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Sounds of War: Popular Music in the United States
during the Vietnam War.

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ABSTRACT

The Vietnam War was the first conflict in the United States in which a large part of the population expressed its opposition to the conflict since the beginning. This massive reaction against the war, as well as the position supporting it, were reflected in the music of the period. Some of these songs hit the Top 100 chart lists and they were played in the country and on the battlefield itself. The aim of this study is to analyze a selection of songs composed by American and Canadian musicians and released between 1965 and 1970. This analysis will be focused in the themes used, as well as the different linguistic elements that can be found. This would allow us to see the differences and the shared characteristics between the songs in both sides.

Keywords: Vietnam, war, music, protest, USA, Canada

La guerra de Vietnam fue el primer conflicto armado en Estados Unidos al que gran parte de la población se opuso desde el primer momento. Esta masiva reacción contra la guerra, así como la postura a favor de ésta, fueron reflejadas en la música del momento. Algunas de estas canciones llegaron a ser número uno en las tablas de éxitos y a ser reproducidas tanto en el país como en el campo de batalla. En este trabajo se analizará una selección de canciones populares entre los años 1965 y 1970 compuestas por cantantes estadounidenses y canadienses. Este análisis se centrará en la elección de temas en las canciones, así como en los diferentes elementos lingüísticos. Esto nos permitirá ver las diferencias y características en común entre las canciones de ambos bandos.

Palabras clave: guerra, Vietnam, música, protesta, Estados Unidos, Canadá

INDEX

1. Introduction	2
2. Doves: Music against the War	4
2.1. War as a Business.....	5
2.2. Inequity of the Draft.....	9
2.3. Generation Gap between Father and Son.....	13
3. Hawks: Music Supporting the War.....	17
3.1. Music against Protesters.....	17
3.2. War as Heroic Duty.....	22
3.3. How war Affects Families.....	25
4. Conclusion.....	30
5. Works Cited.....	32

1. Introduction

Music is a universal language: it connects people from different religions, ages, races or nationalities. Music is it also believed to be older than words, which makes it one of the oldest ways of communication in the world. It is usually considered as a sort of entertainment but it can also be used as a political weapon. Phil Ochs, a folk musician believed in the power of music to move people and to share his political thoughts: "one good song with a message can bring a point more deeply to more people than a thousand rallies" (Petrus and Cohen 242). During the Vietnam War, music reached an important position as a medium to communicate messages both against and in favor of the conflict.

To understand the context of the Vietnam War we have to go back to the end of the World War II, when Vietnam was a French colony. In 1946, a war between France and Viet Minh — the League for the Independence of Vietnam — began. This war is called the First Indochina War, in which the Vietnamese communists started a guerrilla war performed by farmers that lasted nine years in order to gain independence from France. This situation lasted until the International Geneva Conference, in 1954, where the country was divided in two parts. North Vietnam was ruled by the Viet Minh and his leader Ho Chi Minh, whereas the South was ruled by Emperor Bảo Đại and then by his Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm. This agreement was not supported by the United States of America, China, or the Soviet Union, who fought in different sides during the war. A communist force — the Viet Cong or the National Liberation Front for Southern Vietnam — started to fight in the South against the anti-communist forces. In 1963, it seemed that communists have some opportunities to have the power in South Vietnam. For this reason, the United States of America started to send a big number of troops in order to fight them back. It started with a little number of troops, until the American Army started to be attacked and, in 1965, the Johnson's government decided to be truly involved in the conflict.

American citizens had different positions relating to this war. Some people were afraid that, if the Viet Cong were able to win the war, the predictions of the so-called "domino theory" would come true. This theory feared that if communism won in a

country, this would cause a chain reaction and its neighbors would be threatened to have the same end. Other people were against the involvement of the United States in the conflict: either because they did not believe in “domino theory”, because they did not like the fact that American youth were drafted to fight in Vietnam, or just because they thought that America had not right to intervene in another country.

Music was important to spread singer’s opinions about the war, not only among the population of the United States thanks to radio and vinyl recordings, but also in Europe, and even on the battlefield in Vietnam. Those who supported the war were called hawks, and those against it were called doves. The reason is that the first ones are predators and attacks other animals, while the latter are the symbol of peace. In this war each of them had a powerful singing while standing up for their ideals.

The aim of this study is to make a selection of songs, both against and in favor of the Vietnam War, in order to analyze the topics they deal with and their different characteristics. This selection will be focused in those songs that were written and released between 1964 and 1970 because this was the period in which America participated actively in the war. For this reason, in that period of time, American population took an active role expressing their ideas about the conflict. In order to narrow this selection, only American and Canadian singers will be considered, no matter their musical style. Finally, this study will analyze songs that either reached the Top 100 hit list or were popular among the population.

2. Doves: Music against the War

One of the differences between the Vietnam War and those conflicts that took place before is that this is the first time when there is a bigger number of protest songs than of those supporting the conflict. Some of these songs were not only against the war, but they even advocated to overthrow the actual political system. This is connected with the type of society existing in this period. The society after the World War II was a conformist society where everybody wanted to have the perfect house and appliances because it was the role transmitted by TV. This view will change in the 60s when a culture of protest and non-conformism will take its place, and music will reflect this change. This revolution started with the African-American Civil Rights Movement and the women's liberation front, and these movements will be often connected with the anti-war protests.

Music became important because it was not only broadcast in the United States of America, but also in the Republic of South Vietnam through the Armed Forces Radio — FTRS —, where soldiers could listen to the hits on the music charts. However, as this radio was part of the military, there was a kind of censorship. However, in the 1960s technology was enough developed to play recorded music everywhere, and that made possible for soldiers to listen to harder protest songs in music tapes. These ones were brought to the war by the soldiers themselves, or sent by the family through the mail. It is also important to highlight that most of the soldiers in Vietnam were very young, the average age being nineteen years old. This fact helped rock music, very popular among young people, to spread among the troops.

The fact that music could be played everywhere during this period created an important connection between music and war. In fact, as Andresen establishes in his book *Battle Notes* (17), the *New York Times* described the conflict as “our first rock and roll war.” Due to this connection, musical references became part of the battlefield slang: for example, “Rock-and-roll” substituted for “lock and load,” referring to the procedure for readying the M-16 for firing or for switching the weapon from semiautomatic to automatic fire,” (Tucker 783) and “[...] C-47s served as designed and also as the first

gunship -the AC-47 or "Puff the Magic Dragon, [named after a popular song by Peter, Paul and Mary.]" (Globalsecurity).

There are multiple ways to divide protest songs: by date, country, use of different linguistic elements such sarcasm, etc. In this study, songs will be divided according to the topic they deal with.

2.1. War as a Business.

There is a wide number of songs dealing not only with the Vietnam War as a conflict, but also considering it as an economic and political business at the expense of human lives. This thought has its reason in the fact that this was not a necessary war for the United States, and that, in order to be able to fight in Vietnam, there was a need for weapons, aircrafts, and, after the war, for health care for the soldiers.

Phil Ochs was one of the most popular songwriters of the folk revival of the 1960s and he wrote a large number of songs not only against the war but also about civil rights, labor conditions, the death penalty and political corruption. He is famous for his protest music and antiwar activity related to the Vietnam War. His most famous song, released in 1965 by Elektra Records is "I ain't Marching Anymore." This song also became very popular during the Moratorium to end the war in 1969.

The song is a passionate denunciation of war as a worthless cause. There is no direct blame in it and Ochs uses irony. He also invokes to the listener's value system. The song relates the story of a soldier who has been fighting in every American war since 1812, where America started to grow as a country and to spread across the West; this was also the first time that blood started to be split by Americans. Then, he enumerates more wars: a thousand fights against Indians and in the Little Big Horn, the Mexican-American war, the Civil War, the World War I, which was supposed to end all wars, and the World War II. The list of battles, which seems endless, emphasizes the number of wars America has been involved into. Also, the soldier, after telling us which wars he took part in, adds

that by participating in these battles he was part of the violence inherent in them and in the loss of life as a result, and because of this, he decides to stop marching.

In the chorus, Ochs accuses the old people, the policy makers of starting wars and never risking their own lives, whereas the young men are those who die in battle. He also questions if the price of these military victories has been too high. In the last verse Ochs also says that it does not matter how you want to call the choice to stop marching “call it peace or call it treason, call it love or call it reason” (Ochs “I ain’t Marching Anymore”). If to restore the peace it is necessary to commit treason, maybe it is worth it.

The song uses the first person, which is very common to find in American folk songs. “In singing first-person lyrics, one identifies with the discursive or narrative voice, and so the characterization of the narrator is the stage for the construction of political positions” (James 127).

Another popular song against the war — although it was never on the top of the charts — is “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die-Rag” by Country Joe & the Fish, and it was released in 1967 by Vanguard Records. This song is a satire about the position of the US government towards the Vietnam War and the interest of the military industry in the conflict.

The first verse explains how Uncle Sam — which is a personalization of America — is in need of strong men to go to Vietnam and it encourages young people to stop studying and to join the fight. This refers to the fact that there was a forced conscription in order to send young men to war: if young people were studying at the time, it was not mandatory for them to join the draft.

In the next verse there is a warning to the military industry talking about how much money they can make supplying the army with weapons, bringing the attention to the fact that the support for the Vietnam War has an economic interest: “There's plenty good money to be made by supplying the Army with the tools of the trade, just hope and pray that if they drop the bomb, they drop it on the Viet Cong” (Country Joe & the Fish

“I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die-Rag”). The third verse is addressed to the Army and deals with the causes of the war: to battle communism and to restore peace, although both of them are only reachable by killing and bombing Vietnam.

The last verse is addressed to the population, especially to conservative people and to a conformity generation of parents that support war and send their own children to death. They also mock them saying that they should hurry and send their sons to battle as soon as possible if they want to be the first ones in their neighborhood to have their son back in a coffin.

The chorus starts with a counting march that reminds of military music. After counting the band asks the reason why they are going to fight, answering that they do not care at all, and that they only know that they have to go to Vietnam: “don’t ask me, I don’t give a damn, next stop is Vietnam” (Country Joe & the Fish “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die-Rag”). After that, the counting continues and Country Joe and The Fish say that there is no time to think about why they are fighting there. Finally, they add that they are going to die in a cheerful, ironic way. This part talks about how soldiers can be seen as puppets of the government because they are going to fight no matter the reason and they are indifferent towards death. This song does not criticize soldiers for their duty in Vietnam but they are rather seen as victims of the people in power: the government, the industry that makes profit from the war, and the leaders in US military. The use of a variety of sounds effects, such as horns, especially during the chorus gives the song a dark humor sense. The song has an informal tone and it addresses the listener directly.

However, not all the composers were so sympathetic towards soldiers, and some of them considered them to be the basis of the war and that without them there would be no battles. This thought is reflected in the folk song “Universal Soldier” written by Buffy Sainte-Marie and released in 1964 by Vanguard Records. She is a Canadian-American Cree singer focused on problems of Indigenous peoples of the Americas, although she also wrote about war and religion issues. This song was very popular in the United Kingdom thanks to the cover released by the British folk singer Donovan in 1965, which reached the No. 5 on the charts.

“Universal Soldier” is a pacifist song who highlights the responsibility of the individual instead of just blaming the government as we saw in the previous songs. Truth is that this song does not deal only with the Vietnam War but, as the title suggests, the topic is more universal and general. The song starts with a portrait of this soldier. There is a discrepancy in heights, from "five foot two to six feet four" (Sainte-Marie “Universal Soldier”) in order to indicate that this soldier can be anybody, with a wide range of physical features. After that, Sainte-Marie explains that “he fights with missiles and with spears” (“Universal Soldier”), that is, he either fights in the present, with a variety of technological advances, or in the past with more traditional weapons. The act of fighting with spears can also be applied to the present, but in under-developed countries. After that, she establishes a discrepancy of ages: men included in the draft had to be at least eighteen years old, but some of them could lie to be accepted as volunteers while being under age for different reasons such as avoid problems at home or in order to get a steady job.

In the second verse, Sainte-Marie states the soldier's religion, listing some of the main religions in the world. This selection can be a bit odd in our period because Islam does not appear in the list, although the songwriter decided to list Jainism, which is a non-violent religion from India. She also addresses the moral values of the soldiers saying that they know they should not kill people but that they are aware that war consists in killing the enemy.

In the next two verses she explains the different reasons this universal soldier has to fight. First, Sainte-Marie gives an enumeration of different countries to fight for, and finishes saying that fighting is not the way to end wars. After this, she says that it does not matter in which side you are fighting because both of them are the same. She also adds that although the soldier can believe that he fights for peace and that he is in a war that he has not started, in the end, he is the one who is going to decide who to kill.

The fifth verse in the song explains the importance of soldiers in the war, how battles are won just because there is an army, and how without them, Hitler and Caesar, two generals from different eras, would not win anything. The soldier is this “weapon of

the war” (Sainte-Marie “Universal Soldier”), the one who is going to die in battle and the one who can stop wars, because without these soldiers there is no army. In the last verse, Sainte-Marie says that this soldier is the one to blame for war and that fighting is not the way to stop war.

There is a wide use of repetition in the song, a use of lists and of contrast between different elements such as “Democracy” and “Reds” or “live” and “die.” There is also an emphasis in “he” which is repeated throughout the verse, presenting the problem as something external to the singer, and giving the song a kind of objectivity. This song however, does not reflect the fact that not all the soldiers fight because they feel it as the right or patriotic thing to do. Some of them were drafted to the war and they went against their will.

2.2. Inequity of the Draft

Conscription, also known as draft, was the system used to pick young men able to fight and forced them to join the army to be sent to war. The only way to skip this selection or “to dodge the draft” was either going to jail, or to claim physical, mental or religious reasons. However, some of these men decided to desert from the army. This was encouraged to the fact that “of the 210,000 accused offenders, most had their cases dropped; of the 8,750 convicted, 5,500 received either suspended sentences or probation, with 3,250 being imprisoned” (O’Sullivan 681). This made that “by 1972 the desertion rate was 70 per thousand compared to 25 per thousand during the Korean War” (O’Sullivan 681). In fact some famous people, like Muhammad Ali, refused to be conscripted alleging religious beliefs. The government did not recognize him as a conscientious objector and he was found guilty of draft evasion, which cost him a boxing title and four years without being authorized to fight.

Although “Eve of Destruction” is not just a protest against the war itself but against society, it is included in this section because this song has one of the strongest statements against the draft. This song was written by P. F. Sloan but it was sang by Barry

McGuire and released in 1965 by Dunhill Records. “Eve of Destruction” hit No.1 on the US *Billboard*'s Hot 100 chart, and No.3 on the OCC's UK Singles Chart.

The first verse deals with the Vietnam War and the violence that the Eastern world is suffering. It also highlights the hypocrisy of the draft selection in the United States to select young people to go to battle because at eighteen years of age they are valid to kill and give their lives for their country, but they cannot be decided in politics until they are twenty-one, which is the age for voting. This was changed in 1971, when the voting age was lowered from twenty-one to eighteen. He also addresses the hypocrisy of this selection, as the soldier can even be a pacifist and have a strong position against violence but he will be forced to fight no matter his ideals. In the last line of the verse Sloan says that “even the Jordan river has bodies floatin” (Sloan “Eve of Destruction”). This means that even in one of the sacrest rivers in the world there is a war: the called War over Water which was a series of confrontations that took place from November 1964 to May 1967 between Israel, Syria and Lebanon to control this river's drainage.

The second verse deals with the possibility of a nuclear war that will mean the end of the world, and emphasizes how the war has no sense if in the end the planet is destructed. In the third verse, the author expresses his frustration and anger for this situation and how this can be felt in his body reaction. He is also concerned about how it seems impossible to change the situation if you do not have political power. He also adds how Senators, who have that power, do not do anything to change the situation.

In the fourth verse Sloan explains how only with demonstrations it is impossible to change problems such as Racism when, as human race, we are behaving worse and worse with each other. He also shares his frustration as it seems that nothing makes sense in this world. In the fifth verse he explains that there is not only hate and problems in China, that seems far away, but also in Selma, Alabama, where there were three marches to protest against how black people had not the same voting rights as white people. This whole situation cannot be avoided even if you go to outer space, because when you come back this world will have the same problems. This part is a reference to the Gemini IV mission, which lasted four days in space — from 3rd to 7th June 1965.

The last verse talks about funerals, where you can hear the drums, and to feel pride because of what the dead fought for, but also disgraced because the loss of a family member or a friend is something people would prefer to avoid. The last part deals with society's hypocrisy, particularly the one related to religious people, and how they do not put in practice the things they believe in but they need to maintain their status and their decency in public.

More than the music, what is interesting in this song is McGuire's voice. He has a rough voice that becomes harsher as the song continues. This gives the song a feeling of outrage and anger. The use of low diction, as well as the fact that the singer addresses the listener directly, gives the song a conversational tone, which makes the message more direct and subjective. The different verses in the song are the singer's reply to what the listener is saying, which is stated in the chorus. In this part, there is a use of repetition to exaggerate the fact that the listener's opinion always remains the same. McGuire decided to release a new version of this song in 2012, with updated lyrics, criticizing how 45 years after the first version, we are still on the eve of destruction.

The next song does not share the anger of "Eve of Destruction." "Draft Dodger Rag" is a song written by Phil Ochs and it was released in 1965 by Elektra Records. This song tells the story of an American boy, a typical guy that believes in his country and in fighting communism. He says that he knows that it is better to be dead than red. This is a Cold War slogan in which red represents communism because it is the main color in its flag. Although he agrees with this statement when he is chosen on the draft he lists the reasons why he is not suitable to serve in the army.

In the chorus he addresses his sergeant using an informal word, sarge. This can be either to make this superior closer to him or to show that this soldier is not ready to follow the strict military life. Then, he states his age in order to cause pity to this sergeant, because he has the minimum age to be drafted. After this, he says that he has serious health problems because he had a rupture spleen and that means that he had to go into surgery, making him carry a purse all the time. He also states that he has bad eyesight and flat feet, which are not the best characteristics to fight in a war. This soldier is also

asthmatic and he explains that this problem is getting worse with time. Then, he asks the sergeant to consider that he still has a career to develop, a girlfriend and an invalid aunt to take care of. This young man also says that he is intelligent and he is studying and working in a defense plant. With this last statement, he is not only studying to be useful to the society in a future, but he is also working to support his country's army during the war.

In the next verse he says that he has problems with his back and that he is allergic to flowers and bugs in general. After this he explains that he can get epileptic seizures when he hears strong noises, and that this could happen if a bombshell hits the ground. He also confesses to being addicted to a large number of drugs. He is sorry about having so many problems and he adds that he is not flexible enough to touch his own toes and that he can hardly touch his knees. Finally, he says that he is not suitable to be in the army because maybe when he gets nervous because the enemy is close he would probably sneeze, revealing his position to the Vietnamese.

In the last verse this soldier states his hate for Chou En Lai, who was the Chinese prime minister, but he says that this sergeant should notice that he is not suitable to go to fight communism. This soldier encourages the sergeant to have a good time, and to kill a lot of Vietnamese for him. Finally, he says that if sometime there is a war without blood he will be the first to go.

The song has a happy tone which matches the irony reflected on the lyrics. Although the song could make listeners feel really pity for this soldier because his health seems to be terrible, they could notice that everything is a joke because it seems unusual that somebody could have all these problems at the same time.

“Fortunate Son” by Creedence Clearwater Revival is a song written by its lead singer and guitarist, John Fogerty. The song hit No. 14 on the US *Billboard's* chart. It was released in 1969 by Fantasy Records and it deals with the problem of the inequity of the draft, as it seems that the sons of important people were able to avoid this conscription. This was not only a problem in that time, but also had relevance a few years later when

some politicians, like Bill Clinton, were accused of using their connections to avoid fighting in the Vietnam War. This was an embarrassing issue in Mr. Clinton campaign for president. This song also reminds the listeners that the United States was not a fair, classless society, and that there were people more fortunate than other. For this reason, “Fortunate Son” is not only a song against the war, but also a working class anthem that shows that American society is not classless, and that there are a number of social class inequalities.

The first verse relates how some people are patriotic. This can also be related to the first soldiers that went to war as volunteers and that were glorified for doing the right thing. Then, they refer to “Hail to the Chief”, the Presidential Anthem of the United States. This song is used when the President appears in public. Then they say that when this happens, “they point the cannon at you” (Fogerty “Fortunate Son”). They are using this symbol to explain that when the power decides to join the war, you, the listener who are not part of this fortunate people, are the one who will fight.

The second verse deals with the status of wealth and how the rich have privileges settled by themselves but when it is time to pay taxes the working class has to pay as well. The third verse explains the status of the soldier and how using the symbol of “star spangled eyes” some people are very patriotic, but you, the blue-collar worker, are the one who is send to war. Then, the singer says that when you ask this powerful people how much you should give, they will answer: more! This might refer to an issue about money, and how it is necessary to raise taxes for the war effort. This money will come from the working class. In the chorus, the singer complains about not being one of the fortunate people because he is not the son of a senator, a millionaire or of somebody serving in the army. The use of repetition in the chorus makes stronger the complaint for being not a fortunate son.

2.3. Generation Gap between Father and Son

The anti-war movement was mostly composed by the youth. This part of the society could find the opposition of their parents, more conservative and not so hopeful

about the results of their actions. This called “generation gap” between parents and sons could lead to arguments in the same family. This topic was used not only in the songs against the war, but also in some of those supporting it such as “Open Letter to My Teenage Son” that will be analyzed in the next part of this paper.

“Home of the Brave” is a song written by Jody Miller and released in 1965 by Capitol Records. It reached the No. 25 in *Billboard*’s Hot 100 chart. This song criticizes how in America, who is proclaimed the land of the free by its citizens, freedom of speech or expression is not granted. Miller tells the story of a school student in order to illustrate this fact.

This student is expelled from school because he wears long hair and he is not allowed to come back until he has a haircut. The Parent-Teacher Association also criticizes him for being different and for not looking like the others. In the chorus, Miller addresses America as an entity, emphasizing that the country is the home of the brave and the land of the free. This is how America is described in “The Star-Spangled Banner”, United States' anthem. This is a clever way to protest against the forbidding of freedom of expression, as she implies that this is a right every American citizen should have, not matter if he is against the war or supporting the government. Miller adds that this young man should be free to decide who he wants to be. After the chorus, Miller tells us how the other kids laugh at this young man for the way he dresses and for the way he wears his hair. This boy was even beaten by his schoolmates for being different, and Miller explains how this mates cannot ignore that he is not like them.

After a chorus repetition, the singer turns the song into something more personal saying that this situation really burns her up. She cannot believe that this young man is put down only because he is the only one in the whole town who is brave enough to express his own ideas. She also says that instead of beating him up, people should try to understand him. Finally, the chorus is sang again and after that there is a repetition of the last line “why won't you let him what he wants to be” (Miller “Home of the Brave”) sang by a chorus and right after that Miller states that this young man has hurt nobody, that he is just different, and that people should understand him. Miller uses irony in the entire

song, highlighting how hypocrite is to be persecuted for being brave expressing a different opinion in a country which, according to their national anthem, is the home of the brave and the land of the free.

A song that shows this clash of generations within the same family is “The Great Mandella (The Wheel of Life).” This song was written by Peter Yarrow and performed by Peter, Paul and Mary. It was released in 1967 by Warner Bros. Records. This song shows a pessimistic view about the end of those who are fighting for a change. The subject of this song is a fight between an intolerant father and one of his sons.

In the first verse this father explains that he told his son not to protest and to do his job like a man. His son replied that he was not going to kill another human being. The father then complains about how it seems that this son thinks he is better than his brother, who died on duty. He also states that it is not fair that his son behaves in this way because he was a good father and he educated his son well. We understand that the job they are talking about is joining the army and going to war.

The chorus states that you have to take a position in the wheel of life, and that human lives are small when they are compared with time itself. Then, it is said that you have to choose a side, you can either win or die but that in the end, losing only means you lose your life, and you are not going to change anything.

After this, the father advises his son that if he does not go to war he will end in jail. He encourages him to tell the jailer that there is no need to have food because he is going to fast as protest until the war is over. Then, this father criticizes how his son thinks he is a martyr because he is ready to die for being against the war. However, the father does not share this point of view: he thinks his son is a coward and that his opposition to the war and his hunger strike is just a game. He also adds that there is nothing his son can do to stop the war, as it is something unchangeable that has been going on for thousands of years.

After a chorus repetition, he addresses the listener to tell the people that they are safe now because this prisoner is dead, and that is the reason why his accusations were not valid. The father celebrates that now people are free, and that they can either hate, kill or end the world because they are not guilty, the one who was crazy was the one against the war.

The song is narrated only by one of the sides in the fight, the father. This fact and the use of the first person makes the song very subjective. This song could be used both in support and against the war, because the message is too pessimistic to motivate people to protest. We can say that it is a protest song just because Peter, Paul and Mary were a trio who performed songs in favor of the Civil Rights and against the war. They even sang in the Civil Rights march in 1963 in Washington D.C. which shows that they were liberal rather than conservative.

3. Hawks: Music Supporting the War

Although the vast majority of songs dealing with the Vietnam War were against it, that does not mean that this was the only position towards this conflict. In fact, there are many songs that supported the war and that even hit the number one in the music charts. However, the most extended opinion states that:

Although polls showed Americans almost evenly divided in their opinions of the war, very few singers followed in the footsteps of Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler, whose romanticized “Ballad of the Green Berets” number one in 1966. Doves dominated the musical debate on Vietnam (Werner 114).

In this chapter, we will see not only that this statement is not true, but also that most of the songs analyzed hit the charts. This could be not so extended in protest music because in war periods there is always some kind of censorship, although most of the time these restrictions did not come from the government but from the music label itself.

3.1. Music against Protesters

One of the topics that appears in this music is the critique against the population that was against the war in the United States. People supporting the war thought that protesters, who were mostly young people, should be fighting in the battlefield instead of carrying signs and having demonstrations in college campuses. For this reason, many composers believed that the enemy in this war was not Vietnam itself, but rather this American generation that was against government policies, and that, in their opinion, could be considered antipatriotic.

“Day for Decision” is a song written by Johnny Sea and released in 1966 by Warner Bros Records. This song shows an apocalyptic view of the world — or America —, very similar to the picture we can find in “Eve of Destruction.” However, this apocalypse has different causes. In “Day for Decision” the problem is not the war itself, but America and its people. This song hit the No. 14 in the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart.

The first thing that catches the listener's attention is that the song is a recitation with some music in the background, but the person speaking does not sing. The song starts with a recitation accompanied with a guitar. Sea starts commenting that the other day he heard somebody saying that America is in real trouble. In this way he starts the song with an external opinion and from that point on he develops his argument. The reason to use somebody's opinion is that in this way there is a sense of objectivity, although the whole song deals with the singer's point of view. Sea says that he agrees with this statement and he uses the symbol of United States' flag, the Old Glory, to reinforce this idea. He says that the flag is really close to earth: this is something unthinkable in that country given that, according to the United States Code, the flag should never touch the ground, even when it is lowered, because it is considered disrespectful to the flag. He also highlights that America's embassies are being attacked, and that the country is fighting in various winless conflicts. These conflicts mean the loss of American lives in other countries and, although these men are dying for some ideals, it seems that people do not care about these principles anymore.

Then, a harmonica starts playing, accompanied by the guitar. Sea explains how America's trouble is not something that exists in Asia or in Cuba, but in America itself. The reason for this trouble is what he calls a disease, which is to protest either against the war itself in places such as San Francisco or even for black people's civil rights in the slums of Chicago.

After this, the harmonica sound disappears and Sea explains how America has reached this point. He says that there is no love for God, country and family anymore. And now that this changed, people behave in a different way: Americans do not salute the flag, do not pray in public or do not want to be seen in a town hall meeting. They do not want to be considered patriots because society has changed and this kind of thinking is old-fashioned. Moreover, now there is a new kind of pride, materialism, where you have to get married with the prettiest girl and to have a car and the biggest house. Sea also addresses the listener and encourages him or her to ask someone to sing "American the Beautiful", a patriotic song, in a party and to draw his or her own conclusions.

Then, the music stops to reinforce the importance of the next words. Sea says that America has not changed, people did. After this a sort of oriental music starts to play when he says that America's enemies know it. This influences the listener to think about Asia as the most important enemy, and the one he is referring to, although in the beginning of the song he already said that Cuba is an enemy too. Sea says that these enemies know that there is no need of fighting, they just have to wait until the country "fall[s] under the weight of its own corruption" (Sea "Day for Decision"). For this reason, he states that America worst enemy is America itself, the one who can destroy the country.

After this, patriotic music starts to sound. Sea highlights how America defeated the British Army during the American Revolutionary War and how America won the Second World War. He also criticizes that now there is a conformist attitude, letting anybody to solve America's problems, it does not matter who. This attitude allows Viet Cong to get stronger in the fight. He also says that all the philosophy about how is better to be red than to be dead is a disease in America. Because it kills its own spirit, letting communism spread in the country. Then, he explains that Democracy is frail and fragile and that it is "made of hope, prayer and Yankee ingenuity" (Sea "Day for Decision"). It is held together by a fourth-of-July flag-waving patriotism" (Sea "Day for Decision"). But he says that this patriotism is almost finished and that there is just a little remaining in the country. Then, Sea invites the listener to perform a little test: to venerate the flag and to sing a freedom anthem that every American citizen knows, although now it is considered as something old-fashioned. After this, a group of voices start to sing "America the Beautiful" and at the same time he recites the lyrics.

When the recitation finishes he says that if the listener feels a little pride inside and tears that come to his eyes that Sea will thank God, because the listener is still an American. He refers to the listener as mister, which indicates that for Sea the true patriots are men and no women. The song continues with the choir singing "America the Beautiful."

Another popular song by Merle Haggard was "Okie from Muskogee". This song was released in 1969 by Capitol Records. It reached the first position in the *Billboard's*

Hot Country Singles and the No. 41 in the *Billboard's* Hot 100 chart. Haggard complains about students' demonstrations singing about a college campus in Oklahoma where students behave correctly and do not criticize government.

The song starts with an explanation about how these students are different from those who are against the war. The students themselves say that they do not smoke marijuana or do drugs in Muskogee. The use of drugs was usually associated with hippies, which were part of a subculture that started in the 60s in US among young people. They were pacifists, so it was easy to find them in demonstrations against the war. Then, the students say that they do not burn draft cards, that they like to live according to the rules and in freedom. Burning draft cards was a symbolic way to protest not only against the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War, but also to protest against the government decision to perform compulsory conscriptions. Draft card burning were prohibited by law in 1965, but people continued damaging their cards. These students continue criticizing hippies from San Francisco, saying that they do not practice free love, they are clean and they cut their hair.

In the chorus these students say that they are proud to be an Okie, which is a person from Oklahoma, from the city of Muskogee. They explain that this city is a place where even boring people can have a good time. They also add that they still have "Old Glory", the American flag, waving in the courthouse because they are proud of their country, and that the best thrill they have is white lightning which is a type of illegal whiskey. Although is doubtful that Haggard thought about using this term to mean anything else, white lightning is also a way to call LSD.

Then, these students say that men still wear leather boots, not like hippies, which wear Roman sandals and beads. They say that football is the roughest thing in college, which is a way to say that there are no demonstrations where you can end beat by the police. They also add that they respect the Dean. However, in a college where students behave like the ones represented in this song, it is easy not to have a confrontation between the students and the Dean. However, if students want to protest and the Dean is against that it is easier to not respect the Dean's decisions.

“Okie from Muskogee” is sung by the students, and that gives it a kind of subjectivity, although it is very difficult to have a large group of people thinking in the same way. The song seems to describe something very unreal: if people in America always thought like these students, in a conformist way, it is likely that America would not be a Democracy today.

Another popular song by Haggard was “The Fightin' Side of Me”, released by Capitol Records in January 1970. Just like “Okie from Muskogee”, this song reached the first position in the Billboard’s Hot Country Singles in February and the No. 92 in the Billboard’s Hot 100 chart. The main topic in this song is the people that protest against the war.

At the beginning of the song Haggard says that he hears people criticizing America and the way government deals with problems and conflicts. He also complains about those saying how these problems should be solved. However, Haggard explains that he understands that not everybody can think in the same way, and that this people have the right to stand up for their beliefs. However, he states that when they criticize America, they are criticizing him as well. In the chorus, Haggard says that he is taking this criticism as something personal, because when protesters complain about how America works they are complaining about the soldiers that fought and died for their country.

After that, he says “If you don’t love it, leave it, let this song I’m singin’ be a warning” (Haggard). That is, after saying that he understands that everybody cannot have the same opinion and that they should defend it, Haggard threatens them. He says that this song is a warning because next time, he could be able to do something worse than just writing a song. In short, in his opinion you can protest against the war, but not here, and if you want to protest in America, you will have to deal with the consequences.

Then he says that he read how a crazy man said that he did not believe in fighting. Haggard asks himself how the country is going to continue to be free if people do not fight. This has to do with an American expression, “Freedom is not free”, that is freedom

has a cost, and it has to be earned by fighting. After this, he says that American protesters really like their country and their lifestyle but still they think that people should live in a different way.

This song could be considered to be slightly in favor of freedom of speech at the beginning, but Haggard's opinion is more conservative: freedom of speech is perfect if you think like I do. The use of low diction as well as the first person singular gives a conversational tone to the song, which helps to state the singer's opinions more directly.

3.2. War as Heroic Duty

A topic that is always present in the culture built around a war is the soldier seen as a hero. In the Vietnam War, where a large part of the population criticized the American involvement in this war, this topic was present and it had an important function: to recruit young volunteers to go to war. However, this idea of the soldier as a hero only lasted during the conflict. When Vietnam War was over and veterans returned to the United States, some of them even amputated or with mental diseases, they only found hate. Part of the population considered them to be baby killers and they were isolated from society.

One of the most famous patriotic songs from the Vietnam War is the "Ballad of the Green Berets." This is not only because it talks about an elite special force in the army, but because it was recorded by one of its members: the Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler. This song was released in 1966 by RCA Records, and became a hit, reaching the top position on *Billboard's* Easy Listening chart and the second on *Billboard's* Country survey.

The song starts describing the soldiers from the Green Berets force are. Sadler says that they came from the sky, because they are parachutists. However, saying that these soldiers came from above the earth, Sadler gives them a status of superheroes or demigods. They have no fear and they jump from the plane and die if necessary. They are also very clear when they talk and do not like double meanings. The chorus describes how these men have silver wings: this is a badge that parachutists received when they

accomplish a certain number of jumps. The rest of the chorus says that there are a lot of people who want to become a Green Beret but that this force is the best, and only a few men are worthy to be one of them. This last statement makes them to look like super humans because only the best ones are allowed.

In the next verse, Sadler explains how these soldiers are prepared to survive in the wild and how they are trained to fight really close to the enemy day and night. Then, he says that this courage came for the Green Beret. In the next chorus there is a variation: one of these Green Berets died on duty, and his wife awaits at home. However, this is not a sad thing, because he gave his life for the people who need a savior, and explains the wish of this dead soldier. This last wish is that his son would be raised to be a Green Beret in a future. This song is an idealization of the Green Berets and its members. The message of the song tries to make joining the army appealing for young men, to test themselves and to try to be a part of this elite force.

There also were songs that elevated soldiers to the status of heroes, reminding us even of the Greek odes. One of these examples is the song "Private Wilson White" written by Marty Robbins. It was released in 1966 by Columbia Records and hit the No. 21 on the Hot Country chart. The song is not so much about how soldiers are heroes in the battlefield, but how some of them have a glorious, heroic death.

The song starts with the chorus, where it is stated how proud America is for this soldier and how the country proclaims him as a hero. Then, Robbins explains that one day on the battlefield, there was a platoon who was surrounded by the enemy. There were twenty soldiers and from there nineteen were paralyzed by fear. However, one of them was ready to give his life to save his partners.

Then, the song explains how this soldier, Wilson White, decided to save the rest of his platoon without hesitation. He ran through an open field while yelling for God and country. This lemma makes his death even more heroic because it highlights that he was doing that not only to save his platoon, but because of his religious and patriotic beliefs.

However, enemies saw him and, noticing his intentions, they shot him. This Private lost his rifle in this shooting, being unarmed.

He was hit by seven bullets in the chest, near the heart. The number seven could be chosen because it is a powerful number in religion. Due to this shooting the soldier falls to the ground. However, this did not stop this hero, who stands up and runs towards the enemy. The reason why he sacrificed himself this way was to focus the enemies' attention on him so the platoon could have a chance to escape, as they were pinned down by four machine guns.

Enemies kept firing at him but this wounded soldier continued towards the enemy in order to keep the vow he made to his platoon. This makes him even more heroic, because he is a man who would keep his word and honor no matter what. Although he was almost dead, he had the strength to pull the pin of his hand grenade and to throw it while screaming that he was dying for freedom.

This song tries to be an epic narration about one soldier. For this reason, we can find some elements from Epic Poetry in it. First, we have a large setting: the action takes place on a battlefield in an unspecified day in a land that we only know that it is far away. This does not indicate where the actions take place. We can think about Vietnam taking into account that this hero is from America and the year this song was written. However, the song could be suitable for wars taking place later on that century. There is also a hero, which represents the country's ideals: religion, land and freedom in this case. He also needs superhuman courage to perform his actions: this makes him different from the rest of the soldiers. The aim of the song is to remind young men that although it was possible to die on the battlefield, they could die as a hero and have their name remembered for generations.

The following song is a bit different because it was written by a Senator of the United States, Everett McKinley Dirksen. This song is "Gallant Men", which was released in 1967 by Capitol Records. The song is a patriotic recitation about the gallant men that fought and fight for their nation. It made No. 16 on the U.S. *Billboard* chart.

The song starts with Dirksen saying that from a large period of time there have been gallant men who have fought for his country. In particular he says that these men died so their country could be free. This is a recurrent idea in the music in favor of the war: men die defending their country from external threats. Then, he says that this is still happening nowadays, when these men know that somebody has to give their lives for their country, so they do.

These men are the people who built the nation because they fought so America could be free and live in Democracy. After this, he asks for a torch to light the sky so the nation can praise these men. He uses the torch because it is a symbol of liberty, and because one of the most popular American symbols, the statue of Liberty, carries one: this makes the symbol stronger. Finally, he says that the men are going to defeat tyrants and that these dictators should realize that they are not going to win as long as there is gallant men to fight back.

This song supports the war although the main argument, which is that brave men fight for their country, seems not appropriate for the Vietnam War. This war problem was not that people decided not to fight because they were cowards, but rather because they did not believe in the reasons behind the war.

3.3. How War Affects Families

It is common both in the music against the war and in the song supporting it to use a family in which two sons have different opinions towards the war. However, in the protest songs, these brothers are not going to change their mind about the conflict. This is not the case in Hawk's music, where the son against the war will realize how wrong he was.

“An Open Letter To My Teenage Son” is a song written by Victor Lundberg and released in 1967 by Liberty Records. This song was a Top 10 Hit in the same year. The

song, as the title suggest is a hypothetical letter from a conservative dead to a more liberal son.

The song is a word recitation while “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” — also known as “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory”—, which is an American patriotic song, can be heard in the background, first in an instrumental version, and when the end of the song is close a group of voices singing the chorus. The song is an answer to different questions that his son asked to him.

The song starts with the father answering the question from his son about what is his reaction to long hair and beards in young people. The father answers that it is not a bad thing per se, because great men like Washington or Lincoln had long hair and beards. For this reason, they can be a symbol of Independence and of everything which America means, in this way, this hair and beard can be a way to show the pride you have for your own country.

The singer also replies to the request from his son of being judge as an individual and not as just a teenager. The father agrees in that this is a reasonable request and asks him to do the same with the rest of the people. He highlights that in his own generation some people judge others by their race and explains that this was a wrong thing to do as believing that every teenager is only a drug addict and an alcoholic. He also encourages his son to judge humans on their own potential, and he will do the same.

Then, this father answers the question about God and if he is dead. The father says that each person should answer this question as an individual but that you can see that he exists in the nature. He also says that people from different generations had always tried to legislate morality, and that this is almost impossible. The reason is that new generations tend to go against the previous ones. For this reason, although young people think that God is dead, the next generation could be sure about the existence of God.

In the next verse, the father explains his position towards draft card burners. He says that in History there has always been wars, who were unfair and immoral, but

necessary. The father also highlights how all the rights and freedom that exist in America have a cost, and he says to his son that if he doubts that it is something not worthy to fight for, he should not be an American. Moreover, as America is a Democracy, if somebody does not believe that politicians can do their job, that person should not be able to vote. He adds that if the son does not recognize how America helped his father giving him a job and stability, this father would assume that the son is a failure. Finally, he says that the mother is going to love a son because she is a woman, but he can divide his thought and love both the son and his country. For this reason, he says that if the son decides to burn his draft card, he will burn his birth certificate, so he will not be his son from that moment on.

The song is very direct, and gives the listener a feel of being in a conversation. We only know the father's opinion but he introduces them telling us what his son asked before. In this way, there is a conversation between both characters, and we can also imagine the son's opinions, expressed in the questions the father utters.

The next song narrates a mother's mourning. This song is "The Tallest Tree", written by Bonnie Guitar in 1966 and it was released by Dot Records. It hit No.24 in the U.S. *Billboard's* Top 100 chart.

The song starts with this mother comparing her son's lives with trees. She explains how the growth of a man takes a whole life, just as the evergreen. After that she keeps the metaphor saying that her sons were her forest, and that she was proud of them. Then, the mother talks about Ben. He was her oldest son who grew like the redwood, proud and fearless. But he was called to serve his country during World War I and he died on duty. After that, she explains how her middle son, Dave grew as an oak tree. He was very strong but he had to abandon his home to fight in the Korean War, where he died.

Finally, she talks about Joe, her youngest son. She says that he used to comfort her saying that in order to keep a forest alive some trees have to die and fall. He also had to go to war and although the mother does not specify which one, from the time line we

can deduce that it was the Vietnam War. This conflict took away her son's life, who was her tallest tree as well.

The song shows a fatalistic view of a mother loss but there is no sense of outrage. She accepts that their sons were necessary at war and that they lost their lives for their country. This is also said in the song in Joe's words: some trees need to fall for the survival of the forest. This means that some men must die so the country can survive. The song uses symbolism to compare the trees with human lives. The fact that these men were the tallest trees makes them better than others, because that means that they were stronger.

This song was considered as a pro war song because the mother accepts that her sons had to die for their country, so other can be free. We also have to consider that it is strange that this woman had three sons in the thirty years that passed between World War II and the Vietnam War, and that they were all young by the time they were called to serve in the army.

Coming back to the topic where two sons have different opinions towards the war we can find the song "Ballad of Two Brothers", written by Autry Inman. It was released in 1968 by Epic Records. This song hit No. 14 on the *Billboard's* Top 100 Hits. This song has a letter structure, and each part is a different message from a different sender. The first one is sent by Bud, who is fighting in Vietnam. He had been in Vietnam for a few weeks but he explains to his parents that he had no time to write earlier because he was busy marching through mud and rain. He also says that the letter is going to be short and that he just wanted to let them know that he is fine and to send them his love. Then, he says that he is determined to fight and win the war because he sees how Vietnamese people are not free and how this is not fair. He also refers to the "domino theory" explained above. Bud says that he also wants to win the war because if they lose the new battlefield could be closer to home because communism could spread in the world. He says goodbye and asks his parents about his brother Tommy, who is studying in a college.

The next letter is written at the same time as the first one. This time the sender is Tommy. He says that he has been marching a lot that day protesting against the war and

how tired he is. However, he says that this is necessary and that there were a lot of people recording the demonstration. He asks his father to look him up in the newspaper although he warns him that he might not recognize his son due to the beard he wears now. Then, Tommy says that he knows that the protesters are right and that he cannot understand how his father can defend Bud, who is killing a lot of people in another country. He also rejects "domino theory", because one of his teachers explained to him that people can live under Communism as well as under Capitalism. He apologizes because he does not believe in doing things for God and the country. Then, he says that he has to go because he has to attend a rally. At the end he asks him to send him extra money.

The next letter is not written by any of the sons but for the Bud's sergeant. It is addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Smith and it explains that they should be proud of his death son, and that he received a medal of honor. He also says that Bud's last words were for his parents and highlights how Bud was one of the bravest men he had ever know.

The last letter is written by Tommy, who explains to his parents why he did not write this time, and how he was not brave enough to come back home after finding that his brother Bud was dead. He also explains how he reconsidered his ideas about communism, and how he found out that they were wrong. He says that he always loved and respected his brother and how he knows that Bud would never go to war if he did not believe in the reason he was fighting for. He ends the letter saying that he realized about his mistakes and that he hopes that his parents could forgive him someday and consider him as worthy as Bud, now that he joined the army.

This song is very direct because the reader can feel that those letters are real. The song only reflects those letters, without addressing the listener or asking him to participate in the war. It gives the sensation to be looking into a family's intimacy. The song is a recitation accompanied by music that matches the spirit of the letters. We can hear military music in the first one, a kind of hippie music in the second one, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" in the third one, and a mix of the music from the second and the third letter in the last one.

4. Conclusion

Although the general idea is that a vast majority of American people were against the Vietnam War, this paper showed that this is incorrect. Moreover, there were more hits in the pro-war music than in protest songs. This could happen due to the fact that in every war there is a certain censorship, and either musical labels or *Billboard* magazine who created the charts could modify the data to avoid possible problems with the government. Another reason for this difference is related with the music genre. Protest music is formed by folk or rock songs whereas patriotic music used country songs. This last type of music has its own hits chart and that could make them to be more broadcast on the radio.

Another important difference as it was just pointed out, is the difference in the music genres they used. Protest songs are usually folk or rock songs. Folk was used due to its popularity, as a folk revival was developing since the 1930s. Another reason for using folk music is that it can be played by only one person, as we saw in some of the songs explained in this paper such “I ain’t Marching Anymore” or “Universal Soldier.” The fact that it can be easily mixed with other popular genres among young people like pop or rock, gave this music genre a possibility to reinvent itself. Rock was used because it was popular between the youth, and not so loved by their parents, who reinforce the idea of rebellion against an older generation. The most widely used genre in the music supporting the war was country. This genre was born in the 1920s, for this reason it can be odd that a “modern” music genre was used to defend a kind of old-fashioned idea. However, country is a genre that was born in America and for this reason, singers took it as an important part of American culture. Almost at the end of the war, in the late 1960s, it would start to be mixed with newer genres like rock.

Protest music was written by young, working-class people, whereas in pro-war music we can find examples of songs written either by people serving in the military or even by politicians. This does not mean that people serving in the army or with a political career were not against the Vietnam War, but they would never share these thoughts out loud, because they could be prosecuted for treason.

Finally, both positions used symbols and metaphors although it is more commonly used in the patriotic music to make its message stronger, and to link it with American identity. They also used everyday language that everybody could understand. The use of irony is more common in protest music but it depends of the author's intention or style. Using the first person while narrating the events in the song is very common in both genres, which makes statements more personal and subjective.

In short, although the culture of the period was against the war, there is a large number of songs supporting the war. Moreover, although the music against and in favor of the war are slightly different in style and in topic, both of them are important to understand the American culture that existed during the Vietnam War.

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