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# World Music and Activism Since the End of History [*sic*]

PETER MANUEL

“A thousand militant voices will sing a freedom song  
The people united will never be defeated...”

So proclaimed these verses of “El pueblo unido jamás será vencido,” which, together with a host of *nueva canción* anthems, sustained the spirits of millions of Latin American progressives through the dark days of Cold War US-supported military dictatorships. But what happens when freedom is finally obtained? When the socialist ideal is discredited? When the economic hegemon is no longer an easily identified antagonist—the imperialist USA—but the intangible workings of an amorphous global financial network? Does the socially conscious music then stop? Is there anything for the thousand voices to sing of, besides love, dancing, and sex? Or, for that matter, nihilistic rage?

However one might answer these questions, the third quarter of the twentieth century stands out as a historical moment in which progressive, activist songs occupied lively niches in popular music cultures throughout much of the world, serving as soundscapes for set of socio-political movements that, although diverse, shared a commitment to universalist values ultimately deriving from the Enlightenment. But whether in Jamaica, Pakistan, Spain, or Latin America, these musical movements have largely evaporated. What happened?

In recent decades, historians have written extensively about what appears to be a dramatic and tangible change in global socio-political culture since the 1980s. This transformation has been interpreted from diverse perspectives, and with varying degrees of optimism or pessimism. In Francis Fukuyama’s paradigmatic, seminal, and much-debated formulation<sup>1</sup>, it is the triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy, the exhaustion of structural political and economic alternatives, and, hence, the effective “end of history.” For some cultural theorists, it is a postmodern condition marked by new aesthetic and epistemological sensibilities. For social activists, it is an era of progressive new social movements (NSMs) that have extended rights and dignity to women, gays, minorities, and other subalterns, and have raised public awareness and influenced policies on issues ranging from environmental concerns to animal rights. Meanwhile, for observers of less sunny dispositions, the “new world order” is an anarchic and unprecedentedly dangerous era of savage tribal, religious, and ethnic movements armed with modern weaponry.

The decline of protest songs in the mainstream West since the 1970s has been oft noted, and has been traditionally related to specific developments such as the end of the Vietnam War. In this essay, I suggest that the decline was part of a much broader change in global culture, and that a cross-cultural exploration of the parallel trajectories of diverse political song movements can enrich our understanding of the global socio-political climate as a whole. I suggest that activist musical movements, in diverse parts of

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<sup>1</sup>Fukuyama, Francis, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* 16 (1989): 3–18; and *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

the world, illustrate with particular clarity how the 1950s-70s represented a sort of high point for a set of international socio-political movements which, although diverse, were animated by shared Enlightenment values of liberal secular humanism. Since the 1980s, however, the dissipation of these musical movements—and in many cases, their replacement by lyric expressions of militant, intolerant, chauvinistic neo-tribalisms—reflects the passing of this distinctive political historical moment, and its segue to a new era in global music culture and world history.

In presenting my case I draw from various music scenes outside the Euro-American mainstream, since the parallels between them so dramatically highlight the global nature of the cultural transformation. In looking, as I do, at diverse international music scenes over a period of some three decades, my treatment is perforce cursory rather than detailed, but I contend that more extensive examination of the genres in question would reinforce rather than undermine my arguments. In this article, I also restrict my focus to music genres that are explicitly allied—primarily via their song lyrics—to socio-political movements. Well aware of the dangers of indulging in a mere exercise in nostalgia, I focus on tangibly documentable musical developments, and offer interpretations as to the broader factors that have collectively enervated them.

## **Music and Progressive Activism in the Post-War, Post-Colonial Decades: A Global Project**

As someone whose sensibilities were formed in the 1960s, and as a member of the great American baby-boomer generation that invented youth counterculture, and that would never get old, it is of course hard for me to imagine that any music could rival '60s rock in quality or socio-political significance. Much of that music has not, of course, withstood the test of time, nor did my generation succeed in its goal of bringing down the military-industrial complex. There was no shortage of puerile narcissism, myopia, shallow hedonism, and political naiveté, and in the realm of commercial popular music, explicitly activist songs would constitute only a small percentage. And yet, that percentage was significant, and even in the most surreal flower-power fantasies of a song such as Joni Mitchell's "Woodstock" (popularized by Crosby, Stills, and Nash), there was a vision that linked celebration, rock music, and progressive protest against the Vietnam War:

...and I dreamed I saw the bomber jet planes flying shotgun in the sky  
turning into butterflies above the nation

This highly politicized decade was also the period of the massive 1968 student protests in Paris, Mexico City, and elsewhere, which, while displaying their own share of incoherence and naiveté, were animated by a shared opposition to imperialism, shallow materialism, social conformism, and reactionary attitudes toward sexual and recreational practices. In Europe, the US, and several Latin American countries, rock music was similarly interpreted, both by its fans and its critics, as inherently, if indirectly, linked to the spirit of progressive protest and countercultural sensibilities.

Some commentators<sup>2</sup> have characterized the '60s countercultural protests as opposed to modernity and to Enlightenment ideals, especially insofar as the latter, in its early formulations, espoused an unquestioning faith in reason and science, which were then so discredited by the rationalized savagery of two World Wars, the ongoing rape of the environment, and the ethnocentric equation of reason with Euro-American ideologies. An arguably more productive and tenable perspective would be that of

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<sup>2</sup>For example, David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 37.

Habermas and others, who would note how countercultural movements, despite their contradictions, were at least implicitly and often explicitly animated by the modernist ideals of secular, liberal, egalitarian justice, and universal human rights—a vision clearly deriving, in however rearticulated a form, from the legacy of the Enlightenment as formulated by its eighteenth-century spokespersons. In this essay, I follow this interpretation, in which the ongoing project of modernity is linked to that of the Enlightenment, seeking to develop objective science, universal morality, and law according to their inner logic.<sup>3</sup>

These same ideals certainly inspired the *nueva canción* or “new song” movement which flourished throughout Latin America from the late 1960s roughly through the mid-1980s. In that region, while different countries confronted their own particular set of circumstances, millions of progressives and especially young people shared a vigorous sense of opposition to American imperialism and its local puppet regimes. The *nueva canción* movement emerged as the quintessential expression of this dissent, animated by a sense of idealism and socio-political reform. The ferocity with which the musical movement was repressed in Chile and elsewhere only lent it greater power and urgency where it did manage to be heard. Like countercultural ‘60s rock in the USA, the movement was not without its own aesthetic and ideological contradictions, and some songs naturally have withstood the test of time better than others. The movement was also diverse in various ways, linked as it was with various specifically local socio-political causes, such as an envisioned (if to some extent symbolic) solidarity with Andean Indians in Chile and Peru, or with Afro-Caribbeans in the Dominican Republic, or support for the goals of the Revolution in Cuba. Parallel movements flourished in places like Argentina, where *rock nacional* became linked with progressive opposition to the US-backed dictatorships of the 1970s and ‘80s.<sup>4</sup> Despite the brutality and dominance of neo-fascist dictatorships throughout the region, the progressive movements and their associated music shared what must be regarded as a certain optimism, in the period when socialism was widely seen as a potential and credible alternative to laissez-faire capitalism, even if Stalinist Cuba and the Soviet bloc did not in themselves constitute models. Such optimism was explicit in innumerable songs, from “El pueblo unido” to Brazilian protest anthems such as Geraldo Vandré’s “Disparada”:

We are all soldiers, armed or not,  
On the march, singing, following the hymn...  
Confidence written across our foreheads, history in our hands<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, all these political movements, as expressed in *nueva canción*, shared an underlying commitment to the rationalist, secular, liberal values derived from the Enlightenment, whether inflected with Marxism or other local liberation struggles. Such ideals pervaded song lyrics, whether Marxist anthems like Quilapayún’s “La Internacional,” proclamations of solidarity with the poor and oppressed such as Inti-Illimañi’s “Lamento del indio,” or universalist songs such as “El pueblo unido jamás será vencido”:

Arise, sing, the people will triumph...  
taking justice and reason in their hands.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, it would be too much to expect a sensuous commercial dance music such as salsa to exhibit the same sort of wordy, serious, socio-political orientation as did singer-songwriter *nueva canción*,

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<sup>3</sup>Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity: An Incomplete Project,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 9.

<sup>4</sup>See, e.g., Pablo Vila, “Rock Nacional and Dictatorship in Argentina,” *Popular Music* 6, (1987).

<sup>5</sup>Claus Schreiner, *Música Brasileira: A History of the Popular Music and People of Brazil* (NY: Marion Boyars, 1993), 157.

<sup>6</sup>“De pie, cantar, el pueblo va a triunfar... sus manos van llevando la justicia y la razón.”

but several salsa hits of the 1970s and '80s did articulate a commitment to social themes, whether Latin American solidarity and pride, the vicissitudes of barrio life, or, in the case of several songs by Ruben Blades, explicitly progressive political commentary.<sup>7</sup> Such songs, although a minority, were a familiar part of the salsa soundscape, and allowed the music, as an international Latin American phenomenon, to be loosely allied by many fans with a new spirit of Latino empowerment and liberation. Hence, salsa could serve as the soundtrack for the vigorous Latino pride movement spearheaded by the Young Lords and others in the 1970s, as Latinos in New York and elsewhere took inspiration from the Civil Rights movement to demand political recognition and develop their own sense of ethnic pride in an upbeat, inclusive, and positive manner rather than a chauvinistic, clannish, or militant one.

In Jamaica, a similar spirit of optimism, idealism, and mobilization thrived during the same heady decade of the 1970s, when the prevailing socio-political sentiment of the nation, independent since 1962, was that it would be finally able to control its own destiny, whether politically or ideologically. In the realm of spiritual consciousness, this sentiment took the idiosyncratic form of messianic Rastafarianism, envisioning an empowerment of global postcolonial subalterns in a way that, while not militaristic or chauvinistic, would nevertheless bring Babylon's oppressive throne tumbling down. In the political sphere, the spirit was embodied in the moderate socialism of Michael Manley's People's National Party (PNP), which sought (without success) to enfranchise, empower, and uplift the poor by redistributing wealth, negotiating higher remuneration for bauxite exports, and joining hands with other non-aligned countries to chart a course independent of American imperialism. Hence the innumerable roots reggae songs that celebrated the "sufferers," that vowed to fell the mighty tree (of imperialism? of neo-colonial ideology?) with a small axe, that urged them to "Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights," and that extolled the spirit of core Enlightenment values, however linked to the idiosyncratic Afrocentricity of Rastafari. The Heptones' 1968 song "Equal Rights," paraphrasing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was particularly explicit:

Every man has an equal right to live and be free  
No matter what color, class, or race he may be

Roots reggae, invigorated as it was by this sense of socio-political and ethical urgency and commitment, became an international phenomenon, cherished in much of urban Africa and elsewhere, and linked to various other progressive causes, from the anti-apartheid movement to the rights of Palestinians, as in several songs of reggae artist Alpha Blondy of Cote d'Ivoire.

As Blondy's music illustrated, the spirit of progressive, universalist idealism was by no means limited to the Americas and Western Europe. In newly independent India during the mid-twentieth-century decades, a resilient political left manifested itself in various ways, including the Fabian socialism of Nehru's Congress Party, the prolonged rule of self-labeled Communist parties in the states of Bengal and Kerala, a lively street theater movement led by the leftist Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), and a series of hard-hitting social-realist films directed by K.A. Abbas, Bimal Roy and others, which enjoyed a presentable market niche alongside the sentimental commercial blockbusters of the day. Progressive secularist Urdu poets such as Kaifi Azmi and Sahir Ludhianvi penned many film song lyrics for these producers, hailing freedom, dignity, and human rights, and denouncing economic iniquity. Typical among

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<sup>7</sup>Blades' numerous political songs would include "Caminos verdes," "Tiburón," "Desapariciones," and "Prohibido olvidar." Kindred sentiments were expressed, however obliquely, in songs such as Eddie Palmieri's "La libertad, lógico," and Conjunto Libre's "Imágenes latinas."

these is “Sāthi hāth barhānā” (Comrades, lend your hands) from the 1957 film *Naya Daur*, which was one of several contemporary movies with explicitly political and Marxist-informed themes. The song scene depicts the protagonist leading a retinue of mine workers singing these defiant verses:

We are the ones who extract rubies from the earth, pearls from the sea,  
All that is of value in this world has been created by us  
How long will labor be chained by the rich?  
Reach out and snatch that which you have always dreamed of  
Comrades, lend your hands.<sup>8</sup>

From this decade through the 1970s a school of progressive secularist Urdu poetry also flourished in Pakistan and India, led by the Pakistanis Ali Sardar Jafri, Ahmad Faraz (1931-2008), and especially Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-84), whose often openly political verse enjoyed something approaching mass popularity, being extensively read, memorized, and recited among tens of millions of educated Urdu speakers throughout both countries. Both the political and romantic verses of these poets were also widely sung in diverse contexts. Particularly popular was Faiz’s “Mujh se pahli-si muhabbat meri mehbūb na pūchh,” a grim indictment of poverty and exploitation. While Faiz did not write specifically for movies, this famous poem was among those of his which were used in films, in this case as sung by Noor Jehan in the 1962 film *Qaidi*.

Don’t ask me to love again as I once did, my beloved  
...Our world knows other torments besides that of love...  
Woven into silk, satin, and brocade  
Men’s bodies sold in the street and the bazaar  
Smearred with dirt, running with blood--  
My gaze goes back that way too, what can be done?<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, the socialist left was a prominent part of the Pakistani political scene during this period. Further, while there may be little to be said in favor of the military dictatorships of Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan (ruled 1958-72), it is worth noting that they were overwhelmingly secular rather than Islamic in character, like the subsequent administration of Z.A. Bhutto (1972-77), with his openly socialist rhetoric. It was not until the US-backed military regime of Zia ul-Haq (1977-88) that fundamentalist Islamic parties that came to permeate the nation’s political and social fabric.

A spirit of secularist reform, however regionally inflected, also animated popular music elsewhere in the Muslim world during these decades. In the Arab heartland of Egypt and the Levant, singers Umm Kulthum (1904-75) and Fairuz (b. 1935) became icons not only of Egyptian and Lebanese nationalism, respectively, but also of the secular pan-Arabist movement that reached its apogee in the 1960s.

During this period, and continuing in various places through the 1980s, it was common for movements for regional or ethnic pride, empowerment, and identity to be not only secular in character but also linked to socialist ideals. In Spain, the moment of idealistic mobilization came in the 1970s-80s, when the country was unsteadily emerging from decades of fascist dictatorship. Vigorous *nueva canción* movements flourished in Catalonia and Andalucía, celebrating workers’ rights, socialism, and subaltern

<sup>8</sup>Visible at various YouTube postings, including: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1SuMZwDIV4> (accessed May 2015). Lyrics translated from Urdu by the author.

<sup>9</sup>Visible at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSCVQGZJCzA>, and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3HMHx57EMw> (accessed May 2015). Lyrics translated from Urdu by the author. The song is worked into the fanciful plot, involving the romance between a woman and a man serving a prison sentence on her behalf. See also Faiz 1971 for full translation of this and other poems. I thank Tahira Naqvi and Fawzia Khan for background information on the use of the song in this film.

activism. Catalanian *nova cançó* (new song) singer Lluís Llach was one of the many artists who voiced the era's sense of optimism and moral certitude:

Arise again, so that our solemn and clear voices can be heard ...  
To the streets! Everything must be done, and can be done!

Political song was particularly vigorous in the southern province of Andalucía, where activists across the political spectrum mobilized to demand better treatment from the Madrid government, which, in their view, had treated the region essentially as a conquered territory to be exploited ever since 1492, when the agriculturally productive Moors were defeated and eventually expelled. In the 1980s in Andalucía there was a profound sense of belated socio-political awakening, of finally being able to stand up and demand justice. Much of this political activism was framed in Marxist terms, with demands for worker's rights and especially land reform. The spirit of socio-political awakening and mobilization was audible in a broad gamut of Andalusian music genres.<sup>10</sup> These included many activist flamenco songs,<sup>11</sup> sevillanas, and fandangos, as well as a local *nueva canción andaluza* (Andalusian new song) movement, which openly called for reform, linking struggles for workers' rights, redistribution of wealth, reduction of military spending, land reform, and a new celebration of Andalusian culture and autonomy. A representative lyric is the song "Hay que repartir la tierra" (The Land Should be Shared), in a cassette of similarly themed fandangos and sevillanas, by the Gente del Pueblo:

Since the land of my Andalucía is so vast  
Why do you divide it so unfairly?  
Landowners, leave the land to the laborer, because I love it  
The land where we live is shared so unfairly  
That the rich who own it neither work it nor cultivate it  
And only want it for its own sake.<sup>12</sup>

One could go on in this fashion, mentioning the Greek protest songs of Theodorakis and others, the chimurenga music of Thomas Mapfumo, and the various other musical manifestations of progressive movements that managed not only to survive repression, but to derive a sense of immediacy and importance from it. It bears noting that such activist songs, like the Latin American, South Asian, and Jamaican songs I have mentioned, represented only a minority, among a much broader popular repertoire of songs about love, romance, dancing, or other typical themes. However, in each case the musical expressions were familiar, established, and legitimate niches in the music scenes in question, reflecting the active presence of progressive, secular reform movements in the broader socio-political spheres.

Finally, any survey of activist songs expressing a secular, universalist commitment to social justice must of course include the various forms of political song cultivated throughout the communist world itself. There is no doubt that much music in this vein, whether in the Soviet bloc or China, was generated by opportunistic, despotic fiat rather than grassroots inspiration, and was regarded with weary cynicism by

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<sup>10</sup>Peter Manuel, "Andalusian, Gypsy, and Class Identity in the Contemporary Flamenco Complex," *Ethnomusicology* 33 (1989): 47–66.

<sup>11</sup>Such themes were basic to the repertoire of several leading flamenco singers, including El Cabrero, Manuel Gerena, Enrique Morente, José Menese, and Pepe Taranto.

<sup>12</sup>On *Sevillanas de la autonomía*, by Gente del Pueblo (Fonomusic 91.2375/8). For further lyrics in this vein, see Fernando González Lucini, *20 años de canción en España (1963-1983)* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1989). (Siendo tan ancha la tierra que tiene mi Andalucía, ¿Porqué dejáis pa' nosotros la tierra mal repartía? Terrateniente, al labrador deja la tierra, que la amo yo, que está tan mal repartía, la tierra donde vivimos que los ricos que la tienen ni la labran ni cultivan, solo pa' el colmo la quieren.)

much of its audience. At the same time, several commentators have testified to the genuine popularity of such songs among many living under communist regimes, who endorsed—however equivocally—the progressive ideals rhetorically invoked by their governments.<sup>13</sup>

Thus far I have presented what may seem like a heterogeneous congeries of musical movements, diverse not only in their geographic sites but also in terms of their specific historical contexts and focal socio-political orientations, from Latino immigrant empowerment to Rastafari. Likewise, the causes they enlivened ranged from youth countercultural movements to institutionally organized political platforms.<sup>14</sup> Further, their individual time-frames correspond loosely rather than precisely, in some cases out of sync by a decade or two. Moreover, while I do not deny my sympathy for many aspects of these movements, my point in these pages is not to celebrate them or even assess their validity. Indeed, aside from the massive atrocities perpetrated by Stalin and Mao in the name of communism, it could well be argued that India's Fabian socialism effectively stifled economic growth in that country for two generations; that the genteel Marxism of the Latin American intelligentsia contributed at least indirectly to the terrorism of Peru's Shining Path and the Stalinist repression of the Castro regime; and that rationalist secularism makes an odd match with an obscurantist religion founded on deification of an Ethiopian monarch who—a devout Christian—explicitly repudiated his Jamaican worshipers. Nevertheless, it is also clear that these musical movements, however diverse, shared an underlying invocation of compatible Enlightenment values—that is, essentially liberal, modernist, and universalist conceptions of social justice and human rights, often counterposed to commercialism and economic domination by elites or imperialist hegemons. This humanism was resilient and flexible enough that it could accommodate a variety of more specific movements, including Marxism, Latin American and Arab pride, specific causes like the anti-apartheid struggle, and even moderate Rastafarianism. More importantly, from the present perspective, it is clear that these various socio-political movements, with their associated musical expressions, represented a particular socio-historical moment that has passed, as the main currents of global culture, in all its diversity, have taken a different turn.

## The Decline of Protest Music After the End of History [sic]

Historians have written so extensively about the dramatic changes in global socio-political culture since the 1980s that there is no need for more than the briefest adumbration of these developments here.<sup>15</sup> In the broadest terms most relevant to this essay, the various secular, liberal, universalist movements that, with their musical counterparts, flourished in diverse forms around the world have, with a few notable exceptions, largely been replaced or marginalized by a political quiescence, by a proliferation of cause-specific NSMs, by the rise of right-wing populist strongmen, or, most palpably, by militant tribalisms.

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g., Izaly Zemtsovsky, "Musicological Memoirs on Marxism" in *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics*, ed. Regula Qureshi, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 167–89.

<sup>14</sup>See Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) for further discussion of such disparate sorts of movements.

<sup>15</sup>E.g., Robert Antonio, "After Postmodernism: Reactionary Tribalism," *American Journal of Sociology* 106 (2000); Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How the Planet is Both Falling Apart and Coming Together—and What This Means for Democracy* (New York: Random House, 1995); Ferenc Fehér, "1989 and the Deconstruction of Political Monism," *Thesis Eleven* 42 (1995); John Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change, 1510-2010* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 3rd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Robert Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy* (New York: Random House, 2000); Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); and of course, Fukuyama.



Collectively, neo-fundamentalist movements based on religion, clan, and race or ethnicity have filled a vacuum that was created by the broad disillusionment with secular Enlightenment metanarratives.

The various dimensions of these changes, along with their causes and ramifications, are numerous, and exhibit troubling as well as felicitous features. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the turn to state capitalism in China, and the dismal performance of communism in Cuba and North Korea, Marxism has lost credibility as an alternative to neoliberal capitalism. Accompanying the dissipation of Cold War tensions came the dramatic replacement of dictatorships—both US-backed and Soviet-bloc ones—with democracies, as the world went from some 80 democracies in the early 1970s to around 140 in the early '90s. Due to this evident triumph of economic and political liberalism, socialist-inspired pro-democracy movements in Latin American and elsewhere declined. At the same time, throughout much of the developing world, Western-educated elites steeped in imported ideologies of socialism and secular nationalism came to be replaced by indigenous ruling classes more oriented toward traditional local forms of ethnic and religious identity.<sup>16</sup> Global media, population explosions, and migrations increased exposure to and interaction among diverse peoples, promoting both cosmopolitan openness as well as clashes and an increased turn toward ethnic identity politics. With the end of the Cold War and the advent of a celebrated “new world order,” while wars continued to rage in various parts of the periphery,<sup>17</sup> most of the developed world came to enjoy an extended period of stability, economic growth, and accompanying political quiescence.

Most prominent among sanguine assessments of the new climate was that of Francis Fukuyama, who, in a much-debated 1989 article and subsequent book, hailed the transformation as the “end of history,” in the sense that mankind had reached the endpoint of ideological evolution, with the exhaustion of structural alternatives (especially fascism and communism) to democracy and neoliberal capitalism. In Fukuyama’s formulation, there could be further *events*, and reactive anti-modern socio-political movements in the periphery, but these would be largely subsumed in a universal convergence toward rule of law and accountability. Societies would continue to modernize by institutionalizing these essentially Western-derived ideals.

However broadly accurate Fukuyama’s thesis has turned out to be, there is no doubt that the tectonic global shift he interprets has vitiated the realm of activist protest music and their allied political movements. A primary factor has been the way that the fall of dictatorships, whether of left or right, deprived countercultural music of much of its sense of socio-political urgency. While an efficient totalitarian state such as North Korea can effectively stifle any form of dissent, many dictatorships of the Cold War era, however authoritarian, were unable to prevent protest music from circulating, whether in the form of cassettes of Cuban *nueva trova* disseminated throughout Latin America, or ambiguously coded Haitian *konpa* songs, Brazilian *canções de protesta*, or Argentine *rock nacional* hits, that were prized for their inferred revolutionary lyrics.<sup>18</sup> These songs, along with much of the spectrum of popular music in these locales, acquired tremendous meaning and importance from their implicit or explicit ties to political opposition movements, and indeed, precisely from their status as heroic, popular art forms which repressive dictatorships sought to silence.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>See, e.g., Owen, *Clash of Ideas*.

<sup>17</sup>In the 1980s-90s, these would include conflicts in the Balkans, Chechnya, Sudan, East Timor, Armenia/Azerbaijan, and the Congo.

<sup>18</sup>See Gage Averill, *A Day for the Hunter, a Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Schreiner, *Música Brasileira*, 155–63; and Vila, “Rock Nacional.”

<sup>19</sup>Conversely, as Rosenthal and Flacks note in *Playing for Change* (2003), in the 1970s-80s, the much more permissive attitude

Meanwhile, the advent of democracy, whether in Latin America, the former Soviet Bloc, or elsewhere, did not dramatically (if at all) relieve poverty and inequality. At the same time, the globalization of capital deprived progressives of easily identifiable antagonists such as American multinationals or local comprador elites. How can a “pueblo unido” raise a thousand voices against the amorphous, diffuse, and inexorable workings of global transnational capital?

Thus, while the musical ramifications of these developments were numerous and in many ways linked to local developments as well as these broader systemic conjunctures, one can nevertheless see overt changes in all the progressive musical movements mentioned so far here. Latin American *nueva canción* has retained a certain sentimental, nostalgic afterlife among the generation that grew up on it, but it has been largely defunct as a movement for decades. At best, it survives in a self-consciously bland and non-confrontational singer-songwriter form, as in the case of the re-named “*canción social*” or “*canción propuesta*” [lit., proposal song] in Colombia, which studiously eschews revolutionary rhetoric.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, freedom of speech, coupled with the advent of democracy, took the wind out of the movement’s sails, just as the end of the Vietnam War also put an end to protest music in the US after 1973. For its part, the Latin American left—no longer able to link itself to the struggle for democracy—has been discredited by the murderous Shining Path, the bankrupt Cuba, and the Colombian FARC, which has operated essentially as a kidnapping and cocaine cartel.

In Spanish popular music, one can observe the same sort of trajectory, from a progressive, highly politicized period—in this case, the 1960s to mid-’80s—to a largely disillusioned and demobilized present characterized by apolitical punk groups rather than intellectual singer-songwriters.<sup>21</sup> As in the other cases mentioned above, some of the relative quiescence stems from the genuine achievements of certain goals, including full, stable democracy, the enactment of various social and economic reforms, federalist autonomy for regions like Catalonia, the legitimization of the Catalan language, and the repeated election of a relatively progressive socialist government (however uneven its performance may have been). At the same time, the economic woes of Andalucía and elsewhere can no longer be attributed solely, or even primarily, to malfeasance on the part of local landlords or Madrid-based exploiters who could be pilloried in song. Since 2007, of course, Spain as a whole has fallen into an economic crisis that has provoked its share of street protests and angry rap songs, but this dissent has not generated a mainstream counterpart to the politicized Catalan and Andalusian song movement of earlier decades. Spain’s dilemma is typical of many countries in the new global economic order, in which, for a composer of political song, there are no longer any tangible demons or even obvious reformist causes. How does one pen a protest song denouncing the credit glut, the real estate bubble, overinvestment in infrastructure, and the arcane financial derivatives that precipitated Spain’s economic crisis?<sup>22</sup>

Even in societies that had been democratic, and whose activist music scenes were thus not

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toward rock of the Communist Party in Poland, compared to other Soviet Bloc countries, led to an ideological sterility of its music scene.

<sup>20</sup>I thank ethnomusicologist Joshua Katz-Rosene for introducing me to this genre. See Robin Moore, “Transformations in Cuban *Nueva trova*, 1965-95,” *Ethnomusicology* 47, (2003): 1–41.

<sup>21</sup>As Héctor Fouce and Juan Pecourt note in “Emociones en lugar de soluciones: música popular, intelectuales y cambio político en la España de la Transición,” in *Trans* 12 (2008): 20, speaking of the evaporation of Spanish protest music, “With the death of Franco came the death of the anti-Franco movement... In the 1980s died the possibility of saying anything on a mass scale, of sending a collective message. The singer-songwriter songs, the meetings, the debates, all disappeared.”

<sup>22</sup>Meanwhile, Catalonia has hosted a vigorous independence movement, though largely motivated by regional pride and economic considerations rather than more abstract ideals. In that sense it is typical of a contemporary sub-nationalist movement. Though singing rock songs in Catalan (e.g., by Manel) remains an assertion of regional identity, the independence movement has not generated any sustained protest song movement along the lines of the 1960s-70s *nova canço*.

vulnerable to being crippled by a political opening, the changing climate of the new world order enervated once-resilient socio-political song scenes. In the Caribbean and Newyorican salsa world, the colorful songs of Ruben Blades and others which chronicled the vicissitudes of barrio life, indicted dictatorships, and hailed Latino pride and unity gave way in the 1980s to the safe, sentimental clichés of *salsa romántica*, with its endless hackneyed refrains of “*no puedo vivir sin ti*” (“I can’t live without you”). The renunciation of idealistic socio-political lyrics has been even more pronounced in the Jamaican dancehall reigning since the 1980s, where anthems to human rights have been eclipsed by the party songs of bling-laden deejays who at best sing of the pleasures of dancing and punanny, when not extolling nihilistic gangster violence or exhorting their fans to butcher gay people.

In India, the era of progressive films and film songs had largely ended by the late 1960s, as Hindi cinema and its regional derivatives, which thoroughly monopolized commercial popular music, definitively shunned social realism in favor of apolitical melodramas, set in glittery fantasy worlds of cabarets and mansions. As Ali Mir wrote, the social-critical lyrics once commonplace in Hindi film lyrics gave way to “escapist fantasies and commodity fetishism played out in chimerical dreamscapes.”<sup>23</sup> While progressive Urdu poetry retained its audience through the 1970s, it no longer occupied a place in mainstream popular song. There, as elsewhere, a certain socio-political moment, marked by progressive politics and its expression in popular song and cinema, had effectively come and gone.

Finally, while my focus in this article is outside the mainstream West, the decline of protest music in the latter music culture has been proverbial, and needs no detailed discussion here. As Rosenthal and Flacks pithily observed, “The political turn to the right in the United States and many industrialized countries in the 1980s certainly called into question whether popular culture was either intrinsically oppositional or politically effective; given the gains of the right, it could hardly be both.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite the international decline of songs of overt protest and activism, some commentators saw salutary trends toward new forms of progressive music, expressing sensibilities that were in their ways savvier than the leftist threnodies of the ‘60s singer-songwriters. In 1994, two years after Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man*, cultural historian George Lipsitz wrote insightfully of the new challenges and opportunities for popular music and progressive politics in his book, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place*. This engaging text stands with Fukuyama’s volume as a quintessential expression of the sanguine sentiment of that halcyon period dating from the end of the Cold War until 9/11. Lipsitz, like Fukuyama, is an astute rather than naïve observer of global trends, and is sensitive to the dangers (as suggested in his title) that the new era has presented. However, like Fukuyama, his perspective was optimistic, as he sought to illustrate the sorts of positive roles that popular music can play in a postcolonial, globalized world where multi-directional, decentered flows of transnational capital have replaced Western imperialism and weakened the nation-state, and where new social movements have replaced Marxist metanarratives. Lipsitz noted the challenges involved in creating meaningful popular music in a situation where counter-hegemonic subversion and critique can only be expected to occur in an immanent fashion, from within the existing structures of the social order itself, rather than representing

<sup>23</sup>Ali Mir, “Lyrically Speaking: Hindi Film Songs and the Progressive Aesthetic,” in *Indian Literature and Popular Cinema: Recasting Classics*, ed. Heidi Rika Maria Pauwels (New York: Psychology Press, 2007), 217.

<sup>24</sup>Rosenthal and Flacks, *Playing for Change*, 16. Also see, e.g., Eyerman and Jamison (13), who wrote how after the early 1970s, “the intricate balance between culture and politics dissolved into component parts, leaving both fundamentally different than before, but diffusing the revolutionary potential into disparate and often destructive directions.” Melucci has also written perceptively of the “deep crisis of collective action” (114) and the disappearance or, at best, fragmentation of oppositional youth cultures (129–32).

transcendent critique from an imagined liberated zone. At the same time, he stressed that the new world order also presents unprecedented sorts of opportunities for world popular music. Of particular interest to him were forms of eclectic world music that involved cross-cultural exchanges. Hence, Anglo-Indian dancehall vocalist Apache Indian artfully embodied the sort of hyphenated identities so typical of the postmodern world. Indigenous Australian reggae groups, he argued, established “affective alliances” with their models in Jamaica, as did Maori rappers with their Afro-American counterparts. And thus did the diverse syncretic music of various groups and artists, from Thomas Mapfumo to Boukman Eksperyans to Quebecois nationalist rockers, in phrases that recur throughout the book, “play a vital role in” progressive movements, “aspire to political significance”, “convey understanding of global capitalism,” “reflect new sensibilities for contesting multinationals,” and possess “profound political implications” and “emancipatory potential.”

From our present perspective of two decades after its printing, *Dangerous Crossroads*, like *The End of History*, may read more like a faded postcard from a charmed bygone moment than a chronicle of the future or even the present. In retrospect we can see that many of the artists Lipsitz celebrated, like Apache Indian, turned out to be ephemeral flashes in the pan, never espoused political messages, and never gained mass followings. Likewise, it is not clear if the “affective alliances” of, for example, Australian aborigines with Jamaican reggae fans, ever had any *effective* substance or consequence, not to mention “profound political implications” or “emancipatory potential.” Instead, what may be more striking a trend in world music since the activist Cold War decades has been a grand process of depoliticization and demobilization in the face of the amorphous hegemony of neoliberal globalized capitalism. Meanwhile, the 1990s, when Fukuyama and Lipsitz penned their insightful assessments, from our present vantage point appears as an even more sharply defined and distinctive historical moment, a halcyon post-Cold-War era when it really did seem as if history had ended, and fairly felicitously at that--until history came back with a vengeance on September 11, 2001.

## Songs of the New Tribalisms

The attack by al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001 was, of course, only an epitomizing moment in a broader set of historical processes that, among other things, precipitated a fresh questioning of Fukuyama’s thesis and the notion that history took anything more than a brief vacation.<sup>25</sup> Debate about Fukuyama has been prodigious, and there is no need here to do more than merely summarize a few of the considerations that suggest that while one historical chapter may indeed have ended, it has quickly passed to another one, which looks less post-historical every day.

One would have to commence a retrospective assessment by noting that some of the positive, salutary developments noted by Fukuyama have continued. Most of the democracies established since the Cold War have survived, in however flawed fashions, and are joined by a few newcomers, such as Tunisia. New social movements have thrived in recent decades, achieving progress in the struggle for the rights of women, gays, and ethnic minorities, for the environment, and myriad other causes. However, as is often noted, the proliferation of NSMs also represents the splintering of an inclusive progressive left that had experienced only defeat for generations. Conversely, its inclusive moments, such as the Occupy Wall

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<sup>25</sup>For a representative sample of some of the critiques of Fukuyama’s thesis, aside from Huntington, see Arquilla (2011), Hardt and Negri (2001), and Zakaria (2001). Fukuyama himself has revised aspects of his argument (e.g., 2014).

Street protests, have often been marked not only by ephemerality but also by an indiscriminate jumbling together of worthy and dubious causes.

Meanwhile, however, the fragility and uneven nature of the triumph of global capitalism has been painfully illustrated by the ongoing global economic stagnation, and by the evident permanence of an impoverished underclass in the West, not to mention the hundreds of millions worldwide who are being marginalized rather than enriched by globalization. With the fall of the Soviet Bloc and the capitalist turn in China in the years around 1990, the left-right polarity effectively evaporated and was emptied of meaning, engendering an ideological vacuum that was filled by the old standbys of religion and ethnicity. Enlightenment universalism, where not marginalized, has often come to be actively resisted insofar as it has been equated with cultural homogenization, shallow consumerism, and the destruction of community, as noted, among elsewhere, in Benjamin Barber's engaging 1995 book *Jihad vs. McWorld*.<sup>26</sup> The intensification of globalization--involving unprecedented cultural collisions, an overwhelming information glut, and a Foucauldian sense of manipulation by invisible power centers--has collectively engendered resistance in the most centrifugal, sectarian, and often nihilistic forms. Hence the thirst for absolutes and for community, for violence and for hierarchy, for scapegoats in a bewildered and overpopulated world, generating new forms of fascism based on resentment, fear, hatred, and hysteria. Hence the rise of cynical strongmen like Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump--the latter in an electoral campaign driven by hate-mongering, bigotry, scapegoating of minorities and foreigners, a barrage of lies and false news stories, and a conspicuous absence of appeals to notions of justice and human rights. Hence the resurgence of militant tribalisms and reductive religious fundamentalisms, whether Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, reacting against the impersonality and spiritual alienation attending globalization, cultural relativism, the shallow uniformity of McDonalds, the implacable, bureaucratized, neoliberalist order represented by the Twin Towers, and the model of a bourgeois, milquetoast society disinclined to fight--or sing--for anything. As Jean Baudrillard pithily wrote, "When the world has been so thoroughly monopolized, when power has been so formidably consolidated by the technocratic machine and the dogma of globalization, what means of turning the tables remains besides terrorism?"<sup>27</sup>

We have asked how one could sing protest songs against the intangible hegemony of globalization. Well, in fact, various movements worldwide have found ways to do so, however indirectly voiced in the form of neo-fascist, clannish, fundamentalist, or openly nihilistic ideologies. The progression was perhaps nowhere more palpable than in the Balkans, where a multicultural secularist, socialist paradigm of the Tito era, expressed variously in music, gave way in the years around 1990 to genocidal ethnic wars, whose soundtrack was provided not by the universalist "Internationale" but by fascist Serbian turbofolk songs such as "Serbi Supermeni":

We are Serbian supermen, we wage war against the whole world,  
We are ready for the holy war, even if it lasts a hundred years.<sup>28</sup>

In the political scene of India, neoliberals would find much to celebrate, including the benefits, however unevenly distributed, of economic liberalization, and the gradual dismantling of an idiosyncratic socialism explicitly designed to prevent economic productivity. Less felicitously, in the years around 1990 the end of the prolonged rule of the Congress Party, with its imperfectly realized goals of religious

<sup>26</sup>See also Antonio, "After Postmodernism," and the works cited in note 8.

<sup>27</sup>Jean Baudrillard, "L'esprit du terrorisme," *Harper's Magazine*, February 2002.

<sup>28</sup><http://www.youtube.com/v/3adMIpYYwUA>. See Lausevic 2000 for further discussion of such songs.

tolerance and egalitarianism, led to a socio-political vacuum being filled by a handful of regional and caste-based coalitions and, most conspicuously, a Hindu chauvinist movement that promoted a set of savage riots and massacres of Muslims. In my 1993 book *Cassette Culture*, I documented how cassettes had unleashed a tremendous outburst of regional music creativity and vitality, while I also noted how they had provided the medium for massive dissemination of songs and speeches that explicitly called on Hindus to slaughter Muslims, as they did in several places in North India. The core, iconic demand of the Hindutva movement was to demolish an obscure and abandoned mosque built by Mughal ruler Babur in the 1400s and construct in its place a temple to Ram, the deity invoked in the movement to make India a specifically Hindu nation, with the Muslims either killed, expelled, or definitively subjugated. A song on the most widely circulated political cassette proclaimed:

The time has come, wake up young people,  
 You must vow to build Ram's temple...  
 Advance in the battlefield and hit hard...  
 Don't play their farcical courtroom game  
 Liberate Ram's birthplace...  
 If they don't heed your words whip put your swords  
 If there must be a bloodbath then let it happen!

To be sure, acrimony between Hindus and Muslims was hardly new, but it had never been part of mainstream political discourse until the breakup of the inclusive, socialist-oriented Congress party in the mid-1980s, and further, such songs and speeches had never had mass media dissemination until the advent of new micro-media, in particular, cassettes.

The sense of Muslim victimhood, legitimated by such events and the ongoing Palestinian crisis, has of course been of course a fundamental inspiration for reactive Islamic militancy in general. This movement, although largely shunning instrumental music, if not music as a whole, does produce its own activist songs, many of which are widely intoned throughout the Middle East and Pakistan, and are also abundantly produced for and posted on YouTube, including in sites urging Muslims from around the world to join ISIS's putative caliphate. Most are in the form of what is called *nasheed* [pl., *anasheed*]<sup>29</sup>—that is, a capella responsorial songs, with verses in Arabic, or, as in the following example, Urdu:

Keep your eye on the target, keep your steed ready  
 Keep them terrorized, this is the law of our religion...  
 Learn the art of gunpowder, get the taste of our faith  
 It is good for the faithful to know about weaponry...  
 They will try to lead you astray by calling you a terrorist,  
 Slay them, ordains the Quran.<sup>29</sup>

In 2010–12 the Arab Spring movement generated renewed hope that pluralist and democratic values might offset the tide of militant Islamic fundamentalism. Observers of world music celebrated the outpouring of musical creativity accompanying the movement, from Egyptian rappers Arabian Knightz to Tunisian singer-songwriter Emel Mathlouthi. Sadly, as of 2017 the movement has foundered, with Libya, Syria, and Iraq laid waste by civil war, and a military dictatorship tenuously ruling Egypt, and it has become clear that in overthrowing secular dictatorships the movement unwittingly helped unleash the most savage, virulent, and globally menacing form of Islamic tribalism ever seen. Hence the earnest

<sup>29</sup> Accessible as of May 2015 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fS5xkrM--jc>. Lyrics translated by Zahir Anwar, to whom I am grateful.

rhymes of Libyan rappers like Ibn Thabit and others have been drowned out by bomb-blasts and Wahhabi sermons, and increasingly seem like quaint and forlorn mementos of an ephemeral idealistic moment. Far more numerous and popular on the internet today are the anthemic *anasheed* whose regressive utopianism—to be achieved by beheadings, destruction of antiquities, and enslavement of captive women—is defiantly antithetical to Enlightenment values.

In response to the depressing litany presented here, commentators of more optimistic dispositions would no doubt enumerate many counter-examples, such as (in the USA) the assorted socially-conscious songs of Steve Earl, Common, Lupe Fiasco, KRS-1, Green Day, Alicia Keys, and Immortal Technique. On the international level, scholars and journalists have called attention to the various European rock and rap songs protesting economic austerity policies, the ongoing strains of Palestinian resistance songs (McDonald 2013), or Japanese anti-nuclear protest music (Manabe 2015), all of which, like most NSMs, focus on a particular issue.<sup>30</sup> On the whole, however, in place of the transcendent vision of an earlier generation, contemporary progressive politics has largely devolved to a cultural sensibility and a congeries of micro-movements, few of which have inspired “a thousand militant voices” to burst into song. Most NSMs, from gender rights to environmental causes, however worthy they may be, have not lent themselves to expression in song, except in the most marginal, oblique, ephemeral, or contradictory forms. Protest music is even less likely to emerge from developed-world sophisticates steeped in the ironic detachment of postmodern aesthetics.

For Fukuyama, it was the very success of the neoliberal democratic project that served to undermine progressive art linked to heroic struggles for justice. In his hyperbolic but provocative assessment:

The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one’s life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed.<sup>31</sup>

Whether or not history has ended, Fukuyama was astute in noting the broad tectonic shift that has taken place in global political and economic culture, with accompanying transformations in the arts. What his thesis missed was the other half of the global scene, in which tribal militants of all stripes rage, rage, against the dying of the light of history. Hence despite the spread of democracies and neoliberalism, the world has moved to a situation in which, in Yeats’ terms, things fall apart, the center cannot hold, the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity—with that intensity often expressed in music.

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<sup>30</sup>The *Nation* columnist Joshua Clover (2013) devoted a pithy and insightful essay to “protest art’s contemporary withering” in the mainstream West, but opined that it may be flourishing elsewhere, be it in the French *banlieues* or Brazilian *favelas*. Obviously, I believe that a closer look at global popular music scenes belies this optimism.

<sup>31</sup>Fukuyama, “End of History.”

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## Abstract

While the decline of protest music in the USA has often been noted, a global perspective reveals that progressive, activist protest musics occupied lively niches in many music cultures worldwide (e.g., of Jamaica, India, Spain, Latin America) during similar periods, roughly the 1950s–80s. While on one level these music movements were embedded in particular socio-political movements, on a broader level they reflected an ardent commitment to the secular universalist ideals of the Enlightenment. The subsequent dramatic decline of all these protest musics—roughly since Fukuyama’s much-debated “end of history”—reflects a broader transformation of the global political climate. This transformation has both salutary aspects—notably the spread of democracies—and dismaying ones, notably the decline of Enlightenment metanarratives and their replacement by new tribalisms, which have found their own passionate expression in music.