetings, the first of which involved tying Bono into Jubilee (Jubilee 2000 Report, 2000). This meant getting the agreement not just of the singer but of his band too. It also meant elaborate negotiations with the British Phonographic Industry (BPI), the organiser of the Brits, and most crucially ITV, the television company that owned the broadcast rights (interview, Jubilee 2000 organiser, 2006). A similarly complex story can be told about the moments when musicians and causes become allied. Live 8, for instance, involved political negotiations between the Band Aid Charitable Trust and the Prime Minister's Office, the Treasury, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the London Parks Authority. It also required global negotiations between political and bureaucratic actors in seven other major cities (interview, Harvey Goldsmith, 2006). These were supplemented by further negotiations with broad-casters, together with arrangements for an immense array of logistical issues, incorporating arrangements for sound mixing, lighting and so forth (*Entertainment Design*, November 2005). The cost of £11 million had to be recouped through sponsorship, rights deals and merchandise sales (for accounts, see: http://www.live8live.com/docs/accounting.pdf). A standard contract was issued to all musicians in which they signed away all rights—performance, visual and merchandise—to the Band Aid Charitable Trust (interviews, Harvey Goldsmith, John Kennedy, 2006).

Legitimation

Behind these stories of negotiation and network is a longer-running one of legitimation. Bob Geldof once remarked of Bono and himself: 'debt relief ... turned a couple of Paddy pop stars into economists' (*Rolling Stone*, 11 November 1999). More

likely, we would argue, *media representation* of Bono and Geldof turned them into 'economists'. Where with RAR the key source of legitimation was the music press and its ability to establish a counter-public around the idea of music as political weapon, with Jubilee and Live 8 the key player was the mainstream press, and the official public sphere it constituted. It was evident that over time, and following a general trend towards a greater focus on celebrity, the mainstream press has come to sanction (even sanctify) the authority of figures like Bono and Geldof.

There are a number of dimensions to the legitimation of the musicians' involvement in debt relief. At one level there is the 'popular' legitimation of the stars; that is, the way in which Geldof et al. are represented as speaking for the people or popular conscience. This was evident in almost all elements of the UK media. On the day of Live 8, *The Independent* (2 July 2005) devoted its front page to an open letter from Geldof to the G8 leaders. *The Sun*'s (2 July 2005) Live 8 'souvenir 8-page pull out' opened with a headline that appeared to issue from Geldof: 'I can't wait for world to come together to cry out for Africa'. On the day that Live 8 was announced, the *Daily Mail* (1 June 2005) headed the story: 'Geldof's encore for world's poor'. These papers all seemed to suggest that Geldof spoke for the 'people' on behalf of the 'poor' or 'Africa'; he was the 'people's' representative, their voice, their conscience.

The representation of Geldof and Bono also characterised them as 'experts' on debt relief and Africa. Geldof was, for example, commissioned by the BBC to present a series of programmes on Africa. *The Independent* (15 July 2005) ran this headline on its world news pages: 'Geldof rates UN four out of 10 on Africa'. The obvious implication was that Geldof's views on the United Nations were worthy of serious attention; they were news. Meanwhile, *The Guardian* (16 June 2005) described Bono as 'The Irish rock star, who arguably has done more than any other to ensure that the cause of Africa gets on the agenda of the US administration'. There were, of course, dissenting views (Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and Janet Street-Porter in *The Independent*, 6 June 2005, 2 June 2005; John Harris in *The Observer*, 5 June 2005), but the general coverage tended to endorse the claims of the pop stars to be authoritative and representative spokespeople.

Notable too is that the coverage given in 2005 was of a different order to that 20 years earlier. Then *The Times* (15 July 1985), for example, reported Live Aid in a more muted, low-key fashion: 'Live Aid, the global rock show seen by an estimated 1,500 million people in 160 countries is expected to raise nearly £50 million for famine relief'. The first person quoted is not Geldof, but Live Aid's accountant. Our suggestion is that the change in, and character of, the coverage of Geldof and Bono is crucial to creating the form and meaning of the participation represented by events like Live 8. Live 8 inhabited the mainstream public sphere and represented its politics.

Furthermore, the legitimation of Geldof and Bono cannot be separated from their power. Where the decentralised, *ad hoc* character of RAR mitigated any concentration of power, the Jubilee/Live 8 story is one in which particular individuals acquire considerable influence. It was reported to us that when an NGO pitched an article on African debt to the *Daily Telegraph*, they were told: 'We only want it if it's from Bono or Bob Geldof' (interview, CAFOD staff member, 2005). This is a particular

example of a more general concern about the power that Geldof in particular exercises over campaigning on debt relief. The participation that Live 8 came to represent was shaped by his political values and perceptions.

Performing Participation

In marked contrast to RAR, the cultural politics of Live 8 was simple. There was a single criterion, at least as far as the leading figures were concerned. As with Live Aid, the selection of artists to appear at Live 8 was based only on their market size. The values encoded in their music were of no significance. Indeed, Geldof ridiculed those musicians who wanted their music to be seen in political terms. He said of the Clash (RAR's totemic political band who headlined the 1978 Victoria Park RAR carnival) that they were 'a laughable farce ... That was just Pure Nonsense for Now People ... the rhetoric of pop revolution was too easy' (*Rolling Stone*, 5 December 1985, 60). Geldof was dismissive of the idea that African bands should appear at Live 8 because they were *African*; they should only appear if they were *popular*, and they were not. As Geldof said, 'For all their great musicianship, African acts do not sell many records' (*The Guardian*, 28 December 2005; also interviews, Harvey Goldsmith, John Kennedy, 2006). While this may appear as a statement of fact, it does, of course, disguise a political judgement, one which promotes a particular populist vision. It shapes the form of participation just as surely as do the processes that organise and legitimate the participation. Live 8 created a movement that was located close to the centre of contemporary society and politics, a version of Royal Ascot or Wimbledon for popular politics. RAR stood on the fringes, contained in a counter-public sphere. Both linked music to political participation, but in doing so gave life to very different values and experiences.

Conclusion

This article has explored the idea that music and musicians can create forms of political participation, and has tried to indicate how, if this is possible, such participation might be studied. It began by suggesting that traditional approaches to participation would, on the whole, be incapable of incorporating events like Rock Against Racism or Live 8. An alternative approach, one centred on the notion of the public sphere and participation as discourse, could, however, provide a more receptive framework. In adopting such an approach, we have argued that to study participation means focusing as much on the conditions of such participation as its form. Hence our emphasis on the organisational infrastructure and the legitimation process. We have also suggested that the politics of performance is important to the constitution of participation. We have tried to illustrate the implications of this approach through two case studies. We cannot claim to have 'proved' that music makes an observable and independent difference to public action. What we have suggested is that, in observing the proximity of music and musicians to political causes, researchers need to pay attention to the music as much as the politics, and that in connecting the two they need to focus on more than the general context, but rather to look in detail at the mechanics and practices that link them. We would argue that music's association with various social and political movements is not to

be regarded just as window dressing, but rather as integral to those movements. The extent to which music and musicians inspire and mobilise public action is a separate question; for now it is important to note how music and musicians help to constitute—by way of organisation, legitimation and performance—the platform from which particular instances of public action emerge.

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Interviews

Some 50 interviews were conducted in the course of the research, including those directly involved in the organisation of RAR and Jubilee 2000, as well as those who were involved on a more casual basis. Those interviewees mentioned by name:

- Richard Constant, senior executive, Universal Music Group, and a key link between Jubilee 2000 and the record industry and associated media;
- John Kennedy, Band Aid Trustee, and hence responsible for the decision to launch Live 8;
- Harvey Goldsmith, Band Aid Trustee, responsible with Kennedy for the Live 8 decision, and also in charge of the logistics for Live 8;
- Red Saunders, founding member, Rock Against Racism; signatory to the original letter and responsible for many of the ideas and symbols associated with RAR;
- Roger Huddle, founding member, Rock Against Racism; involved in music and in design;
- Peter Jenner, manager of the Clash and Billy Bragg, among others, and closely connected to the RAR events.

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