

TACTIC MUSIC VIDEO

Social justice music videos combine the contagious power of music with compelling visuals to expose injustice and inspire potential allies into action.

CONTRIBUTED BY

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Emily Hong is a feminist anthropologist, filmmaker, and co-founder of Rhiza Collective. Emily has directed several collaborative films including *Get By* (2014), *Nobel Nok Dah* (2015), and *For My Art* (2016), which have explored issues of solidarity and labor, womanhood and identity in the refugee experience, and the gendered spectatorship of performance art.

“ROCK AND HIP-HOP PROVIDE RHYTHMIC OPENINGS TO CHANNEL ANGER IN WAYS THAT CAN MOVE HARD-TO-REACH ALLIES AND POWER-HOLDERS.”

Music has long played an important role in generating and sustaining activist communities and social movements. Social justice music videos take this power a step further, combining the contagious power of music with compelling visuals to expose injustice and inspire potential allies into action. Typically a result of collaboration among musicians, activists, and videographers, social justice music videos transform a classic tool — protest music — for 21st-century community organizing and mass mobilization in the Global South.

In high-risk political contexts, social justice music videos can literally break the silence and prepare the ground for local organizing. In northern Myanmar (also known as Burma), rock band BLAST teamed up with All Kachin Students and Youth Union, Kachin Development Networking Group, and Kachin News Group to release a 2010 karaoke music video album highlighting an emergent environmental crisis. Two hit songs, “Aka Law” and “Malikha,” gave voice to the cries of the Mali river, bringing attention to the ecological and cultural havoc wreaked by the Chinese-built Myitsone Dam. Local and national coalitions were able to build on the widespread awareness of the dam’s destructive impacts to mount a successful campaign that saw the dam’s construction suspended in 2011.

In certain instances, a viral music video can turn a small campaign into a transnational sensation — bringing in key new allies that can

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- Manich Msamah
- Public Option Annie
- Stolen Gas Campaign

Tactics

- Hashtag hijack
- Storytelling
- Visibility action

Principles

- Balance art and message
- Brand or be branded
- Choose your target wisely
- Consider your audience
- Joy is a revolutionary force
- Know your community
- Know your cultural terrain
- Make the personal political
- Personalize and polarize
- Reframe the issue
- Stay on message

shift the balance of power. In 2015, South Indian rapper Sofia Ashraf and Vettiver Collective repurposed Nicki Minaj's "Anaconda," calling out Unilever for its mercury contamination in Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu. The resulting video, "Kodaikanal Won't," went viral, gaining close to 4 million views and a surge in signatures for an online petition demanding justice for poisoned former employees. The video catapulted 15 years of local organizing efforts onto an international stage, giving the struggle new transnational allies and media coverage. Months of intensified campaigning and a boycott of Unilever products forced the company to do the previously unthinkable: compensate Kodaikanal workers.

Social justice music videos have not only remixed popular songs or genres from the Global North, but have also contributed to the revival of indigenous and traditional languages, music, dance, and storytelling. A stunning video from New York-based art collective Semillas (Seeds), for example, channeled the power of indigenous danza, hip hop, and ballet to tell the story of the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students from Mexico.

While high-budget productions with high-profile musicians can certainly command an audience (see MIA's 2015 "Borders" video on the refugee crisis), low-budget videos can be just as powerful. "Kodaikanal Won't" was shot in just one day. In areas with limited or slow internet access, low-resolution karaoke video compact discs (VCDs) can be cheaply reproduced, circulated through underground networks, or sold on street corners.

Music videos can take on a range of issues more effectively than speech alone. Audio-visuals can subvert dominant narratives by contesting government claims with visible, on-the-ground impacts. Such sensory details can work in tandem with powerful lyrics that call out the hypocrisy of power-holders, such as corporations sensitive to consumer power or governments shamed by citizen voices. While activist indignation doesn't often find productive channels, musical genres such as rock and hip-hop provide rhythmic openings to channel anger in ways that can move hard-to-reach allies and power-holders (see: THEORY: Hamoq and hamas).

LEARN MORE

Never Thought "Kodaikanal Won't" Video Could Make Unilever Settle: Rapper Sofia Ashraf

Tushar Kaushik, The New Indian Express

http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil_nadu/Never-Thought-Kodaikanal-Wont-Video-Could-Make-Unilever-Settle-Rapper-Sofia-Ashraf/2016/03/09/article3318386.ece

M.I.A. Talks About the "Borders" Video and Why She's Getting Legal Threats for a Soccer Jersey

Ryan Bassil, Noisey, 2016

- Think narratively
- Use humour to undermine authority
- Use your cultural assets

Theories

- Artivism
- Hamoq and hamas
- Postcolonialism

Methodologies

- Spectrum of allies

TAGS

Art, Communications, Education, Media, Social media

<http://noisy.vice.com/blog/mia-interview-2016>

The Justice Through Music Project

<http://www.jtmp.org/>