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**United we fall, divided we sing.
An empirical study of the political role of music in Flanders (Belgium) and
Southern Italy**

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*La musique exprime ce qui ne peut être dit
et sur quoi il est impossible de rester silencieux.*

*Music expresses that which cannot be said
and on which it is impossible to be silent.*

-Victor Hugo

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Summary:

The research seeks to gain in-depth understanding of the role played by music in the ethno-cultural regionalist conflict characterizing Belgium and Italy. More specifically, the aim is to observe and analyze how artists, songs, performances and other musical experiences can convey political identity and ideology, can be used by political groups to represent and popularize their claims, can inspire collective debate and mobilization.

The theoretical framework within which the research is framed identifies music as a system of sociocultural relations, as well as a site where political discourses, ideas and problems are shaped, debated and shared. On a general level, the political value of music is connected to its power to convey discourses and symbols producing sociocultural classifications, categories of inclusion and exclusion. Music is seen as having the power to create, represent and reinforce collective ideologies, shaping the contents and the limits of cultural and political identity, ethnicity and sense of place. Concerning the analytical approach, music is not only studied in its textual and aesthetico-formal qualities. More importantly, it is subjected to contextual observation of its performance and of the experiences it creates.

Belgium and Italy are divided countries. Cultural, political and economic factors shape the fracture between north and south in the history and contemporaneity of both national projects. On one hand, the *Vlaamse Kwestie* (Flemish Question) has developed around the claims for language emancipation of Dutch-speaking Belgians, was part of the issues bringing to the country's federalization, and evolved into the never-soothed separatist demand of Flemish nationalists. On the other hand, the *Questione Meridionale* (Southern Question) emerged in the aftermath of Italian Unification, was integral to the way political elites managed the country, and led to the rise of a northern separatist party. It is reflected today into so-called neo-meridionalism, a new wave of anti-national ideals, revanchist feelings and centrifugal projects in the south.

Through the study of music the author proposes an alternative reading of the forms and contents, the ideology and the action of contemporary Flemish nationalism and Southern Italian neo-meridionalism. Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, and the regions of Southern Italy provide the case studies.

The research is based on qualitative framework conducted from 2013 and 2015. It draws upon the empirical data collected through observation of and participation to political and non-political musical events. It also includes interviews with different categories of participants among which artists and listeners, but also organizers, managers, producers as well as members of cultural associations and political groups.