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“Don’t Mention the War”: Live Aid Concert and UEFA EURO 2020 Finals as Examples of the Separation of Global Mega-events from Political Conflict

Abstract

This research compares two important British live entertainment mega-events held at Wembley Stadium in London, and examines their attempts to distance themselves from the mentioning of political conflict or war. The paper will argue that the Live Aid concert in 1985 and UEFA EURO 2020 final, held in 2021, despite being separated by thirty-six years, share many common features which, in turn, determined their approach to social responsibility. The paper will support this claim by explaining the two events’ official social responsibility programs and providing examples of performer activism occurring within a small window left open for independent free speech. It will conclude that despite the prominence allocated to addressing social issues at both events, anti-political conceptualisation prevailed, resulting in the avoidance of all mentioning of political conflict and war. It proposes that it is only through the analysis of activism that it becomes possible to understand the complexity of the political realities surrounding a major live music or sporting event.

Keywords: Live Aid 1985, UEFA EURO 2022, anti-war protests, protest music, athlete activism, mega events, Wembley Stadium, Political Awareness, depoliticisation, social responsibility programs

A New Precedent in Social Responsibility at Entertainment Mega-events

The Live Aid concert at Wembley Stadium in 1985 was the follow-up event to the Band Aid charity single “Do They Know It’s Christmas” released in 1984. The concert, which was billed as the “The Greatest Show on Earth,” was organised in just ten weeks under the leadership of an inexperienced music event promoter, Bob Geldof, as an emergency response to the catastrophic famine in Ethiopia which had been exacerbated by political conflict and civil war. Great uncertainty remained over whether the event would take place until days before the concert (*Live Aid Against All Odds*). Yet somehow, all went well and the Live Aid concert successfully set new precedents for live entertainment mega-events that would spread around the world.



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The Live Aid event had its roots in other past charity benefit concerts such as the UNICEF organised “A Gift of Song” concert in 1979, featuring Abba, the Bee Gees, Rod Stewart, and more. But “A Gift of Song” was only videotaped and broadcast on NBC the following day and now the availability of live satellite broadcasting technology was to open up a whole new range of scope and possibility for a live music mega-event. Harnessing the same technology used to live broadcast the Los Angeles Summer Olympics in 1984, the Live Aid concert was able to bring an urgent message of humanitarian social responsibility to an audience many times bigger than ever before. But, while the Live Aid concert was primarily conceived as a fund-raising event, the platform and delivery system for the message was popular culture and a live entertainment mega-event. To achieve the social goals, Live Aid was to provide a “Global Jukebox” with live performances from the (Western) world’s most successful popstars. It is this revolutionary fusion of entertainment mega-event, live satellite broadcast, and social responsibility goals that has gone on to establish the Live Aid concert as the “critical watershed event which defined the period” (Jones 190).

Somehow, from its chaotic start, the Live Aid event always understood its significance as revealed in its tagline “the day music changed the world” (Jones 197). Live Aid would become the event that woke the world up to the possibility of promoting a social responsibility agenda through the platform of a global live entertainment mega-event. As Omaar claims, Band Aid and Live Aid “changed forever how politics, aid and the electronic media ... function in response to humanitarian needs” (qtd. in Müller 74). Previously, raising social issues at major entertainment events was only possible through independent acts of activism outside of the organiser’s control that voluntarily or involuntarily involved performers. Often, such activism caused either great controversy, like Smith and Carlo’s Black Power Salute at the Mexico Summer Olympics in 1978, or great harm, like the terrorist attack at the Munich Summer Olympics in 1972. The model created by Live Aid showed that if a humanitarian social agenda was built successfully into the foundations of a mega-event, and was supported by performers, then it was possible to conduct and execute a highly effective social responsibility awareness campaign. Live Aid had innovated a shift towards consumer led social responsibility programs promoted via entertainment through a “form of activism which is articulated from within the market” (Jones 203). This model would later be adopted by other global events, including many major international sporting competitions.

Highly visible and profitable modern entertainment or cultural mega-events, such as major music concerts or sporting competitions, offer one of the few opportunities for large audiences in western cultures to openly express emotion *en masse* (Berlant qtd. in Davis 212). When you channel these feelings into a social cause and broadcast the images live across the globe, an enormous social impact is possible. On the day of Live Aid, the London-base *Daily Mirror* “Live Aid Souvenir Issue” (15 July 1985) declared “Live Aid rose above governments” (Jones 197) to achieve its social responsibility goals. But not to be overlooked is the fact that this was dependent on the willing collaboration of the top performers who were now presented with an interesting choice: to make a social statement through the official social responsibility program’s approved channels or to act independently and use the platform to make individual activist statements.

Separated by thirty-six years, as UEFA EURO 2020 was held in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, EURO 2020 and the Band Aid Live Aid concert in 1985 offer an opportunity to examine and compare two British live entertainment mega-events held at Wembley Stadium in London. Both succeeded in entertaining the world, stirring up English passions to unprecedented levels, and promoting a social responsibility agenda on a global stage. But both also took place during difficult times of political turmoil and conflict providing many motivations and reasons

for performers to feel the need to make activist statements. Together they provide a unique opportunity to investigate music and sport in parallel and assess both mega-events’ long-term political significance.

Neutrality as the Outcome of Globalisation and Nationalism in Music and Sport

The role of music and sporting organisations, both non-profit and commercial, is central to the transformation of music and sport in modern times. FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) has more member states than the United Nations and must coordinate them all to participate in a tournament every four years. Similarly, when American-based MTV, or Music Television, went global in 1988, it then formed a worldwide music community that embraced 180 countries as of 2020. Although both FIFA and MTV have always claimed to be apolitical, their potential use to politicians, and the ability to make political statements themselves, cannot be underestimated. However, these organisations, like all global music and sports organisations, have always both chosen a path towards depoliticisation. This is because retaining neutrality appears to be fundamental to ensuring music and sport’s overall success.

Back in 1985, the Live Aid concert was to break new ground in this regard. In the section “Plugging into the Global Jukebox” in the book *The Greatest Show on Earth: Live Aid*, Peter Hillmore explains how, when it first started, “Wembley was the obvious choice for the London venue: it’s the most famous stadium in Britain, the site of major sporting events” (55). Then things moved up a gear as “Bob Geldof had thought in terms of a telecast to the whole world, a global jukebox for the global village” (56). Soon the company responsible for the transmission of live coverage of the L.A. Summer Olympics had become involved and commandeered 16 satellites to realise the concept of the global jukebox, which meant that the Live Aid concert was to become the world’s biggest music concert ever as “1.5 billion people were ready to see the show; or put another way, 85 per cent of the world’s television sets” (56).

However, as examples of sporting mega-events had previously shown, when an event grows to such a large scale it loses its “playful character and its professional practice has become both a global media spectacle and a serious and financially significant global business” (Smart qtd. in Sage 7). This process is a part of global sportification which has been defined as “a universal hegemonic shift towards competitive, rationalized, and standardized organization of sporting practices and organizations” (Sage 7), where “the infrastructure of globalization comprises the forces shaping the global political economy” (Sage 24) with the mega-event finally becoming an “integral component of the political economy of globalization” (Sage 8).

But globalisation is only half the story as both music and sport also need neutrality to help them overcome the issue of nationalist separatism. As McLeod explains, while music and sport have an almost unique ability to build interdependent communities that cross geographical and cultural borders, they also serve “as an effective tool in nation building and image consolidation” (158). A difficult dichotomy exists in music and sport between globalisation and nationalism that organisations need to balance. In the International Olympic Charter, it clearly states that “the Olympic Games are competitions between athletes in individual or team events and not between countries” (International Olympic Committee 18). Yet, it later mentions that “any competitor in the Olympic Games must be a national of the country of the NOC which is entering such competitor” (International Olympic Committee 80). Here, both globalisation and nationalism are encouraged equally under a system where “international sport has been transformed from sporting events between individuals or teams to events between nation-states that have unequal resources to produce

elite athletes and teams” (Sage 7). According to Hughson, Inglis, and Free, the result is that “sports seem able to bind the politically minded with the non-politically minded together into an imagined national community, where the nation does not exist beyond sport” (qtd. in Kaufman 225).

As the Live Aid concert transitioned into a major global entertainment mega-event, unavoidably, the same would happen to music, as in the presence of royalty and with British Airways lending them the “supersonic plane, Concorde, for the day, so that some stars could play in both Wembley and Philadelphia” (Hillmore 55), the performers at Live Aid became a showcase for Britishness and Britain’s contribution to the global wellbeing.

Peace and Unity or Anti-Political Conceptualisation?

Much scientific literature has been written on the complex relationship between sport and music (individually) with politics. However, even though most scholars agree that there exist deep connections, surprisingly, this has not been the approach adopted by the organisers of the world’s largest live music or sporting events that have always chosen to keep political issues firmly out of the picture. Even when an event appears to be overwhelmed by politics, mega-event organisers have adopted positions that forbid any political debate that could affect the event’s success. Both Live Aid concert and UEFA EURO 2020 took place during periods of great civil and political unrest, and yet both organisers chose to sidestep these issues in favour of portraying peace and unity through political neutrality in music and sport.

Rock Protest Music, Conflict and War

A broad definition offered for rock protest music is songs with “opposition to a policy, an action against the people in power that is grounded in a sense of injustice” (Weinstein 3), or, in other words, music asking for social and political change. It is from this perspective that many now approach the notion of protest music in the 1960s, reinforced by the popular belief that “the most significant aspect of the sixties was [its] social activism” (Anderson qtd. in Heilbrunner 2), and that the Vietnam War era was the golden era of rock music activism. This viewpoint is largely based upon studies of US artists such as mid-1960s folk icons Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, late-1960s psychedelia icons Frank Zappa, The Grateful Dead, and Jimi Hendrix, and early 1970s soul icons Marvin Gaye and Edwin Starr. Such research supports the view that “the rock interpretation of protest songs introduced political sentiment into the mainstream by their method of attack” (Heilbrunner 4).

Yet, when the rock protest singer David Crosby was asked about 1960s rock music and political protest, he responded: “Somehow, Sgt. Pepper did not stop the Vietnam War ... I am doing my level best as a saboteur of values, as an agent of change, but when it comes down to blood and gore in the streets, I’m taking off and going fishing” (qtd. in Heilbrunner 13). In his article “Rock Protest Songs: So Many and So Few”, Weinstein argues that the iconic 1960s protest songs we all know so well now may not have had such a great influence at the time and, even more damagingly, that “despite the foregrounding of protest songs in rock discourse, there are, then, far fewer of them than one is led to believe. They are but a tiny proportion of all rock songs, even using the most generous definitions of rock and protest” (7).

With regards to British protest rock music, a similar story can also be found supporting the claim that “the British ‘1968’ experience was unique – conservative, isolated and politically untouched” as “counterculture dwelt in an ‘underground’ scene distinct from the mainstream popular

and artistic culture of ‘swinging’ London” (Anderson 117). Much of the reason for this was that the anti-war messages brought over from US 1960s protest rock were in total contradiction to the new consumer values of Swinging London. As Anderson explains, the British rock protest music, if anything, “formed a tangential association with ‘swinging’ London, an establishment culture that took in mainstream pop, Bond films and the Playboy Club, as well as couture, design, publishing and government supported high arts” (175). Such a retrospective misconception regarding 1960s British music may have arisen as it is now recognised that “nostalgia is the preferred mode for classic-rock fans” (Weinstein 10) as, at the time of release, “the industry only allowed the general public to be exposed to protest songs when they had become a safe crowd-pleaser, with no risk involved either for the artists’ careers or for social order” (Bindas and Houston qtd. in Perone 7). This means that nearly all radio stations, both in the UK and US, purposely kept “off the air anything controversial” (Grassy 8), while television “avoided protest music even more than radio” (Weinstein 6), and the British contemporary music press of that time overlooked protest completely as “the events of ‘1968’ got in the way of proper entertainment” (Moore 154). For anti-war rock protest music to ever crossover, it was required first to become neutral and apolitical in meaning, or, in other words, to stop being protest music.

International Sporting Competitions, Conflict and War

“Sports officials often claim that sport has to be ‘un-political’” (Thiel et al. 253) as “we can assume that ISOs [International Sporting Organisations] should find it easier to get involved in international relations if focused on their main area of interest – the ‘apolitical’ sport” (Kobierecki 3). Nowhere has this belief and policy been more evident than in the modern history of the Olympic Games organised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). In Helen Jefferson Lensky’s *The Olympic Games: A Critical Approach*, the author devotes a chapter to the claim that “sport and politics don’t mix,” which has always been a key philosophy behind the success of the Olympic Games. This conviction is written into the IOC’s official Olympic Charter in Rule 50(2), which states: “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas” (International Olympic Committee 94). However, such rules and regulations failed to stop the so-called Munich Massacre at the Summer Olympics in 1972, where a group of Palestinian militants broke into the Olympic Village and held eleven Israeli athletes, coaches, and officials hostage. Even though the incident resulted in the deaths of eleven Israeli citizens and a West German police officer, the final words at the time belonged to the IOC’s President Avery Brundage in his now-infamous statement that “The Games must go on”.

This was not a surprise. Evidence of sport and war being separated can be found as far back as the ninth century BC, when the institution of the truce, or *ekécheiria*, meaning laying down of arms, was initiated in Olympia in Ancient Greece. Now known as the “Olympic Truce,” this tradition was revived and updated by United Nations Resolution 48/11 of 25 October 1993, and supposedly remains in force today. In international football the same mentality can be summed up in FIFA President Sepp Blatter’s comment in 2004 “in advance of a match between Brazil and war-torn Haiti, when he urged the world to ‘make goals not war’” (Hough 1287). As Kobierecki explains regarding group draws for international tournaments, the common policy is to ensure that countries at war are not drawn together as the preference is to “disengage from high politics of international conflicts and estrangements” (3) to promote peace and unity.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Michael Jordan in the National Basketball Association and US Olympic Basketball Team personified the socially and politically neutral approach of sport as

exemplified by Jordan's gesture on the medal podium at the Barcelona Summer Olympics in 1992, where he draped an American flag over his shoulder to conceal a Reebok logo in an act whose "symbolism was just as striking as it was [Smith and Carlo's protest] in 1968" (Powell 33). At the time, Jordan's action was met with heavy criticism from US Black activists who interpreted his action as not "with a clenched fist in the air but with a clenched fist full of money" (Powell 34). However, as Harry Edwards, founder of the Olympic Project for Human Rights, counter-argues, "The Jordan Era," now recognised as lasting between 1972 to 2012 and characterised by a lack of political activism, was also the "era where the foundations for power were laid" (Poole) as Jordan would go on to become the first Black owner of an NBA and NASCAR team.

'Feed the World' and RESPECT: Political Awareness at Live Aid Concert and UEFA EURO 2020

Back in 1985, when the seeds for the Live Aid concert were first being sown, Britain had many social and political problems, including race riots, the miners' strike, and the Northern Ireland conflict. But this was nothing compared to Africa, where the legacy of decolonialisation, sometimes further muddled by Cold War interference, had fuelled political conflicts and civil wars resulting in tragedies such as the apartheid system in South Africa and catastrophic famine in Ethiopia.

The Live Aid concert was first and foremost driven by the urgency of the famine relief effort in Ethiopia, with no time to get involved into the politics of the war that lay behind the tragedy. The concert's main organiser, Bob Geldof, was the lead singer of the Irish alternative rock group The Boomtown Rats, whose name exemplified his attitude towards politics – you can live outside of a system you directly benefit from. In a well-known public confrontation with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1985, he chose to refrain from commenting on the ideology behind her new monetary system, instead only mentioning its unfair wealth distribution. Later, when discussing Thatcher, who had refused to directly oppose apartheid "instead pursuing a policy of 'constructive engagement with the country's white minority government'" (Conway-Smith). Geldof explained how he regarded Thatcher as a fellow punk and admired her for wanting to smash everything down (*Maggie Thatcher Was A Punk, Says Bob Geldof*).

Following the massive fundraising success of the initial Band Aid single "Do They Know It's Christmas" in 1984, Geldof recruited an elite board of trustees for the Band Aid Trust, which was to be chaired by Lord Gowrie, then Minister for the Arts, and was to include Lord Harlech, the head of Harlech TV; Michael Grade, the controller of BBC1; Maurice Obserstein, the chairman of the British Phonographic Institute; and Midge Ure (Barker 99). This all seemed to make good sense, as popular music theorist R. Serge Denisoff had realised in 1970, claiming that "despite all of the good reasons for questioning the effectiveness of rock protest songs, they do sometimes function to spur political commitment. This result almost always occurs when they are created and performed in the context of some supportive organizational form such as a social movement" (qtd. in Weinstein 15). However, Geldof's new non-governmental charity organisation, with its social responsibility program now operating under the slogan 'Feed the World', was acquiring friends and making deals that would increasingly bring it into closer contact with those driving the political conflicts related to the war behind the famine. In 1986, Geldof clearly stated: "[A]s in England, where I didn't want to get involved in party politics, so too in Africa" (qtd. in Barker 318). Yet, the Band Aid Trust was already working with political organisations such as "the best-organized imperialist aid agency in the world, the US Agency for International Development (AID)" (Barker 102), who, given Ethiopia's important position in the Cold War, "played a major role in justifying

the aid communities' protracted interventions in the region" (Barker 104). For this, and many more reasons beyond the scope of this article, while there does exist academic literature claiming that the Live Aid concert and its "message of compassion expressed by participants affected changes in U.S. and U.K. governmental policies on foreign aid to famine-struck provinces in the Horn of Africa" (Davis 216), there is a more significant body of literature (see Barker 99; Grant 315; Müller 61) in support of the view that "it did so by shunning overt engagement with the underlying causes of global hunger and poverty" (Jones 191).

For the next three decades that followed the Live Aid concert, the structures put into place by the expanding European Union and its Schengen area, comprising of 26 countries in 2020, can lay claim to have managed to keep its member states away from any major internal war since World War II. However, in 2014, it failed to acknowledge the hostile invasion of Crimea by Russia in Ukraine, and instead sought to maintain good relations with Russia for economic and energy supply related reasons. Then, rather unexpectedly, the British Brexit referendum of 2016 resulted in Britain choosing to leave the EU, and soon further calls for national sovereignty in other European countries emerged that would start to pull the cultural and political unity of the European Union apart.

It was this same fervour to breakaway that would arrive at the headquarters of Union of European Football Associations. In April 2021, just two months before the start of UEFA EURO 2020, the European Super League was formed with backing of six top English clubs alongside the three biggest clubs from both Italy and Spain. The reaction of UEFA President Aleksander Čeferin and the organisation was immediate as sanctions on participating clubs were threatened. In a public statement, Čeferin announced: "Gentlemen, you made a huge mistake. Some will say it is greed, others disdain, arrogance, flippancy or complete ignorance of England's football culture. It does not matter. What does matter is that there is still time to change your mind. Everyone makes mistakes" (qtd. in Dunbar). The Super League collapsed three days later amidst claims from the European Parliament that the breakaway competitions would have undermined EU values and "endanger the stability of the overall sports ecosystem" (Evans).

The organiser of EURO 2020, UEFA (the continental confederation of FIFA for Europe), has always been strongly pro-European Union while also claiming to separate sport from politics and their current president, Aleksander Čeferin, has consistently expressed the goal to promote harmony and equality in Europe. In 2019, during his acceptance speech for re-election, he reinforced this message of unity by saying: "European football remains united, that European football remains respectful, respectable and respected" ("Čeferin Re-Elected for 2nd Term as UEFA President until 2023"). It should therefore come as no surprise that under Čeferin's presidency, from 2016 to date, the leading UEFA social responsibility campaign became known as "RESPECT".

On 11th June 2021, the EURO 2020 finally kicked off to promote peace and unity through sport in Europe with the UEFA social responsibility program RESPECT further developed into 'EqualGame.com', an umbrella scheme designed to cover all social and political issues that may be incurred during the tournament. However, there remained one major issue: the final was to be held at Wembley in London in a country which had finally left EU just three months before. In fact, while no individual country held UEFA EURO 2020, England was to host the most events, including the final, both semi-finals, two last sixteen matches, and three group stage matches. Other games were held in other European countries in 11 other different stadiums. The irony was that UEFA EURO 2020 planned as a sporting mega-event to further unify Europe under common political and social values was now to be hosted in a Brexit Britain that politically was pushing to pull all of that apart.

The Recognition of Political Conflict and War at Live Aid Concert 1985 and UEFA EURO 2020

This next section will look at the activist actions from performers at the Live Aid concert and UEFA EURO 2020 that recognised the existence of political conflict or war. As explained in the previous section, the organisers of both events set up social responsibility programs, "Feed the World" and RESPECT, to act as blanket covers over all social and political issues while remaining neutral over their systematic root causes. However, both events (purposely or unavoidably?) also left open small windows of opportunity for performers (or teams) to express free speech through activism. In the case of the Live Aid concert, there was an opportunity to do so through introductory speeches and song lyrics. At UEFA EURO 2020, such gestures were confined to football shirts, armbands, badges, and taking the knee. These made it possible for performers to reconnect music and sport with politics and reduce the cognitive dissonance between the event and the real world. It is these occurrences of performer activism that now provide invaluable evidence towards attaining a more accurate appraisal of both events' long-term political significance.

"Don't Mention the War" – Live Aid Concert and the Use of Introductions and Song Lyrics

At the Live Aid concert, the civil war in Ethiopia that had exacerbated the famine was directly mentioned, but not by any of the performers at Wembley. Instead, references were made at "sister" events held simultaneously in other countries. The first crack appeared at 14:22 GMT, when the satellite link connected to 'The Austrian Contribution' live from Vienna on the global telecast. The Austrian Contribution was supplied by Austria für Afrika, who performed their hit single "Warum?" live on stage (Austria for Africa – Why?). Austria für Afrika was an Austrian supergroup modelled on Band Aid's "Do They Know It's Christmas?", but instead of the British hits bitter-sweet lyrics, the Austrian pop stars decided to get straight to the point. The song lyrics to "Warum?" begin with the verse:

They reign like kings while famine rules the land,
starvation's used with system they have weapons instead of bread.
The land is scorched and misery knows no mercy, as usual,
big brother rubs his hands with glee and sends ammunition.

The chorus then goes on to ask "Why?", and includes a line from an Ethiopian folk song in Amharic that translates into "Ethiopia, once you were a princess, today you are a beggar – let us begin anew once more!" In the next verse, we have the powerful lines "Famine is a useful tool, keeps the masters in power. For he, who has no food to eat, cannot defend himself", further establishing a direct causal link between war and famine in Ethiopia.

The next mentioning of war in Africa appeared two hours later, at 16:27, in Köln in Germany, where the German Band Aid replica supergroup Band Für Afrika were to perform "Nackt im Wind" (Band for Africa – Naked in the Wind). While the German song's lyrics did not mention directly war, Udo Lindenberg's remarkable introductory speech made the context of the song crystal clear. Telecast around the world after Brian Ferry at Wembley, Lindenberg said:

Although it is great that over 30 to 50 million dollars are being raised for Africa, it is but a small token of repayment for the years of colonial exploitation. The only real help will be the immediate withdrawal of all military and economic interests on the part of Europe, Japan, USA and the East-Block. (*Live Aid (July 13th, 1985): GERMAN CONTRIBUTION / UDO LINDENBERG'S SPEECH*)

He continued: "We – from this country which has instigated two terrible wars – appeal to all people ...: Stop the wars in the Third World. Stop the crime of military build-up". Then coverage went back to Paul Young at Wembley.

The Wembley Live Aid concert, controlled by Bob Geldof, was never intended to directly confront the issue of war and its role in the famine. To set the tone, Geldof had selected the first live act himself, starting with the appropriately named "Status Quo" and their classic anthem "Rockin' All Over the World." If social awareness had been of a priority, the band could have followed this up with their massive global hit "In the Army Now" but this was never an option. From herein, the goal was to raise money and not get weighed down by controversy. However, not all performers would get onboard and song lyrics still offered a small opportunity to drop in subtle messages according to their own feelings on "musical social responsibility" (Barker 96), even though, as Weinstein correctly identifies, "the point of the song, its message of protest, can be entirely lost" (Weinstein 11).

The first example can be seen in Ultravox's [13:17, 17 minutes] second song "Dancing With Tears In My Eyes." Ultravox's frontman, Midge Ure, together with Geldof, were the two pioneers responsible for the original Band Aid single. However, now Geldof's Live Aid organising abilities had far overshadowed Ure's earlier contribution. The strong anti-war message of Ultravox's nuclear war-themed song was clear to all familiar with the song's dramatic video portraying the last few minutes on Earth before a nuclear apocalypse as "the man on the wireless cries again – It's over, it's over." Ure's selection of the song, while not mentioning African wars, does raise the issue of the Cold War which was deeply connected with the civil war in Ethiopia.

Next, Sade's [14:52, 16 minutes] first song "Why Can't We Live Together" provides an interesting example. Even though the Live Aid concert was for Africa, there were no African bands or musicians performing at Wembley (except Freddy Mercury, see later). Even more remarkable was that Nigerian-born Sade was the only Afro-British performer to headline at Wembley on that day. Sade's set opened with a cover version of Timmy Thomas' beautiful anti-Vietnam war song "Why Can't We Live Together", from 1972. The song lasted 5.35 minutes and its sombre and downbeat tone was a great contrast to most of the other musical contributions. The song clearly states: "No more war, no more war. All we want is some peace in this world" alongside its Black civil rights message of "I said: 'No matter, no matter what color'. You are still my brother". All things considered, Sade's effort was admirable. U2's [17:19, 20 minutes] first track "Sunday Bloody Sunday" is also relevant here. As Bono states at the beginning of the live recorded version of this track: "This is not a rebel song". Still, "Sunday Bloody Sunday" now holds the equivalent status of a peace song against the troubles in Northern Ireland by confronting the horrors of past events. The song was not about Ethiopia or Africa in any way, as U2 addressed their local agendas instead, but at least they did not promote the idea of a world without war or conflict and raised the issue of ongoing civil wars around the world.

Freddie Mercury and Brian May's [21:47, 4 minutes] "Is This the World We Created?" is the most complicated of all the songs at Wembley to judge. Its scheduling, just before the grand finale, put enormous pressure on the two performers to deliver a social message. In a 1984 interview, Queen guitarist Brian May was clear about the band's approach to world social and political issues when he stated: "The band is not political – we play to anybody who wants to come and listen" (Harris). Therefore, while the two performers had unparalleled experience of performing in massive stadiums, including in Argentina under a military junta and in South Africa under apartheid, they had little or no experience in activism. In 1985, at the time of the Live Aid concert, Queen would be on the UN's list of blacklisted artists for breaking the British Musician Unions' cultural boycott

of South Africa. Yet, this issue would be glossed over to permit them to perform. Despite these discrepancies, the song “Is This the World We Created?,” which was the shortest, but one of the most famous, songs on *The Works* album released in 1984, was played at every Queen concert from 1984 to 1986 and fit perfectly the social responsibility campaign slogan of “Feed the World” while perhaps hinting at war as a cause. The song asks us: “Just think of all those hungry mouths we have to feed. Take a look at all the suffering we breed ... Is this the world we invaded. Against the law?” Freddie Mercury was the second and final African-born artist to headline at Wembley as, unknown to many, he was born Farrokh Bulsara to Parsi-Indian parents in Zanzibar, in 1946. Yet nothing was made of his African roots for whatever reason.

“Don’t Mention the War” – UEFA EURO 2020 and the Use of Clothing, Armbands, Badges and Taking the Knee

During the UEFA EURO 2020 tournament there were direct references to Russia’s occupation of Crimea and the collapse of the EU’s unification over cultural values, but the British government, mired by Brexit, was to consistently remain a persona non-grata throughout. At the tournament final in Wembley, celebrities in the audience, including Tom Cruise and David Beckham, featured prominently in the global live broadcast, while Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who also was in attendance, was kept off screen.

The first political conflict occurred at the UEFA EURO 2020 tournament during Germany’s group stage meeting against Hungary at the Allianz Arena on 23 June 2021. From the start of the tournament, Germany had demonstrated a desire to expand UEFA’s RESPECT/equalgame.com to include LGBT+ rights, which were currently being rewritten in certain EU member states. This was in alignment with UEFA policy that declared Germany’s intentions to be in a “good cause” (Tanner) and in support of their goal to encourage further diversity and inclusion within the game. The main focus of Germany’s gesture had been German team captain Manuel Neuer’s tradition of wearing a rainbow-coloured captain’s armband at every match. In Germany’s last sixteen defeat against England at Wembley, England team captain Harry Kane joined Neuer in this gesture (Tanner). But playing against England was never going to cause tension. The difficult match was to be Germany’s final group stage match against Hungary in Munich.

The initiation of protest aimed directly at Hungary began when the mayor of Munich sent a written application to UEFA for the Allianz Arena to be lit up with the rainbow colours of the Pride flag stating: “It is important for the state capital Munich to set a visible sign of solidarity with the LGBTI community in Hungary, which is suffering from the current stricter homophobic and transphobic legislation of the Hungarian government” (Fahey). The request was rejected as the Hungarian football authorities responded by pointing out “the rules of UEFA and FIFA do not allow politicization on the pitch and in the stadium either” (Street). However, media headlines had already been made and Neuer’s wearing of the rainbow armband throughout the match served as a reminder to all of the politics going on behind the scenes.

But the LGBT+ issue was nothing compared to the potential controversy caused by approving Russian stadiums to host EURO 2020 matches and the possibility of a semi-final or final meeting between Russia and Ukraine after the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. However, while “UEFA has ensured that the Ukrainian and Russian teams do not play against each other in the group stage or the early knockout stages” (Aleksander and Rajkiewicz), it had not prepared itself for Ukraine’s national squad’s shirt design to make a political statement: “The new kit includes not only the standard national colours but also an outline of Ukraine’s borders,

which include Crimea and the full Eastern border. Moscow has called this a blatant provocation, but UEFA thinks differently and has allowed the Ukrainian team to play in the kits” (Aleksander and Rajkiewicz). In addition, it would also contain “the phrase ‘Glory to Ukraine, Glory to our Heroes’ – a rallying cry during the 2013–2014 Euromaidan Revolution, which fought for closer ties with the European Union and ultimately led to the ousting of the Moscow-backed President Viktor Yanukovich” (Jamal).

While Ukraine claimed its audacious shirt design was only to help motivate the team, the Russian Football Union reportedly immediately sent a letter to UEFA requesting “we draw attention to the use of political motives on the Ukrainian national team’s jersey, which goes against the basic principles of the UEFA kit regulations” (Walker). The controversial imagery was then forbidden with a further possible motivation being UEFA’s “renewed partnership with Gazprom, a Russian state-owned oil company”, meaning UEFA was now deeply dependent “on Gazprom to host many matches at EURO 2020, with seven being played at the Gazprom stadium in St. Petersburg” (Jamal). Viewed from this perspective, UEFA was conveniently overlooking the war.

After riding out the storm of the Ukraine kit conflict, UEFA’s RESPECT/EqualGame.com social responsibility campaign soon settled down to become the blanket-cover for all social protest. There were prominent stadium billboards, expensive TV advertisements, and the RESPECT badge was to be placed on the left arm of all football shirts. However, in the years preceding EURO 2020 since the previous European Cup, another social activist gesture that now also needed to be considered had also entered into sport. Catapulted into prominence in 2016 by the actions of Colin Kaepernick in the National Football League in the United States, by the time EURO 2020 had arrived in 2021 “taking the knee” had become the accepted gesture of social protest in British football to express solidarity with the US Black Lives Matter movement and multiculturalism in Britain. The gesture involves kneeling on one knee instead of standing during the playing of the national anthem or other significant occasion. In the British Premier League, this was now occurring regularly before kickoff, and, considering the prominence that UEFA had given to their RESPECT/EqualGame.com program, to ban taking the knee would have appeared hypocritical.

Official governmental disapproval in Britain towards taking the knee at UEFA EURO 2020 first surfaced in the Facebook posts of Conservative MP Lee Anderson, who insisted that the Black Lives Matter movement was political. Anderson’s post read: “For the first time in my life I will not be watching my beloved England team whilst they are supporting a political movement whose core principles aim to undermine our very way of life” (Stubley). However, another interpretation behind underlying reasons behind the British government’s objections is also possible. On 31 January 2020, Britain finally left the EU, which meant that British citizens no longer held European passports and British business could no longer engage in free trade with their European neighbours. While England had voted to leave, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland had all voted to remain, and Brexit was triggering movements for independence that could end the United Kingdom.

During UEFA EURO 2020, both home nations representing Britain, England and Wales, chose to take the knee at all matches in a statement perhaps not only of racial unity but also of solidarity between the British home nations. England’s manager Gareth Southgate publicly denied there was any connection between politics and taking the knee, stating: “I think we have got a situation where some people seem to think it is a political stand that they don’t agree with. That is not the reason the players are doing it. We are supporting each other” (qtd. in Street). England would take the knee at all matches including the final at Wembley Stadium, where their opponents, Italy, would also choose to join them. The match was extremely close, with England eventually defeated 3–2 on penalties, and all three missed England penalties taken by Afro-British players, resulting

in an immediate tidal wave of racial abuse online. It was now that many people in Britain started asking deeper questions. The Brexit referendum had been won using racist campaign techniques targeted against foreign nationals and immigrants ("Vote Leave's Targeted Brexit Ads Released by Facebook"). Top Cabinet minister Priti Patel had publicly stated that she did not support taking the knee or any form of gesture politics (Bowden). Prime Minister Boris Johnson had refused to condemn either his ministers or the England fans booing the England team during taking the knee. The subject of football was transforming a sporting event that could potentially promote the British nations into a political hotcake. The end result was the cancelling of the traditional post-tournament heroes welcoming for the England team at Downing Street (McGrath), and no official celebration of England's best result in a major football tournament since 1966. Sport and politics had mixed in a country that remained divided by Britain's (un)civil war that was now forbidden to be mentioned.

Conclusion

The acknowledgement of the existence of political conflict and war is rarely welcomed in music or sport by event organisers or governing bodies. This can be clearly illustrated by something as trivial as in the original lyrics for Baddiel and Skinner's now ubiquitous football anthem "Three Lions", composed for England at the UEFA EURO 1996 finals held in England, in which the English Football Association threatened to veto their endorsement of the song unless the original lyric "Terry Butcher at war" was replaced (Double). Put simply, there exists an unwritten rule to not mention any political conflict or war in both music and sport, so we should not be surprised when such supposedly harmless examples occur. It is also interesting to note that in 1986 a follow-up event to the Live Aid concert was organised by the Band Aid Trust called 'Sport Aid', integrating live music with athletic meetings to show the depth of the interconnection existing between the two forms of entertainment.

The desire to keep music and sport separated from politics has always existed in the visions of those who wish to keep their passions pure. However, as Volker Schurmann points out, to claim a neutral position can also be political (Thiel et al. 254). If England had won UEFA EURO 2020 at Wembley, it would have gone on to serve as the best possible publicity for launching a new post-EU Britain across the world with or without mentioning Brexit, just as the Live Aid concert in 1985 had inadvertently supported many of Margaret Thatcher's social and economic reforms. Both the Live Aid concert and UEFA EURO 2020 were organised with social responsibility programs designed to achieve social and political goals while keeping music and sport separate from political conflicts and war. However, these programs would not fully cover all requirements of all performers, some of whom sought to take matters into their own hands through activism. From this perspective, the analysis of activism in addition to official social responsibility programs can provide a far more complex and complete understanding of the political issues surrounding live entertainment mega-events.

Author's note – This article was originally submitted for publication shortly before the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022, which may come to mark the beginning of a new era in political and social responsibility at major international events.

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