

From musical expressivity to public political discourse proper: the case of Karpe Diem in the aftermath of the Utøya massacre

Musical communication is widely understood to be too elusive and abstract to have any discernible significance for political public discourse. However, in the aftermath of the Utøya-massacre there have been several instances where hip hop music and performances have been subjected to politicised debate in the Norwegian public sphere. Based on a qualitative case study of the media reception of the Norwegian hip hop group, Karpe Diem, this study finds that their music both provoked, and fed into, extensive public debates concerning topical cultural and political issues. Moreover, this study outlines the process through which Karpe Diem and their music came to be publicly identified, and responded to, as politically significant. Based on the evidence of the findings, this article further argues that hip hop music fills a peripheral (yet significant) function in the model of the political system as outlined by Habermas (2006).

Hip hop and public discourse in Norway

How might music, as an expressive form, enter public political debate? Music is a means of expression frequently charged with political and ideological values and messages – which by means of commercial outreach and multiple mediations, is posited and engaged with in the public sphere. Meanwhile, musical communication is widely perceived to be too elusive and abstract, and too concerned with style, rather than clear, verbalised opinion, to have any discernible and traceable

significance for public political debate, or to be meaningfully conceptualised within the theoretical framework of discursive democracy. However, the public role of Karpe Diem in the aftermath of 22nd July, 2012, when political extremist Anders Behring Breivik massacred 77 people (the majority of whom were young members of the Labour party's youth wing (AUF)) and detonated a bomb in the governmental quarter, comprises a particularly pertinent case for the study of how music enters public political discourse.

Firstly, both the prominence of music in key public events post 22nd July, and the discursive and political climate in the subsequent period, led hip hop artists to receive unforeseen politicised public attention. The most striking example of this was when the hip hop-act Karpe Diem (who had been collectively hailed as national icons of multi-cultural coexistence in the public mourning ceremonies), released their single '*Toyota'n til Magdi*' ('Magdi's Toyota'). This song included sexually explicit lyrics about a female politician from the liberalist and populist Progressive Party (FRP). As this study demonstrates, the release of the song was pivotal not only in terms of generating a critical response to the song itself, but also in re-actualising explicitly political songs Karpe Diem had released in previous years. Furthermore, it subjected the political merits and role of Karpe Diem after 22nd July to extensive public debate.

These public debates transcended strictly musical concerns, as Karpe Diem became the discursive focal point for a number of topical political and cultural issues. These issues included artistic freedom of speech, the political left's relationship to the cultural sphere and meta-debates concerning the discursive climate in Norway more generally. Crucially, these debates were not limited to the cultural press and reviews located in the cultural public sphere. They also engaged a number of commentators, journalists and political actors affiliated with the political public sphere, who responded to Karpe Diem's music as political utterances, and to the artists as political actors.

Secondly, hip hop music has expressive and generic characteristics that are of considerable relevance to public discourse. The centrality of rhetorically poignant and precise verbal points and narratives through rapping, accentuated and organised by heavy beats and melodies, makes it one of the most adept vehicles for a musical articulation of politics (Walser, 1995; Rose, 1994). Perry (2004:39-42) justly describes hip hop as an art form *attendant but not reducible* to substantial socio-political ramifications and issues. Although the socio-economic reality of Scandinavian social democracies is hardly comparable to that of the marginalised Afro-American ghettos, or destitute French *banlieues* (conditions and locations popularly held to be pre-requisites for a socially and political relevant hip hop scene), the attendance to socio-political matters is also characteristic of Norwegian hip hop. Empirical studies of the Norwegian hip hop scene reveal that among Norwegian rap artists there is a high level of commitment to addressing issues of social and political conditions through music, at both a professional (Nærland, 2014), and amateur level (Vestel, 2012; Knudsen, 2008).

This qualitative case study first examines the role of Karpe Diem in the public mourning processes subsequent to 22nd July. Then it provides a descriptive analysis of the public reception to which Karpe Diem was subjected in the Norwegian national print and online media, subsequent to the release of their single 'Magdi's Toyota'. The analysis pays particular attention to which kinds of socio-political themes of debate their songs and performances either raised or fed into, and the key ideological-political positions encompassed within the discourse. Thereafter, focusing on the interplay between aesthetic, as well as cultural, discursive and political conditions, this article outlines the process through which Karpe Diem and their music became publicly identified, and responded to, as politically significant. Lastly, this article considers the democratic value of musical public input, by discussing the findings in light of Habermas' (2006) model of the political system.

Expressive culture, discursive democracy and hip hop

There is a growing recognition among writers within democratic theory that forms of public communication other than those considered as 'rational' or argumentative are also important to democratic politics (Benhabib, 1996; Young, 1996; Dahlgren, 1995). This recognition has led to a call for the inclusion of aesthetics and expressive culture into the theoretical framework of deliberative democracy (Goodin, 2003; Gripsrud, 2009; Hermes, 2005). McGuigan (2005) updates Habermas' (1971) concept of the 'literary public sphere' to the broader 'cultural public sphere' and further suggests that public and personal politics may also be articulated through what he terms 'affective', 'aesthetic' and 'emotional' modes of communication. By implication, this highlights the potential importance of musical communication.

Van Zoonen (2000) similarly argues that popular culture and music may be of vital importance to public political communication either in the form of political fiction, as a stage for political actors, or as a political practice in itself. Also Christensen and Christensen (2008) demonstrate that musical events may generate what they term an 'ephemeral communicative space'. By this they mean a symbolic space facilitating episodic public and discursive negotiations of topical issues that *feeds into*, and *layers onto*, existing discourse.

In parallel to this, there has been growing recognition among scholars writing on the politics of music that it is through public mediation and engagement that music might potentially gain political and democratic significance. Street (2012:8) argues that: "It is where music forms a site of public deliberation, rather than private reflection, that we talk of music as political". Similarly, Hesmondhalgh (2007) argues that musical value-judgements entail democratic significance as part of what he terms an 'aesthetical public sphere'. Emphasising the importance of mediation, Negus argues that music becomes politically significant through:

..processes of mediation and articulation through which particular styles of music are produced, circulated, experienced and given quite specific cultural and political meanings. (Negus, 1996:192)

Although withholding a steady focus on political journalism and exhibiting disdain to markedly driven popular culture, Habermas (2006) provides a model of the political system that entails sensitivity to expressive culture. It also establishes the ways in which the public exposition of expressive culture may provide valuable input to public sphere processes (Gripsrud, 2009). Employing Habermas' model, Nærlund (2014) argues that hip hop-music, although in a peripheral role, should be considered as part of this system. The narratives, critiques, and reflections brought forward by hip hop-music are discursively *laundered* in the public sphere (i.e. in the periphery of the political system) and *filtered* further towards the decision making institutions at the centre of the political system. Using the case of Karpe Diem, and the public reception of their music, this study empirically demonstrates the ways in which hip hop music enters the discursive processes vital to the public sphere, as laid down in Habermas' model.

Furthermore, the public exposition of hip hop music may fulfil four important democratic functions. Firstly, by means of genre-specific hyperbolic and moral-political transgressive lyrics and performances, hip hop may *phatically* (Jacobson, 1960) establish communicative situations, thus having an initiating function for public discourse. Secondly, hip hop music mediates between the private and public sphere. Thirdly, in doing so, it provides what Dahlgren (1995) terms 'symbolic raw material' for public deliberations, where songs and performances themselves become the object of public debate and generate further debates. Fourthly, in terms of the expressive capacity to address politically and socially relevant issues, hip hop songs and performances may also, under certain circumstances, function as contributions to ongoing public debates in their own right. As will be demonstrated, all these dynamics can be seen at play in the case of the public reception of Karpe Diem after the massacre of 22nd July.

Karpe Diem: expressive characteristics and artist-biography

Karpe Diem is made up of Cirac Patel and Magdi Abde Imaguidwere – the former of Indian, and the latter of mixed Egyptian/Norwegian, origins. At the time of the release of 'Magdi's Toyota' (from here of abbreviated TTM) they were, according to sales figures, radio play and festival attendance, indisputably one of the most popular groups in Norway (Gramo, 2010; 2012; 2013). TTM was released as one of the singles of the record '*Kors på halsen, Ti kniver i hjertet, Mor og Far i døden*' in 2012 and earned them a Grammy-award. From the start of Karpe Diem had established themselves as politically-oriented rappers through lyrical attacks on the political right and in particular the populist right wing FRP. Moreover, they have also identified their left leaning political sympathies through their close affiliation with the revolutionary Marxist hip hop/activist group *Gatas Parlament* and with the anarchist/Marxist *Blitz*-milieu.

Sandve (2013) emphasises the musical-lyrical play with identity positions with regard to ethnicity and gender as one of Karpe Diem's defining characteristics. This is also the case with TTM, which lyrically thematises the private worlds of the rappers and their various concerns. However (and key to the media commotion that the song provoked) the song includes lyrics portraying receiving oral sex from the highly profiled FRP-politician Mette Hanekamhaug in the back of the car. In the following, she is also referred to as a 'bitch' ('*merr*'). Although being one among a multitude of lyrical points and concerns, the song thus expresses a non-explicated, yet unmistakable, antipathy towards the FRP.

Method

Chronologically this analysis first provides an outline of the initial circumstances that gained Karpe Diem a prominent position in Norwegian public life, through their role

in the public mourning process in the months subsequent to 22nd July. As will be demonstrated, these circumstances accommodated the politicised public discourse to which Karpe Diem was later subjected. Thereafter, the analysis examines the public political discourse that erupted in relation to the release of TTM, which took place approximately a year later. A main objective of this study is to descriptively analyse the ways in which the reception of Karpe Diem and their music fed into the *national public discourse* concerning political, cultural and social issues. Consequently articles published in newspapers or popular journals (both in print and online) with a national readership, were selected. These include the national press and major regional newspapers along with major Norwegian cultural and political magazines. Local press and niche media were excluded. However, when utterances and debates originating from the local press, niche-media or online debate-forums became the focal point of discussion in the national press, these articles and debates are referred to. This qualitative case study-approach has previously proved fruitful (see Christensen and Christensen, 2008), in examining the public reception of musical and cultural events.

Only articles explicitly relating Karpe Diem and their music and performances to political, cultural and social issues have been selected. These include reviews, interviews, commentaries, chronicles and opinion pieces where music, performances or artist are the focal point of politicised attention, or a point of reference in a discourse concerning general political, social or cultural questions. In order to chart debates as they evolved over time, relevant articles issued between 22nd July 2011 and first of March 2013 were selected. The total number of articles was 101.

In order to identify and chart arguments, perspectives and positions, as they were presented in the various articles, a descriptive and non-elaborate analytical approach was employed. The articles were examined with regard to the following aspects: (1) What kind of political messages the music was construed to convey; (2)

How these messages were responded to; (3) Which debates the song either raised or fed into; (4) How the songs were construed as significant within these debates; and (5) The actors, opinion-positions and arguments that emerged at the level of reception. The discursively central articles, along with those that exemplify general characteristics of the debate, are referred to directly in the analysis (see Appendix).

Relevant articles were identified and retrieved by using *Atekst*. This is a media archive monitoring and digitally storing all editorial content from national, regional and local print and online media in Norway. *Atekst* allows for detailed thematic searches in media-content and is frequently and successfully used in research for both monitoring and analysing media-debate and coverage in Norway.

Analysis

Karpe Diem and 22nd July

The tragedy of 22nd July brutally shook Norwegian society in several profound ways. Public life during the initial phase was characterised by shock, bewilderment and grief, and a struggle to make sense of the events. The incomprehensible and meaningless manslaughter of 77 people (most of whom were politically engaged teenagers) evoked a strong sense of collective grief (Hylland Eriksen, 2011). At the same time, it also profoundly challenged, and momentarily destabilised, what Norwegians collectively imagined their own society to be. Prior to these events, the Norwegian *social imaginary* (Taylor, 2004) was one involving 'the inherent goodness' of Norwegian society (Witoszek, 2011), peaceful multicultural coexistence and high levels of interpersonal and institutional trust (Wollebæk, et al., 2012), and public safety (Fimreite et al., 2013). The ideologically motivated massacre of aspiring politicians, and the bomb attack on a key democratic institution (the government quarter) caused serious disruption to this social imaginary. The fact that the attacks

were carried out by an ethnically white, and seemingly well-functioning, Norwegian citizen, did not fit into any pre-established conflict-narrative.

Public life in Norway in the months after 22nd July was characterised by a number of publicly staged national ceremonies. These events, in which Karpe Diem played prominent roles as performers, facilitated the processes of public mourning, as well as the re-imagination of Norwegian society. The ceremonies, most notably the national memorial concerts in Oslo Cathedral (three days after the killings), and Oslo Spektrum (a month after the killings), must be understood as *media events* (Katz & Dayan, 1992; Brurås, 2012; Toldnes, 2012). They were staged by actors external to the media (i.e. the government and Oslo Municipality), they possessed a distinct ceremonial character and they involved a marked and extraordinary break from media routine. Moreover, these were highly affective events, characterised by reverence and by emotionally charged speeches and performances. As in Dayan and Katz's (Ibid, 8) conceptualisation, these events “celebrated not conflict but *reconciliation*”¹ and were ceremonial efforts aiming to ‘restore order’.

As such, these mass mediated ceremonies were key arenas for what social anthropologist Hylland Eriksen (2012:1) characterises as the “profound expressions of a compassion shared, it seemed, by the entire population”, which also involved a mode of audience reception not as passive spectator, but as ceremonial participants. Crucially, Karpe Diem’s part in these media events catapulted them into the role of national icons of the multi-cultural future of Norway. This icon-status is, as will be shown later in the analysis, indeed key to understanding the politicised public reception Karpe Diem and their music were subjected to when they released the single ‘Magdi’s Toyota’ a year after the massacre.

Media-coverage and commentary of these events gives rich evidence of both the exceptional position Karpe Diem had acquired, as well as the both elevated and affectively charged tone that characterised public discourse in the first month after 22nd July. One commentator (*Vårt Land*, 02.08.2001) argues that Karpe Diem’s song

'A Thousand Drawings' (*Tusen Tegninger*) was the single most powerful performance at the Oslo Cathedral ceremony. The commentator further points out that: "Some people hold this to be the utmost important song in recent years". Moreover, surviving young politicians from Utøya, along with central Labour politicians, jointly issued a comment in the highest selling Norwegian newspaper, *Verdens Gang* (13.08.2011), quoting lyrical experts from Karpe Diem's performance. Here they contended that Karpe Diem's lyrical visions are 'the answer' to the future challenges of Norwegian society. A commentary from *Verdens Gang*, headed 'This is Norway' (22.08.2011), proclaimed "This is Norway: the rappers of Karpe Diem is a piece of our rich multi-cultural future". Further testifying to the exceptional status of the group, this commentator quotes Bjørn Eidsvåg, a well-known Norwegian musician, tweeting: "Karpe Diem is presently perhaps the most important band in Norway".

Although there was a general fade-down of the conflict-level in the political public debate in the months subsequent to 22nd July (Wiggen, 2013), these ceremonies did at the time provoke debate concerning the selection of artists and the judgments underpinning this. One commentary, by media scholar Jostein Gripsrud (*Dagens Næringsliv*, 27.08.2011), emphasised that in its privileging of Anglo-American popular music, the selection appeared 'mono-cultural', i.e. it did not include much of the Norwegian repertoire of jazz, folk or classical music. Accordingly, nor did contributions musically reflect the ethnical diversity of Norway. In response to this critique, the inclusion of multi-ethnic Karpe Diem was mobilised as a key counter argument by several debaters, including Hege Duckert, the head of culture in NRK responsible for the selection (*Dagbladet* 30.08.2011) and *Verdens Gang's* commentator Stein Østbø (02.09.2011).

The initial debate: FRP and Karpe Diem

The public discursive climate was normalising once more when Karpe Diem released their single TTM approximately a year later, which coincided with the one-year memorial ceremony for 22nd July. The debate was initiated when Christer Kjølstad (a member of The Progress Party's youth wing) accused Karpe Diem of being 'leftist glorifiers of violence' in a letter to the editor of *Dagbladet* (02.08.2012) entitled 'Rapping about torture and murder'. In the letter, Kjølstad calls attention to the newly released TTM for being sexually offensive towards a female FRP-politician, but also earlier releases from Karpe Diem, which included lyrics about killing Carl I. Hagen, the former leader of FRP, and setting fire to members of the Progress Party's youth wing. Kjølstad's main argument was that Karpe Diem's status as national icons of multicultural tolerance was altogether false and misplaced, as they lyrically encouraged both political violence and misogyny. In a follow-up interview in *Dagbladet* (02.08.2012) Kjølstad emphasised that FRP is an easy and convenient target for attack from musicians, given the party's position on the outskirts of the ideological spectrum.

Bringing up the heat in the debate, Peter N. Myrhe, a national FRP-profile and MP, followed this with an interview entitled 'Boycott Karpe Diem!' (*TV2.no*, 08.08.2012). Here Myrhe argued that it was incomprehensible and unacceptable that Karpe Diem performed at national memorial ceremonies staged by public bodies 'when their lyrics had proved them to be political extremists'. Moreover, Myrhe argued that Karpe Diem would never have achieved the same status had they agitated against members of the Labour Party's youth wing. In the interview, Myrhe also urged the public to boycott the Øya-festival where Karpe Diem were one of the headliners, as well as demanding a public apology from Karpe Diem to FRP. Subsequently, local and regional FRP-politicians echoed Kjølstad and Myrhe's critique and urged audiences and concert arrangers to boycott Karpe Diem (*Rogalands Avis*, 10.08.2012; 15.08.2012).

The heated response from the FRP-politicians must in part be explained by the discrepancy between Karpe Diem's seemingly a-political role as nationally embraced figures of unity during the initial memorial ceremonies, and the politically and sexually explicit anti-FRP message of TTM. It must in part also be understood as a consequence of the combination of FRP's subdued role in the time after 22nd July – due to Anders Behring Breivik's brief affiliation with the party – and the high level of self-imposed consensus that characterised public life subsequent to the massacre. Although party-political issues were toned down, the commemorative celebration of the Labour Party's youth wing were at centre of public life in the months subsequent to 22nd July. Hence, when the initial period of reconciliation was over, Karpe Diem became an opportune target for FRP politicians, then in opposition, who wished to question the close interplay between left wing artists and the labour party, then in government, during the mourning process.

Patel and Abdelmaguid of Karpe Diem responded to the critique in an op-ed in *Dagbladet* (11.08.2012). In the response titled 'When did we start to interpret all lyrics literally?' they argued that their use of explicit lyrics, including exaggeration, irony and sarcasm, are linguistic devices used to express a "deep disagreement" with FRP-politics, and must further be understood within the context of the hip hop genre. Moreover, they concluded the op-ed by suggesting that the accusations were informed by wilful misreading and publicised in order to score points in the upcoming election. Curiously, Hanekamhaug (the female FRP-politician portrayed as performing oral-sex in TTM) proclaimed herself (*TV2.no*, 12.08.2012) to be a fan of Karpe Diem, further stating that everyone has the right to their own political opinion, and that their lyrics were acceptable and non-offensive.

The exchange of opinions between these parties was widely reported in various national media outlets, including *Dagbladet*, *Side.2*, *NRK.no*, *Nettavisen*, *TV2.no* and *Aftenposten*. Although expressing reluctance, Karpe Diem defended and elaborated on their position in several interviews in the subsequent period. In *Dagsavisen*

(20.09.2012) they emphasised that they are musicians and not politicians playing “that politicians’ game”, but did also recognise that people were taking their lyrics seriously. Similarly, they argued in *Aftenposten* (20.09.2012) that their lyrics “are not debate-contributions”. In a lengthy and critical interview in the politically conservative magazine *Minerva*, somewhat ironically entitled ‘Rock solid moral compass’, their moral and political integrity was questioned. Here, Abdelmaguid repeated the arguments made in Karpe Diem’s op-ed, but further emphasised that morally and politically transgressive utterances made by musicians must be understood within their own artistic context aided by a minimum of genre-competency. However, although maintaining that the lyrics of TTM were acceptable, Abdelmaguid admitted that the situation after 22nd July called for a careful consideration of lyrical content.

The release of TMM and the following response from FRP-politicians also provoked responses from members of the public representing different interests groups. Mina Adampour and Linda Alzaghari, from a minority interest organisation and a think tank concerned with anti-racism, published an op-ed in *Dagsavisen* (04.09.2012) where they defended Karpe Diem as responsible albeit “reluctant idols in the age of migration”. Furthermore, they criticised FRP for trying to politically capitalise on the national grief and Karpe Diem’s role therein. From a feminist perspective, Trine Østreng (from the feminist collective *Madam*) criticised Karpe Diem for sexist bullying of Mette Hanekamhaug (*Dagbladet*, 14.08.2012). Also, homosexual Labour politician Ragnar Kværness (*Aftenposten*, 14.08.2012) accused Karpe Diem of being both misogynist and of promoting contempt towards homosexuals. Other commentators, such as political scientist Svein Tuastad, commented that the Karpe Diem controversy was one of that summer’s major public debates. He further deemed the FRP-politicians’ efforts to boycott Karpe Diem as ‘McCarthyism lite’ (*Mandag Morgen*, 26.08.12). However, he did point out that it was democratically healthy that FRP politicians subjected the songs to public critical attention.

Tuastad (along with a range of other commentators) ridiculed FRP-politicians for their lack of hip hop-code competency and, in consequence, overly literal readings of Karpe Diem's lyrics. *Aftenposten's* (12.08.2012) review of Karpe Diem's performance at the Øya-festival (of which FRP-politician Peter N. Myhre had urged a boycott) also focused on the ongoing debate. In the review, entitled 'Karpe Diem's Revenge', the reviewer argued that the concert promoted multi-cultural coexistence and tolerance, and that the critics from FRP had "spectacularly and fundamentally missed their target".

Ideological debate

Whereas the initial critique from FRP-politicians (along with Karpe Diem's response and the media coverage of the public discourse) focused mainly on the acceptability of Karpe Diem's lyrical efforts, public discourse subsequently gained a more ideological dimension. The following debate revolved around deep running ideological conflict lines in Norwegian society, and involved discursive actors of divergent ideological standing.

In these debates Karpe Diem and TTM figured as either the focal point, or as a point of reference, in a number of commentaries and opinion pieces debating: (1) artistic freedom of speech; (2) the ethics of the political left; (3) the relationship between the political left and the cultural sector. A set of political-ideological positions emerged during this discourse. Most significantly, writers, politicians and publications on the liberal-conservative side of Norwegian politics issued attacks on the political left. Writers, journalists and publications associated with the political left (although often with less pronounced political affiliation than those on the right) used Karpe Diem as a point of reference in their discursive engagement with these themes, and in response to the attacks from the political right.

For commentators positioned on the political-ideological right, Karpe Diem and TTM became a point of reference and a focal point in discussions concerning what is perceived to *be the cultural hegemony of the ideological left* in Norway. The argument fronted by the political right is that both the media (not least the public broadcaster *NRK*), the press and the cultural sector, are infused by left wing ideology and populated by actors with left-leanings, hence causing an imbalance in the symbolic representation of matters of political and ideological significance. This has been an enduring cultural-political issue in Norwegian public and political discourse for the past decades, and not least ardently mobilised as part of the populist Progress Party's anti-elite rhetoric.

A number of commentators ideologically positioned on the right called attention to Karpe Diem as an example of how the political left, the media and the cultural sector allows for, and also celebrates, explicit and offensive artistic critique of the political right, while condemning the same level of offensiveness when issued against left wing politics and politicians. With reference to Karpe Diem's political and sexual explicitness, these commentaries highlight the way in which the left's conception of (artistic) freedom of speech is informed by virtue ethics and is, in effect, hypocritical.

Didrik Sørderlind of the politically conservative *Minerva* (17. 08, 2012), rhetorically asks:

how can (Karpe Diem) rap about shooting and setting fire to political opponents, receiving backseat oral sex from a young female politician they don't like, and at the same time get appointed poster boys of tolerance?

He further polemicises against those arguing that the explicit lyrics of hip hop are acceptable because hyperbole, irony and exaggeration are lyrical devices inherent in the genre, when the same devices are in fact just as inherent to politically non-acceptable genres, such as Nazi-rock.

These commentators further argue that the left's conception of artistic freedom of speech is conditional: explicit and offensive artistic expressions are only acceptable, and of aesthetical worth, when these agree with the left's causes and values. Moreover, these contributions argue that the acceptance and celebration of Karpe Diem and their music was a manifestation of the self-complacent lifestyle-ethic of the political left, and that their conception of artistic freedom of speech is informed by habitual group thinking, rather than by principle and honest reflection. In effect, TTM is argued (*Minerva*, 14.09.2012) to be symptomatic for both the left's elitist fear of the FRP and the left's habitual inclination to symbolically bully FrP. In response to the media's celebration of Karpe Diem, Bård Larsen under the heading 'Intellectual leftists of today' (*Minerva*, 26.01.2012) argued that:

the fact that verbal abuse and harassment of the political right, or of what is often referred to as 'the common people', has become so acceptable, is probably caused by a sort of virtue-ethical custom. A left wing orientation is associated with the good, and the right wing is intuitively associated with stinginess, tightness and to a certain degree low class racism.

Similarly, the NRK's promotion (and, in effect, endorsement) of Karpe Diem and their music, was among these commentators heralded as evidence of how left wing virtue ethics infuses symbolic representation, even at the level of public institutions. Larsen (*Ibid*) does not only explain this imbalance in symbolic representation in terms of a cultural hegemony of the left, but with reference to his book *The idealists: The Norwegian Left's Flirt with Totalitarianism and Authoritarianism* (Larsen, 2011) argues that the left's sanctioning of artistic utterances they do not agree with is a symptom of the left's illiberal and totalitarian past.

Left wing response

Karpe Diem also figured as point of reference, or a focal point, in commentaries concerning these same issues, issued by publications and commentators more

loosely associated with the political left. Several of these commentaries were partially responses to the attacks launched by the publications and commentators of the right. However, whereas the critique and commentary from the right were both aggressive in tone and issued by those either affiliated with the FRP or the conservative think tank *Civita*, the response from journalists and commentators with more loose affiliations with the left were less confrontational in tone. This discursive dynamic of an aggressive and attacking right, and a more aloof yet defensive left, may itself be indicative of the hegemonic balance on the cultural field. In Bourdieuan terms (1984), the left wing values and sensibilities can be seen as *doxic* at the cultural field, i.e. self-evident and therefore not in need of explication. The political values and the aesthetical sensibilities of the right, on the other hand, are *heterodoxic*, and therefore in need of more amplified explication.

The two commentaries issued in *Dagbladet* can be seen as exemplary of this dynamic. The comment by journalist Asbjørn Slettebakk entitled 'The sound of revolt' (14.08.2012) sympathetically placed TTM in the tradition of political hip hop, relating Karpe Diem to canonised political rap acts such as Public Enemy and NWA. The FRP's public response to what the commentator refers to as the 'colourful depiction' of one of their female politicians is here furthermore described as 'comically touchy'. Similarly, commentator Geir Ramnefjell (*Dagbladet*, 08.12.2012) celebrates Karpe Diem as politically conscious artists with both considerable commercial success and credibility and further polemicalises for the increased involvement of artists in topical political issues, due to the political engagement it might prompt. However, this commentary also recognises the political right's increasing efforts to discursively destabilise the left's cultural hegemony, and further held them to be indicative of the politically revitalised popular cultural scene in Norway after 22nd July.

Charlotte Myrbråten, a commentator from the socialist newspaper *Klassekampen* (21.01.2013), also recognises the cultural hegemony of the left. She uses Karpe Diem

as an example of how the acceptance of aggressive artistic rhetoric is, in effect, reserved for artists with left wing sympathies. However, she remains convinced that artists like Karpe Diem are a vital source of political engagement. Explaining this imbalance in symbolic representation, and perhaps implicitly confirming the sort of virtue ethics of which the left is being accused, Myrbråten argues that “Karpe Diem is allowed artistic freedom because we know them as good and well behaved guys, who also carry positive attitudes”. Similarly Mimir Kristjánsson, a commentator of the same *Klassekampen* (10.08.2012), agrees that there is a higher general acceptance for artistic attacks on right wing politicians and politics than attacks on the left. However, alluding to the Utøya murderer Anders Behring Breivik’s short past as a member of the Progress Party’s Youth Wing (FPU), Kristjánsson suggests that this imbalance must be understood in light of the fact that “it was not a member of AUF (The Labour Party's Youth) that recently killed 77 people at the FpU’s summer camp”.

The process of politicisation

A key concern in this study is to explain how and why specific pieces of music are publicly identified, and responded to, as politically significant (in the sense of *signifying* ideas, institutions, processes or conditions associated with politics in a strict sense), and thus enter the public political discourse. Street (2012:44) provides the following clarification of the term “political music”

While all songs are ideological in the sense that they contain a perspective on the world and relationships within it, a political song, I shall assume, is one that self-consciously recognizes the ideological content and seeks to draw the listeners’ attention to it.

Thus, Street here draws attention to the importance of the performer’s or composer’s *intention* in encoding music with a political message and the degree to

which the political message is manifest. Street (Ibid: 44-45) further argues that music may also be inscribed with political significance by means of *context*, i.e. how social, political or cultural conditions may invest music with political meaning, and, by means of the performers' *biographical narrative*, i.e. the degree to which the performers themselves are associated with political causes or agendas.

All these three factors can be vividly seen at work in the case of Karpe Diem in the aftermath of 22nd July. Both TTM, and the older songs that were re-actualised in the debate contained politically provocative and hyperbolic lyrics deriding the FRP. Thus, there is a clear and manifest political tendency in these songs that rendered them subjectable to political criticism. Furthermore, Karpe Diem had a well-established affiliation with Marxist/anarchist groupings within the Norwegian hip hop scene, where they began their careers. Through interviews and performances they made it explicitly clear that they were of a politically left wing orientation. As such, the biographical narrative of Karpe Diem locates them on the political left, which in turn may prompt political readings of their songs and performances. However, there are in Norway, and elsewhere, a multitude of hip hop artists that have more direct affiliations with political organisations and who makes far more politically explicit music, but which have none the less not been subjected to the same level of public political debate. This brings to attention the importance of contextual factors.

Firstly, there were discursive conditions and dynamics that accommodated the politicisation of Karpe Diem and their music. Whereas the initial commemorative phase after 22nd July was politically non-conflictual, and also involved the suspension of Karpe Diem's politics, the following phase of public life in Norway was characterised by high political intensity – not least in terms of Anders Behring Breivik's political-ideological motivations, and who were to blame for these. This discursive climate of high political intensity was also characterised by a readiness to address certain conflictual issues and to invest symbolic material with political

significance, and must hence be seen as a precondition for the politicised reception of Karpe Diem.

Secondly, and interwoven with this change in the discursive climate, there were also political conditions that prepared the ground for the politicised reception to which Karpe Diem was subjected. From a right wing perspective, the media events following 22nd July could, in certain respects, be regarded as a manifestation of the cultural hegemony of the left, involving the temporary 'sanctification' of left-leaning artists such as Karpe Diem. Hence, in the following and more conflictual phase, and the rhetorical situation that subsequently arose, Karpe Diem became an opportune focal point for the political right's challenging of the cultural hegemony. In this process, Karpe Diem and their music also more generally functioned as a symbolic *site* for the contestation over more general political merits and values between the left and the right.

The identification of Karpe Diem and their music as political, and the subsequent public response, are, as this process highlights, also very much a matter of what *is being invested into the music by the listener*. The politicised public reception of Karpe Diem can be understood in light of what German literary reception theorist Jauss (1982), in his writings on the dynamic relationship between reader and text, terms a 'horizon of expectations'. Such horizons of expectations, involving both expectations linked to the genre as well as the biographic aspects of Karpe Diem and their perceived role within the actual socio-political context, must be seen as informative of how their music and performances were interpreted. Moreover, the public reception entails a *generative aspect* in that Karpe Diem and their music was invested with further political significance through the politicised debate, which in turn layer and add onto the horizon of expectation they may be met with in the future.

Karpe Diem and the public sphere

After having outlined the process through which Karpe Diem became subjected to public political discourse (i.e. how their music became a focal point for public debates involving political or ideological questions, comprising politically divergent actors and views), this article will conclude by considering the democratic value of musical public input and the ways in which this might be located in the anatomy of the political system modelled by Habermas (2006). In this multi-level, bottom up, top down, 'laundering' system, Habermas locates the public sphere at the periphery of the political system, as opposed to the institutionalised discourses at the centre. According to Habermas, the public sphere may "facilitate deliberative legitimisation processes by 'laundering' flows of political communication through a division of labour with other parts of the system" (Ibid, 415). Thus, in mediating and ensuring a mutual responsiveness between citizens and decision makers, the public sphere facilitates the formation of public opinion. This, in turn, is the basis for legitimate decision-making.

The case of Karpe Diem gives empirical evidence of the ways in which music may, under particular circumstances, both stimulate and feed into these multi-layered discursive processes outlined by Habermas. The hyperbolic, profane and provocative musical articulations of anti-FRP sentiment were here subjected to public contestation in terms of their acceptability. Hence, both the expressive output and the mode of delivery of songs and performances can be seen to have been subjected to discursive 'laundering'.

Significantly, the case of Karpe Diem demonstrates that their music and performances were debated and filtered through several discursive arenas, mediating between the periphery and the centre of the political system. The songs and performances were subjected to discourse in the cultural public sphere, including reviews and cultural commentaries, located on the periphery. They were then further filtered into discursive arenas, comprising actors, publications, and

journalistic formats located closer to the centre of the political system. Moreover, this case empirically allows for a more detailed conceptualisation of how such a laundering and filtering process may apply to music. The process can be described in three stages. The first involves *aesthetic assessment* by cultural journalists, the second *moral-political assessment*, mainly by political actors, of the acceptability of the merits of Karpe Diem. The third is *ideological debate*, mainly carried out by political commentators, where the merits of Karpe Diem are elevated to a more principle level.

Furthermore, this case demonstrates that the public discursive process, of which Karpe Diem and their music were part, entail important interpretative dimensions. Both songs and performances were subjected to various interpretations, where politically conflicting discursive actors ascribed divergent qualities and values to the songs and performances. Crucially, this interpretative process generated new questions and issues that were taken up in further discourse. Hence, the songs did not only function as general anti-FRP statements, but also, as termed by Dahlgren (1995:148), in the context of television, *symbolic 'raw material'* for public deliberation. This case suggests that it is perhaps not so much the manifest political meaning of the music that matters, but rather that music posits a symbolic object in the public sphere that invites both interpretation and response. As argued above, this interpretation and response will be informed by both contextual factors, such as the discursive and political climate in Norway post 22nd July and the horizons of expectations at the level of reception.

Conclusion

The democratic role of aesthetics in general, and music more specifically, represents both an empirical and theoretical lacuna in public sphere research. Consequently, this article has addressed the following two overarching questions; how and through which processes may music as aesthetical expressivity be significant to actual public

political discourse, and, how may we make sense of musical expressivity within the framework of deliberative democracy.

Empirically, this study demonstrates the ways in which popular music may, under particular circumstances, both stimulate and feed into important cultural and political debates. In the case of Karpe Diem post 22nd July, it is evident that the expressive features of their music and performances fed into long enduring ideological debates concerning artistic freedom of speech, the political left's relationship to the cultural field and meta-debates concerning the discursive climate in Norway more generally. In bringing in new actors and perspectives into public discourse, these debates involved a more nuanced discourse about key issues in the Norwegian society. Moreover, these debates partly played out in media addressing young people and audiences of popular music, thus involving a democratically desirable enlargement of public discourse. Significantly, these debates did not only take place within the cultural public sphere, but also encompassed a range of political actors, topics and discursive arenas associated with the political public sphere.

In describing the various aesthetic, biographical, contextual and receptive factors that led to the politicised reception of Karpe Diem and their music, this study also highlights the complex process and the trajectory through which the aesthetical expressivity of music may enter public political discourse. Based on the findings, this study demonstrates the ways in which musical communication may generate and provide input to discursive processes vital to deliberative democracy as modelled by Habermas (2006), and in addition suggests how this model can be further conceptually sensitized to explain the democratic role of music.

The public role of Karpe Diem and their music in the aftermath of the Utøya-massacre is a case where the intersections between music and politics can be seen vividly at play. Not only does this case demonstrate that music as an aesthetical form of expression may provide democratically vital discursive processes with politically

pregnant input, it also highlights how the Habermasian framework of public sphere theory offers a theoretically fruitful starting point from where to understand the political significance of music.

However, this study also actualises the need to further rethink and develop theoretical concepts of the public sphere, ones that are better suited to both explain, and normatively value, the democratic merits of music. However, in order to enhance our understanding of the role of expressive culture in public political discourse, a fruitful course for further research would be to study the ways in which music becomes subjected to public political discourse in national, discursive and political contexts other than that of the highly particular and trauma coloured context of Norway after 22nd July.

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