

Protest Music as a Communication Method; Research on Teaching Strange Fruit

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Abstract

The great economic power of the United States of America allowed its attitude towards the African American population living on its land to be ignored for a long time. However, the lives of the African Americans and the time they have lived have started to manifest itself in music as well as various visual arts. Protest music is written and performed with the aim of encouraging cultural and political change to be a part of the movement. The emergence of protest music in the United States coincides with the period of the Civil Rights' Movement of the 1954's. The protest music, which started with the aim of drawing attention to the elements of war and slavery, was composed and performed with the aim of drawing attention to the racist attacks against black people in South America, shedding light on violence and oppression, and helping the white people face this situation. The jazz style song "Strange Fruit" sung by African American female singer Billie Holiday, which addresses these issues and is considered as one of the first original example of protest music, started a change by creating the intended effect on the white people and African American people living in the United States. The song/poem "Strange Fruit", the photograph that inspired the composition, the photograph and video of Billie Holiday singing the song will be analyzed with Roland Barthes' semiotic theories. The result of this study shows that protest music, performed in the best possible way, is an important and effective element of communication to draw attention to the efforts of African-Americans involved in the construction of a great piece of labor.

Keywords: Education, Communication, Protest Music, Strange Fruit, Billie Holiday, Semiotics.

Introduction

Music is the art of expressing emotions and thoughts through sound and silence. At the same time, music, which is a universal cultural event, meets social, cultural, religious, spiritual and intellectual needs, and it does this by combining melody, harmony, polyphony and rhythm with natural or artificial instruments. According to the Turkish Language Association, music is the art of expressing certain emotions and thoughts with harmonious sounds within the framework of specific rules. While explaining music, Plato says that rhythm and harmony penetrate very deep into the human heart and capture people strongly and that people distinguish between good and evil through music (Plato, BC360). It is seen that throughout history, music has been used as a means of communication by governments and political formations. One of the examples of this situation is the Roman Church in Europe. The music used by the Roman Church in Europe since the Middle Ages was used to support the existing order as a part of the management style in order to legitimize the feudal order. The Kings and Lords who lived in this period used music as a complementary element and a means of communication in managing the masses they claimed to "protect", using legal oppression and sword power (Solmaz and Başevli, 2005). It is seen that administrators and politicians understand the impact of music on people, benefit from its power to influence/unite, and support musicians by rewarding them when they perform and compose works that emphasize their power. Another feature of music is its ability to unite the masses. Since music has a broad reach and impact, it is one of the fastest and most effective ways to share the intended message and reach target audiences.

Protest music is used during social and political unrest when disappointments are experienced; expectations are not realized, mass demonstrations occur, the masses begin to act together, and in situations requiring collective action and participation (Vandagriff, 2015). It is thought that one of the essential reasons for the popularity of protest music today and the increase in its audience is the role played by the musician. Author Fran Lebowitz talks about the importance of music for people in her comment about musicians in the documentary Pretend It is a City (S1: E2 "Cultural Affairs") series broadcast on Netflix, and states that music and musicians leave a mark on people's memories. Therefore, the person who plays a role in creating these memories explains that musicians are loved regardless of their personalities and who they are. This critical role of musicians on people is also influential in protest music. The populism of the artist, his commitment to a possible cause, and his motivation in the face of the current situation are accepted by his listeners and play an important role. All of these increase the composer and performer's value in the masses' eyes, and the music they perform attracts more attention. This article is about

the song "Strange Fruit", performed by African-American female singer Billie Holiday in the United States from 1939 until she died in 1944. This work started a new movement in protest music in the United States. This change, which started at that time, continues to increase in the field of protest music today, and the new style of protest music, starting with "Strange Fruit", reaches large audiences of listeners and viewers.

Method

Music, which starts personally and reaches society, appears before us with the literal and connotative meanings, symbols and metaphors it contains, what it creates in the mind of the person it expresses, and what it makes one feel and think. Roland Barthes showed that since music has all these features, it can be analyzed with semiotic theories so that music can be understood better. Within the framework of the analysis of this article, semiotic theory and musical and non-musical signs will be focused on. After the lyrics of the song "Strange Fruit", which has original lyrics in English, are translated into Turkish, the subject, text analysis and themes used in the lyrics will be explained. In this study, the approaches of Roland Barthes, who explains semiotics systematically, will be used. Barthes' theory of semiotics, which divides it into headings such as signifier, signified and sign, denotation and ideology, will be analyzed and interpreted by analyzing the music and lyrics of "Strange Fruit", meaning, content, body use and audio-visual synchronization and non-musical element.

Strange Fruit and Semiotics Analysis

Billie Holiday's song "Strange Fruit" is the first example of protest music in the United States, which began to reach a broad audience with record players and radios that began to become widespread in the 1930s, is Billie Holiday's song "Strange Fruit". Billie Holiday released one of her most famous songs, Strange Fruit, on April 20, 1939. "Strange Fruit", recorded with an 8-piece African-American orchestra, reached a wider audience over time and became the 20th studio album. It will become a work that marks the century.

Music critic Dorian Lynskey describes in his book "Revolutions per Minute: A History of Protest Songs, from Billie Holiday to Green Day" that "Holiday's song 'Strange Fruit' is the first of its kind". "Strange Fruit" has added protest songs to the world of popular music and made a new start. Lynskey comments, "Up to this point, protest songs have served as propaganda, but 'Strange Fruit' has proven that it can be art" (Lynskey, 2011).

"Strange Fruit" is a song performed by Billie Holiday with a silky voice, dark, depressed melody, and moody lyrics. Jewish teacher Abel Meeropol, a member of the American Communist Party, published "Bitter Fruit" as a poem in the publication of The New York Teacher in 1937. Meeropol was impressed by the lynching scene that photographer Beitleer made him record, saying, "It was a shocking photo, and it stayed in my mind for days. As a result, he said, "I wrote 'Strange Fruit' as a poem," and he later composed the lyrics himself (Moore, 1876).

Roland G. The photographs examined through the concepts of Studium and Punctum, which Barthes included in Camera Lucida, not only take a photo out of its frame but also analyze it from a historical, cultural, sociological, psychological point of view, but also analyze it with the elements of the person who looks at the photo and establishes a relationship. Studium, a Latin word that means study-learning, conveys photography to analyze it through codes. Barthes Studium defines it as an ordinary analysis of the feelings, thoughts, and cultural codes left by the person looking at the photo. For this reason, a photo frame also creates a documentary image in the viewer. In Camera Lucida, he gives photography as an example for a clearer understanding of the Stadium. Here, Barthes states that the photo taken by the photographer was taken as a news story to detail an event, provide information or provide evidence and was limited to these areas. The person who examines the photo is expected to provide a comment only intellectually or emotionally. However, although the impressionable photograph is impressive, it is not expected to arouse curiosity and eliminate its stasis by going beyond time (Barthes, 2016; Özınan, 2021).

The first performance of the song took place in Greenwich Village in 1939. Meeropol, Billie Holiday's comment; "He fulfilled the requirement of his style. It's pathetic and a shocking quality that I hoped the song would have," he commented. Billie Holiday commented on the first day she performed the song; "There wasn't even a single clap at the end of the song, then one person started clapping nervously, and then suddenly everyone started clapping". Within a short period, "Strange Fruit" started to have a big impact, and people started coming to Café Society, where Billie Holiday was performing, just to listen to the song "Strange Fruit" (Amaoko, 2019).

It was not only the political nature of the song that surprised and touched the listeners but also how Billie Holiday unforgettably performed it. In her book Black Resonance: Iconic Female Singers and African American Literature, Lordi argues that this is the result of Holiday's choices and tells BBC Culture that When Billie Holiday performs the song, she points out how striking the lyrics are. His syllables and the accents he makes evoke a feeling of anger caused by the way he cuts words. All this shows that there is a deep and sad quality in Holiday's performance (Amaoko, 2019).

When we examine the video and picture images of Billie Holiday singing the song, we get the impression that terrible violence is happening in front of her eyes at that moment. By portraying the event, the song, which she interprets as if she were seeing and living at that moment, draws a profile of a young black woman who is even incapable of standing but is so upright, courageous and brave. Billie Holiday's interpretation of the song with such sincerity and feeling allows the listener to experience the event with the support of the lyrics and to reveal the suffering in front of their eyes. Billie Holiday's song interpretation allows her to get ahead of other performers. "Strange Fruit" is a work of art, not a hymn and folk song melody, far from the style of propaganda and early protest music. The power of believability, emphasized by Roland Barthes, manifests itself here. The video and photo of Billie Holiday singing the song and the choices she made in an authentic minimalist aesthetic reveal her persuasiveness and reality, and this situation is understood and appreciated by the listener and viewer.

"Strange Fruit" is still played, sung and performed by many jazz musicians today. The song maintained its success in the early years. It continues to be watched and listened to by millions of people on YouTube and similar social media channels due to the widespread use of the Internet. We can interpret one of the main reasons why the song continues to be popular years later as the fact that racism, violence, and cruelty continue, even though we do not see the scenes of lynching by hanging, even 80 years after the year the song was written (Amoako, 2019).

The poem "Strange Fruit" consists of three continents. There are four lines within each continent. The poem is written in the AABB rhyme scheme, and this order continues on all continents throughout the poem. The rhyme scheme of a quatrain is revealed by looking at the last sounds of the verses. Accordingly, the song "Strange Fruit" rhyme scheme follows the plain rhyme scheme. The "fruit" in the first verse is written in rhyme with the "root" in the second verse.

In the same way, "breeze" and "trees" rhyme. On the second continent, "South", "mouth", "fresh", "flesh", and on the third continent "puck", and "suck", "drop" and "crop" are written in rhyme. The poet limited the poem to 3 continents without too much ado and tried to make his argument strong without repeating the exact words as if he wanted to emphasize the importance he attached to each word. In addition, the absence of the chorus part that we see in many songs in the song "Strange Fruit" is quite noticeable. No second repetition of any remark was made. It brings to mind the idea that the lack of rhythm in the first continent of the poem was explicitly chosen to emphasize the "strangeness" of the situation. In the sub-continent, we see that poetry is exceptionally smooth in terms of rhyme, and even poetry is adapted to a mechanical pattern. This situation emphasizes syllables, the mood and the tone of the poem in the foreground (Corfman, 2016).

With Strange Fruit, instead of music performed by a few musicians with simple and familiar melodies, a complicated musical structure, a plural number of musicians, and a type of music that directly criticizes politics with metaphors rather than direct lyrics have emerged. "Strange Fruit" is a song that warns people about the country's state. It was composed to draw people's attention to the events and the violence and turmoil in the lynching incidents in South America. Although the lyrics were written based on an actual event, the lyrics did not include the murder of a black body by hanging. It is thought that the most important reason for this is that the song "Strange Fruit" is the first original protest music of the period.

For this reason, the desired message is hidden with metaphors. Although the events were not conveyed, "Strange Fruit" was very effective and enabled people to empathize with the event that happened and was conveyed in the song. Billie Holiday's role in performing the song allowed her to portray the event with metaphors in the audience's minds. It allowed them to create empathy about the situation, that is, to connect. All this clarifies the principles of Roland Barthes' 'the more convincing, the more realistic'.

"Southern trees" is a metaphor and is thought to refer to white people living in South America. On the other hand, the tree symbolizes "hatred against blacks" in addition to representing whites. "Strange Fruit" is another metaphor in this poem and refers to dead and alive black people. In this line, which is "blood on the leaves and blood at the root", there are two separate metaphors. The "leaves" and "roots" of the tree refer to the blood-soaked hands of white Americans and their vengeful heart. Other examples of metaphors in poetry are reserved for using the term "southern breeze". The metaphor in which black bodies are used as "fruit" juxtaposes the concept of fruit, which many love, with something completely reversed and distorted, creating the illusion that a natural and beautiful image of fruits waving in a warm southern breeze is imaginable. However, the reality here is entirely different and is nothing more than black bodies depicted as "fruit" (Corfman, 2016).

Music Analysis of Strange Fruit

"Strange Fruit" is performed by the performers at different tempos. Billie Holiday's performance is a slow and heavy tempo in the style of a funeral anthem. The song, performed in the tone of B flat minor, begins

homophonically with the piano repeating minor chords of the same tone while Billie Holiday sings the lyrics. While the piano plays the song lower and quieter, Billie Holiday's voice is more precise and robust to adapt to the environment. This situation brings the song's lyrics to the forefront, ensuring that the Decrees and the desired message are not ignored. Imik and Poppy (2020), in their article titled 'Where is Music in Our Life', "In general terms, the concept of music consists of sound, rhythm, melody and harmony components. In order to improve the quality of comments, it is necessary to add nuances. On the other hand, the use of nuance, a sine qua non, such as salt, pepper and spices of the dish, conveys the part of the work that adds strength to the impressive and power, making the desired emotion and meaning effective."

Music is a cultural event; music in minor tones is perceived as sad and emotional in Anatolia, Europe and the United States. Billie Holiday emphasizes the parts she wants to stand out in the lyrics while singing the song, and at the same time, impresses her audience with facial expressions (TheK9chief, 2017). This Decelerating tempo and homophonic relationship between Billie Holiday and the pianist continues throughout the song, which is set in a melancholic mood. This ensures that the listener follows the song and its lyrics carefully and does not miss anything. The "refrain" part, found in many songs, is not included in "Strange Fruit". The absence of a chorus part also musically adds a separate feature to the song. The most significant change in the song happens at the end of the song. Immediately after the last words, we can hear the woodwind instruments starting to play in the background during the last beat of the song. This sudden rise in music is interpreted as a simultaneous final cry and a protest movement by the instruments and the silence that occurs at once (Drees, 2016).

Conclusion and recommendations

A person resorts to many ways to express himself and Decrees branches of art among the ways he uses. Works of art convey the desired message, sometimes clearly and sometimes using metaphors and side meanings, aiming to bring a different perspective on feelings and thoughts, highlighting the points where speech and language are insufficient and need to be supported.

Music is a social and personal product with the melodies and rhythms used. Music and musical indicators are also used as representative social and political expression tools, create societal awareness and lead to change. Protest music brings the masses together with feelings, thoughts, goals and similar goals, enables them to act Decently and contributes to the formation of awareness. Billie Holiday, who comes from the black culture in the United States, has had to struggle with many difficulties to perform "Strange Fruit", but she is an influential artist who has dedicated herself to making the voice of her people, problems and experiences,, heard through her art, has made a difference and has therefore managed to write her name in golden letters in the history of protest music. The movement started by Billie Holiday has been inspiring many artists by growing day by day. Protest music has formed an essential part of the change by reaching out to the masses from different cultures by addressing many issues such as political and social problems, injustice, police violence, racism, discrimination, and feminization, taking on a role encouraging resistance to cruelty and violence alongside the oppressed, supporting social messages with words and music, manifesting itself in different musical styles.

Billie Holiday performed "Strange Fruit" with her silky voice and delivered the song, composed with a dark and depressing melody, to her listeners with the accents she made to the lyrics and the emotion she added. Moreover, she successfully performed the song by taking an essential stance as a black woman. After all this time since the composition of "Strange Fruit", its lyrics, music, and Billie Holiday's unique interpretation of the song have allowed the birth of protest music in a new style in the United States and have managed to make it clear that music is an undeniable means of communication when it contains the necessary and correct messages and is used in the right way. "Strange Fruit" still occupies an important place today. Protest music, composed and performed to draw attention to racist attacks, spotlighting violence and persecution and ensuring that white people face this situation, has become an essential and practical communication element today.

Roland Barthes made it possible to analyze music, photography, video, body use and audio-visual synchronizations with semiotics. Thanks to the concepts of Studium and Punctum, flat and burning, which Roland Barthes added to semiotics, a photo has ceased to be just a frame, a video is a meaningless visual, and music consists of sheet music; they have become concepts that can be analyzed from historical, psychological and cultural aspects and become reality.

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