Music and the Making of Portugal and Spain

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Indie Music as a Controversial Space on Spanish Identity

Class, Youth, and Discontent

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The End of the Long Summer Festival

In the days following May 15, 2011, many Spanish city squares were occupied by protesters calling for changes to the political system and electoral law and particularly for the end of the two-party system and its control by economic powers. This movement arose in 2010 in the wake of the Arab Spring and was followed by similar street protests around the world. Since 2008, following the international credit crunch, Spain has suffered the effects of a deep economic crisis that has particularly affected the housing market and the banking sector. After years of easy credit and household indebtedness, banks began to take possession of the properties of borrowers defaulting on their mortgages against a backdrop of rising unemployment and cuts in social policies.

The crowds that occupied the streets in Spain to express their outrage were mainly middle-class young people. University students, graduates, and civil servants chanted slogans such as “Lo llaman democracia y no lo es” (“They call it democracy, but it isn’t”). Unlike previous social movements of the 1980s, such as those led by miners, steelworkers, and shipbuilding workers who fought against industrial reconversion, these middle-class citizens were not characterized by a politicized class culture but by political apathy. For many, the anti-austerity
movement (also referred to as the 15-M Movement, the Indignados Movement, and Take the Square) was their first experience of collective political action (Sanz and Mateos 2011).

This outpouring of political activism emerged in a country that had experienced a very long cycle of economic growth and prosperity, leading to the establishment of a culture of hedonistic consumption (López and Rodríguez 2010) as well as the abandonment of classical political identities (based on ideological divisions between left and right) and the collective action associated with them. During this period of prosperity, social movements were barely present in the public sphere while the political experience of most Spaniards was reduced simply to voting on election days.

The contrast between the abundance of studies and reflections on the 1980s and the lack of interest in analyzing the following decades is striking. The 15-M Movement rejects the idealization of the Spanish Transition, criticizing the co-option of the political discussion by political elites. In turn, the movement opened a new line of thinking on how to reconnect Spanish culture with political debates in the public domain (Labrador 2014; Lenore 2014; Martínez 2012; Maura 2018). In this chapter, we attempt to examine these changes from the perspective of popular music studies.

The “soundtrack” for the post-transition years (1990–2011) was dominated by indie, a music genre that originated in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Characterized by the sound of electric guitars, certain intellectual depth and introspective themes, indie music celebrated creative independence and promoted alternative management models, often at odds with artists’ everyday practices (Hesmondhalgh 1999). In the early 1990s in Spain, this style became consolidated in the underground scene and by the early 2000s it was featured in summer festivals across the country. All towns touted the wonders of organizing a festival, very often with public contributions, to attract young people willing to spend their holiday money over three or four days of music, dancing, and partying.

The trajectory of the indie rock band Los Planetas is a good example of the evolution of the indie scene that ran in parallel with the political evolution of the middle classes in Spain. Undoubtedly, Los Planetas emerged as the main exponent of Spanish indie, replicating the transition of this music scene from alternative to mainstream markets. It launched its first album (Super 8) in 1994 with the major label RCA and then headlined major festivals, combining its guitar rock with flamenco and experimental contributions. The title of their record La leyenda del espacio (The Legend of Space), released in 2007, refers to the revolu-
tionary flamenco album *La leyenda del tiempo* (*The Legend of Time*) by Camarón de la Isla. Along with the collaboration of the well-known flamenco singer Enrique Morente, the album sought to “adapt traditional flamenco palos (rhythmic patterns) without palmas (clapping) or Spanish guitars” (Águila 2007).

The turn of the band toward the political sphere is symptomatic of the politicalization of the Spanish middle classes. In 1996 they released the song “Vuelve la canción protesta” (“The Protest Song Returns”), which refers dismissively to how political songs are meant to change the world. However, in 2012 the band’s vocalist and songwriter, Jota, released the song “La nueva reconquista de Graná” (“The New Reconquest of Granada,” with “Graná” depicting the characteristic Andalusian accent from southern Spain) with his other band, Grupo de expertos Solynieve (Expert Group Sun-and-snow). The song established a parallelism between the Catholic reconquest in 1492 and the citizens who shouted in the streets, “We are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers.” Los Planetas titled its 2017 album *Zona temporalmente autónoma* (*Temporary Autonomous Zone*), echoing the ideas of American anarchist thinker Hakim Bey, who describes the socio-political tactic of creating spaces that temporarily elude formal structures of social control.

The stylistic journey of Los Planetas condenses the ideological, social, and thematic evolution of indie: from introspection and political apathy to awareness, from alternative to mainstream culture, from the Anglo-Saxon heritage to embracing national culture (as many groups began singing in English and then switched to Spanish). And over the fifteen years that acted as a bridge between the two centuries, indie bands such as Los Planetas were caught up with the wider political evolution of the middle classes in Spain, from consumerism and discontent to outrage. In this chapter, we connect the pathway that the Spanish middle classes have traversed between 1990 and 2011 with transformations in the attitudes and lyrics of indie music in Spain during the same period. We argue that the political protest that emerged in 2011 as a response to austerity politics had been reflected earlier in the feeling of discontent that some indie bands expressed in their song lyrics prior to the 15-M movement.

The rebuttal of the Spanish Transition has reignited the debate around definitions of Spanish national identity by introducing new political parameters into an environment of controversy traditionally defined by binary oppositions such as modernity/tradition, left/right, and nationalism/cosmopolitanism. This process has involved looking back in search of the reconstruction of the immediate past and the memory of Spanish democracy but from less celebratory and more critical perspectives.
Music, Politics, and Social Class in Democratic Spain

During the 1960s, the dominant idea of modernity in Spain was linked with “Francoist political engineering,” which led to the emergence of middle classes through industrialization, rural-urban migration, strengthening of the civil service, and urban transformation (Labrador 2014). Modernity was one of the elements of “the change” (“el cambio”) that the Socialist Party (PSOE) offered as the motto of its first government in 1982: to be modern was to be European and to reject the autarky that characterized Franco’s policy for many years. But Spain’s accession to the EEC (European Economic Union) in 1986 also meant that the Spanish economy was fully integrated into a neoliberal framework. During the first democratic years, to be modern was also to be cosmopolitan (so, European) and also entailed the rejection of the Marxist heritage that had characterized the Francoist opposition (Fouce 2006; Maura 2018). As Vilarós (1998) points out, when Franco died, anti-Francoism died too.

The perception of popular music as an element of cultural modernization was especially striking in the 1980s when the Spanish Transition and the Madrid Scene (La movida madrileña) converged (Fouce 2006). The hegemonic discourse portrayed the 1980s as a decade when a young democracy, undergoing a full institutional and social transformation, wiped the slate clean and, inspired by the immediacy of punk and new wave, set out to create a cosmopolitan and contemporary cultural movement (La movida), led mainly by young people coming from the new middle classes (Val 2017). The price to be paid, on the one hand, was the harboring of contempt for all previous national styles and, on the other, the radical rejection of the political commitment that marked the politically engaged music of the singer-songwriters (cantautores) during the last decades of the dictatorship, since it was felt that music had stopped functioning as a space of resistance once the democratic regime and the right of free expression had been re-established.

Some scholars (Subirats 2002; Martínez 2012) consider that the abandonment of the political dimension during the creation of a modern national identity was a tribute to the new neoliberal sensibilities that the Socialist Party introduced in Spain. The Socialist Party’s support of La movida madrileña was personified by Madrid’s mayor Enrique Tierno Galván, whose cultural policy promoted free concerts and nightlife (Wheeler 2018). Some analysts see this policy as a way to integrate a generation marked by disenchantment (Fouce 2006). For most analysts, however, it was a deft maneuver to depoliticize the youth in parallel to the co-option of the combative neighborhood organizations of the new dis-
tricts in the city. The cosmopolitan discourse of the bands that were part of La movida celebrated makeup and masks, sexuality, consumption, and nightlife. It was the perfect soundtrack for this type of modernity, for a movement that sought to dissociate itself from party politics despite the subversive nature of its practices: the occupation of public space and the free enjoyment of non-normative sexualities became part of the legacy of La movida.

Even though La movida became part of the Spanish imaginary as the soundtrack of the 1980s, political songs and scenes still had an enormous impact during those years. Movements linked to the working classes through the musicians’ social origin or the symbolic universes they were related to—including heavy metal, urban rock, Basque radical rock, punk, hardcore, and to a lesser extent rap—addressed social issues in their lyrics, and musicians shouted political slogans in their concerts, articulating very vibrant local scenes (Val 2017). However, these music scenes had a limited scope and often functioned as smaller niches of production and consumption that were distanced from mainstream audiences. That is, songs with political content were left out of what some authors have called the “Transition Culture” (Martínez 2012), understood as a set of rules, codes, and guidelines of conduct about which topics and perspectives on Spanish culture are likely to be addressed. In this sense, political and social criticism was left out of popular music.

By the late 1980s, the groups of La movida had already become mainstream and their discourse had become exhausted. As Wheeler notes, “La movida became a showcase for the country’s (post-)modernity and new democratic credential both at home and abroad” (2018, 144). During the 1980s, new wave paved the road for the emergence of mainstream pop all around the world. But at the end of the decade, alternative music became popular once again in the United States and England. For many Spaniards, it was the inspiration they needed to create a discourse that appealed to a new generation that was coming of age (Cruz 2015).

**Economic Expansion and Youth Discontent**

The middle classes have been a fundamental backbone of Spanish democracy, both sociologically and ideologically, and a key element in the modernization of Spanish democracy and culture. As the historian Pablo Sánchez León (2014) points out, since the late 1950s, politicians, philosophers, and scholars promoted the idea that the middle classes were fundamental to overcome social conflicts in Spain. This idea was accompanied by the expansion of this social class during the 1960s. This change in the Spanish social structure was also understood
as a change in the values of Spanish people more broadly (Tezanos 1975, 38). Sánchez León (2014) argues that the emergence of the middle classes in the 1960s reflected attempts to reduce social inequalities in Spain and to increase social mobility, based on improvements in education and imported new forms of consumption and leisure (Carr and Fusi 1979, 106). The promises of modernity and social mobility inherited from Francoism were a central element of the Spanish democratic discourse both during the Transition and the coming years.

This narrative blows up when the financial crisis erupted in 2008. The cycle of economic growth that took place between 1995 and 2007 was based on consumption growth, not on wage growth: the purchasing power of families was maintained with easy credit, which was in turn supported by an immense housing bubble. Real estate was the asset that guaranteed families’ borrowing capacity, so when banks needed to increase their capital base in 2008, they began to take possession of the secured properties of borrowers defaulting on their mortgages. High structural unemployment rates, reduced social mobility, and growing job precariousness (especially among young people) were the dark side of a country in the midst of a surprisingly long upward cycle, sustained by the massive inflow of foreign capital to finance construction (López and Rodríguez 2010).

It is important to remember that the period of growth that began in 1995 was preceded by a global crisis. The Barcelona 1992 Summer Olympics and the Universal Exposition of Seville (Expo ’92) were presented as proof of the success of the Spanish transition to democracy and as hallmarks through which Spaniards could show off their renewed pride to the world (Maura 2018). The investments associated with these celebrations delayed the arrival of the crisis in Spain, but in 1993 unemployment reached an all-time high and the value of the national currency (peseta) was depreciated three times to try to maintain export capacity.

The Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) lost its absolute majority in Parliament in 1993. The front pages of Spanish newspapers were filled with financial scandals (such as the Banesto case6) as well as political scandals (such as the escape of the former chief of Spain’s Civil Guard, Luis Roldán, and the prosecution of former interior minister José Barrionuevo for his “dirty war” against ETA). Increased migration into Spanish cities during the 1990s and the transformation of urban social demographics led to racial conflicts that culminated in the murder of the Dominican immigrant Lucrecia Pérez on the outskirts of Madrid in 1992. The early 1990s saw instances of political conflict and violence on the streets: news coverage of urban tribes, especially skinheads, were common during that period. The media acquired a new centrality thanks to private television channels, which began broadcasting in 1989. Competi-
tion between television networks gave way to the proliferation of infotainment programming. The morbid coverage of the disappearance and murder of three teenage girls from the Valencian town of Alcáser in 1992 exposed a new way of understanding public space and contrasted the Spain that celebrated the Fifth Centenary of the discovery of America with a country where ignorance, brutality, and incompetence lived on (Maura 2018).

The overcoming of the crisis and the expansion cycle coincided with the emergence of the Internet. The middle-class youth, which is the social base for indie music, fits the profile of the creative classes that gave way to the emergence of the “hipster” in the 2010s (Florida 2014). The Internet made it easy and cheap for users to access cultural resources. The means of cultural production became cheaper as they became digital: a large contingent of young people learned to create web pages, design brochures and magazines, and edit video and sound on their laptops, which opened up a world of creative opportunities at a lower cost.

However, the optimism associated with the early years of the Internet, a technology that the media presented as a “land of opportunity” for adventurers and entrepreneurs, contrasted with the reality of young people who were unable to consolidate their adult life due to low-paying and precarious jobs, a work model based on short-term projects rather than long-term contracts, and a housing market that made it difficult for them to leave their parents’ home (Cruces 2012; Rowan 2010). This is a generation that enjoys a cultural wealth thanks to the digital revolution and the emergence of low-cost consumption but that, in contrast, lacks economic resources. This tension between a symbolic world full of opportunities and promises, and the reality of a precarious job market became a breeding ground for the discontent that followed the years of economic expansion and erupted with the 2008 crisis.

Journalist Esteban Hernández (2014) points out that the 2008 crisis marked the end of the middle classes not only in Spain but throughout the Western world. This alleged end of the middle classes mainly affected young people who were educated according to a middle-class ideology, which is based on compliance with norms, trust in social institutions, faith in effort as a form of promotion, and confidence in progress. Middle-class parents were confident that their children would live in better conditions than they did. The scepticism generated towards institutions by the crisis and corruption, the massification of higher education, and the flexibility of employment contracts are elements that have broken the covenant of trust on which the middle class is based, as well as the political framework that had been built since the Transition.

Most governments invoked austerity politics in order to solve the crisis. The anti-austerity movement was a response by the children of these middle classes
and the claim that the crisis was not only economic but also ideological and cultural. A series of demonstrations against spending cuts and the economic crisis occupied emblematic squares in cities such as Madrid (Puerta del Sol) and Barcelona (Plaza Catalunya). Neighborhood assemblies sprang up and camped out for almost a month. The *Indignados* movement took inspiration from the Arab Spring and was imitated in several countries under the Occupy motto.⁸ The members of these assemblies critiqued the electoral system, the political parties, the education system, and the economy, defining themselves in opposition to an elite generated by the confluence of interests of politicians and bankers (Romanos 2017).

For some authors (Labrador 2014; Martínez 2012), the anti-austerity movement also implies the end of a way of seeing the Spanish Transition to Democracy, since the movement calls for the rewriting of the Constitution and the end of the two-party system, which had generated political stability and created strong governments at the price of commodifying democracy. As Romanos points out, the goal of this movement was to end the commodification of individuals—one of the mottos was “We are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers”—and hold the political and economic elites accountable for the crisis (2017, 143).

Research on this movement, compiled by Romanos (2017, 147), has provided some data on its sociological composition: a balanced presence of men and women; an average age close to 30 years; a high educational level (university students and graduates); a large presence of civil servants, health workers and other professionals; and a striking under-representation of the working classes. In light of this, it is possible to regard the anti-austerity movement as a social movement mainly led by the middle classes. In addition, it is important to note that some spaces linked to art and culture, such as *La Tabacalera* Social Center in Madrid, functioned as incubators of the ideas and dynamics that led to the emergence of the movement.

The defence of democracy had united Spaniards under the flagship of national identity since Franco’s death. According to the dominant discourse, from 1978 to 2011, to discuss some aspects of the Constitution was equal to attacking Spanish democracy and was tantamount to being a “bad Spaniard” (“mal español”), referring here to the title of a song from the indie band Love of Lesbian that ironizes about the corruption of the political parties that defend the Constitution and a centralist view of Spain. However, the 15-M proposed that this pact should be revised around civic and political values (Rendueles 2013; Moreno-Caballud 2014). It was possible to be Spanish and, at the same time, to want to amend the democratic public space and create new rules.
As Sampedro and Llobera have pointed out, the 15-M was a “consensual dissent”: most Spaniards shared a “generalized dissent to the way the economic crisis is being handled while also demanding a regeneration of democracy beyond the limits established along the transition” (2014, 64). Their analysis of the data from sociological surveys reveals “cross-sectional support for the 15-M [. . . ] coming from people of different age groups, genders, employment status and levels of urbanization” (64). Three out of every four citizens sympathized with the 15-M’s arguments, and one out of every two agreed with its protest strategies (75). Interestingly, the autonomy claims of territories such as Cataluña, País Vasco, or Galicia have no space in the 15-M discussions. The “consensual dissent” was established while at the same time rejecting wider debates around autonomy and definitions of Spanish identity. The 15-M used the same slogans and sought the same changes in the different Spanish territories, and as such the movement was able to unify people around Spain under the proposal of a new country. But its impact was not to last. On June 15, 2011, activists protested in front of the Parliament of Catalonia and forced President Artur Mas to leave by helicopter. In October 2017, some of these activists supported Catalonia’s declaration of independence after agreeing with the parties that had approved the most aggressive austerity policies in the entire Spanish state.

Indie in Spain: From Individual Discontent to Collective Actions

The indie scene emerged in Spain in the late 1980s and early 1990s in various epicenters: Madrid, Barcelona, Asturias, Andalusia, and Castile and León (Barrera 2014). According to Cruz (2015), the young people involved came mainly from the middle classes and were the children of engineers, public authorities, executives, and high-ranking military officials. Thanks to their families, who held sufficient cultural and economic capital to allow them to study English and to travel, these young people became aware of foreign music record releases through magazines and fanzines. In this sense, the class composition was not very different from that of the seminal groups that created *La movida* (Val 2017).

From a political perspective, indie music was characterized by its refusal to take a political stand in its lyrics, a focus on more intimate aspects, and a preference for English lyrics. Teresa Iturrioz, bassist of Le Mans, observed the following: “Aventuras de Kirlian and Le Mans had a more aesthetic than activist conception of music. There was no social message. Music was the message. It also coincided in time with Basque Radical Rock and so I thought why not make more beautiful music?” (Cruz 2015, 219). As mentioned above, a song released by
Los Planetas in 1996, “Vuelve la canción protesta” (“The Protest Song Returns”), derogated a new generation of singer-songwriters who emerged in those years and reclaimed the protest song. It is an example of the attitude that indie bands had during the 1990s about the political claims of other musicians. Los Planetas’ song states:

These are the new prophets of the new revolution.
We are going to change the world with this song.
Politicians and bankers tremble,
the protest song returns.

The lyrics ironize about the power of political songs to frighten politicians and bankers. Interestingly, politicians and bankers were the ones blamed for the crisis almost twenty years later during the anti-austerity movement.

From 2011 until the present, the debate around how music and musicians should be linked with politics has been revived in the Spanish public domain. An example of this is the book on indie and hipster culture by journalist Víctor Lenore, *Indies, hipsters y gafapastas* (2014), which notes that this culture is eminently elitist and that its discourse has been absorbed by the capitalist system. According to Lenore, the apoliticism of the indie scene, focused on talking about its inner world and without taking into account social problems, has helped the scene to be co-opted by major labels and the mainstream. On the other hand, the works of Peris Llorca (2015; 2018) try to challenge this vision: Spanish indie is a genre in which we can observe traces of the discontent generated by the false promise of young middle-class culture. According to Peris Llorca, that trace is to be found in songs that capture “a certain middle-class discontent that has to do with the frustration over the expectations about modernisation [. . .] the opposite of the euphoria caused by the exercise of modernity that characterised *La movida* of the 1980s” (2015, 137).

This is the discontent of a generation that is suffering the bitter side of neoliberalism: minimum wages, temporary contracts, mortgages, and the contradiction between the good life promised by their parents and their real life. This discontent emerges in the songs of indie bands through different themes: in the case of Surfin Bichos, it emerges through sordid references to a dark, crazy, foolish Spain that has been excluded and is falling behind (Peris Llorca 2018, 137). Los Planetas allude to discontent by articulating a view of drugs as “a response to that radical dissatisfaction, to that lack of something that cannot be named” (138). La Habitación Roja (The Red Room) problematize discontent and its exploration of individualism, failure, and the use of love as a lifesaver in storms (Peris Llorca 2015).
In previous work (Val and Fouce 2016), we have already explored the ways in which some social movements, such as the demonstrations against the Iraq War in 2003 and the protests outside the headquarters of the conservative People’s Party following the Madrid train bombings (known as the 11-M) in 2004, questioned the covenant on which the Transition Culture was based: politics doesn’t get into culture and culture doesn’t get into politics (Martínez 2012). In the early 2000s, some bands began to introduce political themes in their songs. La Habitación Roja, for example, introduced some accounts of the life of the minimum-wage earner (“Van a por nosotros”/“They’re after us,” 2005) and scathing and direct criticism of former Prime Minister José María Aznar for his involvement in the Iraq war (“Tened piedad del expresidente”/“Have mercy on the former President,” 2007). Aznar was also the target of criticism in Iván Ferreiro’s song “Ciudadano A” (“Citizen A,” 2005).

However, it was after the anti-austerity movement that political content was explicitly introduced in Spanish indie. Several groups wrote songs that connected with the anti-austerity movement’s criticism of bankers and, above all, the political class: Grupo de Expertos Solynieve (“La nueva Reconquista de Graná”/“The New Reconquest of Granada,” 2012); Niños Mutantes (“Caerán los bancos”/“Banks Will Fall,” 2012); Pony Bravo (“El político neoliberal”/“The Neoliberal Politician,” 2013); Love of Lesbian (“Mal Español”/“Bad Spaniard,” 2014); Amaral (“Ratonera”/“Mouse Trap,” 2014); and Supersubmarina (“Hasta que sangren”/“Until They Bleed,” 2014). In some cases, the critical attitude of these bands was temporary as they went back to previous themes in subsequent songs. In the case of other groups and solo artists, political issues were to stay. We can even talk about the emergence of groups like León Benavente, Maronda, Las Odio and Siete70, which emerged within the indie scene with a political dimension intrinsic to their lyrics.

The support of feminism is one of the discursive lines that characterized the political states of indie music from 2011. In recent years, feminism has been gaining visibility in Spain, thanks to the #MeToo movement, the general feminist strike of March 8, 2018, and the protests in Pamplona against the sentence given to the five men (la Manada, the Pack) accused of gang-rapeing a woman at the running of the bulls festival in Pamplona. (They were found guilty of sexual abuse rather than the more serious offence of rape.) For example, in “Hoy la bestia cena en casa” (“Today the Beast Has Dinner at Home,” 2018), singer-songwriter Zahara criticizes the Spanish liberal parties that support surrogacy: “If you are so brave, lend me your belly. Sell me your sisters’ newborns.”

Two paradigmatic cases stand out within this politicization of the indie scene. The first one is Asturian musician Nacho Vegas, a former member of key bands
in the emergence of the Spanish indie scene (Manta Ray and Eliminator Jr) who then began a career as an electric singer-songwriter. His records explore the personality of the damned and the addict with dark, tortuous texts. But from 2011 onward, his discourse began to change through songs such as “Cómo hacer crack” (“How to Make Crack”), a single in which he, metaphorically, addresses the social ruptures taking place in Spanish society. In 2014, Nacho Vegas released the album Polvorado, in which the political discourse becomes more explicit, connecting with the tradition of anti-Franco singer-songwriters. The album includes songs with labor-movement mottos and Marxist reminiscences. It was strongly criticized\textsuperscript{11} on the basis that “he lost his lyricism to write pamphlets [. . . ] and reject velvet melodies in order to create easy music” (Rodríguez Lenin 2014). This album also reflects a community feeling characteristic of the anti-austerity movement in phrases such as “they want us in solitude, they will have us together.” His following work, an EP titled Canciones populistas (Populist Songs, 2015), delves into that theme through a cover of a Phil Ochs’ song (“Love Me, I’m a Liberal”), which is adapted to the Spanish political context. The political attitude of this musician is not only reflected in his songs but also in his relationship with the record industry, since he produces his music himself. Moreover, in his concerts he criticized the banks that were evicting citizens and strongly supported the foreclosure association Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH, Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), which was linked to the anti-austerity movement.\textsuperscript{12}

From the point of view of the construction of a discourse that appeals to the “us” (the citizens) versus the “them” (the banks and politicians), the evolution of the band Vetusta Morla is also worthy of analysis. Morla’s lyrics convey complaints and denounce social problems, but in a veiled manner, much in the same way as other indie bands did, according to Peris Llorca (2018). It is not until the band’s third album, La deriva (Adrift, 2014), when the political discourse becomes crystal-clear.\textsuperscript{13} An example of this is the title song for the album, whose lyrics refer to the lack of direction and the loss of points of reference in the context of social crisis. The narrative voice in this song evolves from the first-person to the third-person plural: “We will have to find a solution / May our fate not measure us up.” On that same album, in the song “Golpe maestro” (“Masterstroke”), a clear reference to banks and politicians, Morla once again alludes to collective action as a form of hope in the context of crisis. The possibility of identifying and punishing the people responsible remains open after acts of corruption and larceny were committed: “It was a perfect robbery, except for this: we still have our throat, fists and feet left. It wasn’t a masterstroke, they left a trail, they can run now. Thirst is back,” concluded the song.
10. Indie Music as a Controversial Space on Spanish Identity

Their appeal to common and collective experience is an example of the political evolution of the indie scene and the middle classes in Spain. At the beginning of the indie scene, the media ridiculed the collective efforts of other music scenes to address political conflicts (Lenore, 2014). The indie musical discourse transmits a diffuse malaise lived individually and without considering its causes. However, in the anti-austerity movement the middle classes became aware of the real causes of their problems and realized that relief would only come from collective mobilizations and not from individual actions.

In this sense, the emergence of bands such as La Maravillosa Orquesta del Alcohol (La M.O.D.A.), which has become established in the indie scene in recent years and has reflected its evolution, is very important. The band formed in Burgos, in inland Spain, and is characterized by the fact that its lyrics condemn politicians’ abandonment of rural areas. Its pessimistic songs address social problems, such as the exodus of Spanish youth, always from a community perspective. In fact, the aesthetic of the seven members of the band is reminiscent of construction workers. The band’s songs are full of chants and call-and-response techniques in which all members collaborate. In turn, the band has been influenced by folk, rock, indie, punk, and has collaborated with rap and hip-hop groups, in an amalgam that overcomes the differences and resistances between the music scenes that characterized Spanish music of the 1990s. Such an eclectic band would not have been possible in Spain prior to the anti-austerity movement. This politicization of the scene has not been well received by music critics, nor by other music scenes, who believe that this shift is not authentic but rather an opportunistic attempt to be involved in a movement that for a time became “cool” (Rodríguez Lenin 2014).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have sought to establish the connections between the life experiences of the middle-class youth in Spain and their musical expressions. Spanish national identity in the years following the Transition to Democracy has been related to the consolidation of the middle classes and urban life. This identity gravitates around the ideas of modernity and cosmopolitanism, which were related to the affluence from the 1980s onwards. The basis for this promise of affluence has been Spain’s integration with Europe and the neoliberal economic policies centered around consumption. Cultural identity during the years of democracy has been constructed as a result of the “culture of transition” in which politics and culture should be separate realms.
The occupation of Puerta del Sol and other Spanish squares has confronted this “culture of transition,” a consequence of the failure to uphold the promise of affluence due to austerity politics. 15-M’s demands, heavily supported by Spaniards of all ages, occupations, music genres, and economic backgrounds, were temporarily an attempt to unify the nation under a “new deal” that sought to redefine the basis of national identity. Indie bands, whose members come mainly from middle classes, have turned their songs toward social and political issues in the wake of the politicization of Spanish society that followed the 2008 crisis and austerity policies. Indie songs already anticipated the unrest of a generation that in 2011 occupied city squares to propose a new identity around new values and new narratives of the past.

Notes

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1. The Spanish Transition to Democracy (la Transición) refers to the period following the Franco regime in which Spain gradually moved towards the consolidation of a democratic, parliamentary system (1975–1982).

2. We use the term “soundtrack” to emphasize the connections between the social and political environment and the music that was perceived as being related to this historical moment, not just because of its “sound,” but also because of the shared values expressed by the semiotics of genre (Fabbri 1981). The connections between indie music and the 1990s as a historical period are extensively explored by González Férriz (2020).

3. All translations from Spanish are by the authors.

4. During the Transition several social movements emerged in cities such as Madrid or Barcelona, which sought improvements to the social conditions of working-class neighborhoods (Pérez Quintana and Sánchez León 2008).

5. Basque Radical Rock (Rock radikal vasco) was a very successful movement inspired by punk bands such as The Clash and was linked with the left-wing nationalist parties of the Basque Country.

6. In 1993, the Spanish Central Bank dismissed the Board of Directors of Banesto bank because its risky practices made its clients unable to retrieve their money. Mario Conde, Banesto CEO, was the incarnation of the yuppie model in Spain until his incarceration.

7. The media coverage of the case and its impact on Spanish society is addressed extensively in the documentary The Alcàsser Murders (Bambú Producciones and Netflix 2019).


9. For a chronological account of this scene, see Cruz (2015).

10. As David Hesmondhalgh (1999) has explained, the contradictions of the indie industry are enormous, and the Spanish scene is a good example of that.
10. Indie Music as a Controversial Space on Spanish Identity

11. See the review of the album and the interview published by Rockdelux 327.
13. For an audiovisual analysis of the band’s music videos, see Fouce and Val (2017).

References

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