

# Ethnic and Cultural Identity in Music and Song Lyrics



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Edited by

Victor Kennedy and Michelle Gadpaille

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## INTRODUCTION

VICTOR KENNEDY AND MICHELLE GADPAILLE

This book is the third in a series of interdisciplinary studies of the relation between words and music, following *Words and Music* (Kennedy and Gadpaille 2013) and *Symphony and Song* (Kennedy and Gadpaille 2016).

Each chapter of this book discusses aspects of ethnic and cultural identity that are reflected in poetry, songs and song lyrics. The authors are scholars from around the world who have contributed their expertise in a variety of fields to our most comprehensive survey of world music yet.

These varied scholarly studies are unified by their common address of an issue that could appear simple on the surface: songs reflect, project and store people's concepts of their national and ethnic identity. Moreover, folk song and popular lyrics do this as effectively as more formal carriers of normative collective identity such as anthems. The complexity of the issue becomes evident when one realises the multiplicity of the factors at play: lyrics, musical score, performer, performance, audience, language, paratext and, above all, the ethnic national contextual arena in which these factors combine. Add to this the nuanced elements of irony, burlesque, parody, satire and political commentary, and a folk song or top ten hit can yield incisive insight into the self and social identity-construction of the public who consume and, in one sense, co-create these songs.

The first five chapters explore British identity expressed through and shaped by songs. British-ness may be a historically constructed identity, but its constitution remains crucial to current knowledge of culture and politics. Maximilian Feldner argues that Britishness today can be characterized by pop music, more specifically, by a tradition of British pop music that originated in the 1960s. The music of bands like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Kinks, and their international success, served as a new source of pride and identification after the disintegration of the British Empire, and British pop music has become both an important cultural asset and an integral part of the British national imagination. Feldner outlines the importance of the "British Invasion" of the 1960s, and British punk of the late 1970s, a style that represents a continuation of and

reaction to the musical developments of the 60s. While 60s British bands were mainly white and male, their music borrowed extensively from Black American musicians. Punk, on the other hand, included groups often marginalized in pop music and society at large. It allowed and enabled women to actively take part in a field mostly reserved for men, and established strong ties with black music styles, such as ska and reggae. Yet, although punk represents an approach that more accurately reflected British society at the time than most other forms of pop, this inclusive tendency is elided in the current understanding of British pop music. References to British pop music often reflect a conservative vision of a glorified and mythologized national past that ignores the transnational and subcultural genealogy of pop music.

Another study that reveals nuances in the monolith of British popular identity is Carla Fusco's "How Pop Music Celebrates the Life and Culture of Northern England," which begins with the premise that modernity supposed Great Britain to be characterised by a monolithic culture in which standardisation and homogenisation were the key words of an imaginary visualisation of the nation. On the contrary, globalisation has not diminished the importance of regional and local culture. The social impact of the latter is fundamental, and its importance has in fact been growing. According to Fusco, the rise of Scottish and Welsh nationalism is evidence of the urgency to find in regionalism a source of identification. Pop culture and pop music can help to outline the typical features of this search for identity. "Northernness" in this context, for instance, can be associated with the hard physical labour connected with the North's industrial history. Many singers have chosen to narrate the roots of that local identity, revealing some lesser-known aspects of its tradition. For example, Mark Knopfler's song "Why Aye Man" makes use of a typical expression of Geordie English and speaks about the migration of British workers to Germany in search of better living conditions. Through a close analysis of selected songs, Fusco explores many aspects of the culture of the northern region of England.

Moving to another element in the ethnic mosaic of the British Isles, Saša Vekić's "In Between Worlds: the Intricate Articulation of Irishness in The Pogues' Music" performs an analysis of text and intertext in music, based on contemporary theory of popular music, cultural studies, and Irish studies, largely through the concepts and observations of Ruth Adams, Sean Campbell, Simon Frith, Stuart Hall, Josh Kun, Keith Negus, Noel McLaughlin, Martin McLoone and Gerry Smyth. Although punk could be considered the antithesis of (Irish) folk music, the strands of these musical genres and their different symbols, meanings, stories and ideas are woven

into a cohesive, dynamic and provocative whole in the songs of The Pogues. Nevertheless, the relations between The Pogues and prevailing cultural, social, and political trends and viewpoints in both the U.K. and the Republic of Ireland have been complex and variable over the last three decades; the band's idiosyncratic style and display of cosmopolitan Irishness often attracted hostility from the media and folk musicians in both countries. The front cover of their second album, *Rum, Sodomy and The Lash* (1980), based on Théodore Géricault's painting *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819), as Noel McLaughlin and Martin McLoone write, "depicts the members of the band out at sea, 'in between worlds,' looking for land"; thus, the sleeve art of this album offers a potent symbol of the everyday life of second-generation Irish people in the U.K., or, more precisely, the Irish experience in London, as evidenced by the lyrics of the songs on the Pogues' LPs. Vekić identifies the contexts from which The Pogues emerged, and examines the Irish and London references, cultural space and identity in The Pogues' music and lyrics.

Drink as a common factor in British popular culture becomes the focus of Wojciech Klepuszewski's "The Joyous Inebriation: Drinking and Conviviality in Poetry and Songs," which begins with the premise that in many cases, drink is intertwined with everyday reality to such an extent that it has become a prominent part of the cultural heritage, often a peculiar cultural landmark of the British Isles, especially Scotland and Ireland, where drink is an inherent part of the culture. Klepuszewski analyses historical British drinking songs and finds that, while Irish and Scottish drinking-songs are primarily whisky-induced, English songs tend to focus on beer. Klepuszewski concludes that the predominant mood of traditional drinking-songs is one of joyous merrymaking, devoid of any serious reflection concerning the pitfalls of drink consumption. Drinking songs enact a continuity of social identification that exists outside and beyond any statistics about liver disease or the dangers of drink driving, and thus demonstrates the power of such lyrics and their performance to stratify identity patterns in an ethnically varied context.

A further complication in British popular music comes from the role of accent and trans-Atlantic marketing in creating subtle identity-slippage in the contemporary context. Monika Konert-Panek's "Americanisation versus Cockney Stylisation in Amy Winehouse's Singing Accent" focuses on style-shifting in British pop singing. The use of American pronunciation had been popular among British vocalists since the 1950s, but Americanisation became less noticeable with the arrival of new wave and punk rock in the 1970s. The two main tendencies in the singing accent, Americanisation on the one hand, and the use of some working

class features on the other, mingled to create a conflict of identities. Since that time, changing trends in popular music singing styles have been observed, and Konert-Panek's analysis illustrates selected features of contemporary pop singing using Amy Winehouse's accent as an example. The focus is on Americanisation in Winehouse's jazz and soul singing style as a result of the American roots of these musical genres, and the influence of the London working class accent on Winehouse's style. Her spoken accent is used for comparison, (on the basis of selected interviews), with her singing accent based on two studio albums, *Frank* (2003) and *Back to Black* (2006). The results on both albums correlate with changing musical styles and Winehouse's growing popularity during her short career.

The next two chapters discuss identity in North American music, the first turning to the quintessential American musical genre: the musical. Jerneja Planinšek Žlof's "Lin-Manuel Miranda's Musical *Hamilton* and Early Feminism: Rapping Gender Equality" examines Miranda's view of the necessity and beauty of multicultural diversity and the celebration of equality. *Hamilton's* main characters, the founding fathers, their families, friends, and their enemies, address social, racial, economic, gender and other aspects of inequality. The cast is ethnically and racially diverse, which conveys Miranda's conceit that Alexander Hamilton is an embodiment of hip-hop. Miranda, in various interviews, explains that Hamilton, like stereotypical hip-hop performers, started his career as a penniless and illegitimate child immigrant who worked his way up to greatness. Hamilton's eloquence, which is often stressed in the musical, is a metaphor for words' ability to make a difference—something that is also true of hip-hop. The central female characters, the Shuyler sisters, especially Angelica, are presented as early women's rights defenders. Angelica, an intelligent, charismatic member of the elite, criticizes the exclusion of women from the social sphere and from the text of the *Declaration of Independence*, which asserts that all *men* are born equal. She negotiates the now widely accepted female role in society on the eve of the American Revolution. Planinšek Žlof focuses on her attempts to challenge hegemonic notions of femininity. Miranda breaks down gender biased binaries that prohibit females from occupying the male dominated social sphere. Nonetheless, Miranda empowers his female characters, giving them a strong voice and an important message to convey which is, sadly, often merely voiced without being translated into action and meaningful social contributions, other than those existing on a familial level.

The second North American perspective focuses on the Canadian singer-songwriter, Leonard Cohen. Katie J. Peterson and Paul Lindholdt's "The World Sings 'Hallelujah'" is an analysis of Cohen's hit song "Hallelujah." Everyone has heard "Hallelujah": from Leonard Cohen's original version (1984), to John Cale's classic rendition (1991), to Jeff Buckley's iconic cover (1994), to Rufus Wainwright's soulful interpretation (2001), to the latest of more than 600 covers posted on YouTube. Peterson and Lindholdt recount the tale of how this song came to be, why it took fifteen years to become a worldwide phenomenon, and some of the reasons it continues to capture the hearts and ears of audiences. Cohen's masterful blend of the sensual and the spiritual, coupled with his unfiltered honesty about life, love and faith, make "Hallelujah" more than just another song about heartbreak. His biblical allusions, linking his own experiences to those of David and Samson, and his thoughtful integration of literary devices set this song apart. Are these reasons enough to justify the song's enduring popularity? Is there more to the story? Cohen and his music occupy a special place in any consideration of music as a reflection of ethno-national identity, speaking as he does from a complicated position as a Montreal Jew who lived in the USA and Greece and found a wide audience in Europe, while exploring several of the world's religions; he was ordained in 1996 as a Rinzai Zen Buddhist monk. The song's biographer Alan Light, in *The Holy or the Broken* (Light 2012), dubs Cohen a "Jewish Buddhist" (185). Cohen interrogates our assumptions about identity and can be seen as representing a new, post-national identity, one that is a-centric in a world that assumes singular positionality. It is precisely this trans-cultural aspect of his poetic lyrics that created the fertile reproduction of the "Hallelujah" lyrics that Peterson and Lindholdt analyse.

Turning to European identity, in particular its deep reservoir of folk culture, five chapters explore various aspects of Slovenian ethnic and cultural identity in songs and song lyrics. One of the primary components of Slovenian identity is the language. Slovene is a Slavic language and relatively young on the world's linguistic stage, but nevertheless a prized marker of this small nation's identity, and especially authentic in the continuity of regional variants. Two chapters focus on analysis of songs written using different regional Slovenian dialects.

Mihaela Koletnik and Melita Zemljak Jontes's "Styrian in Slovenian Popular Music" focuses on the use of non-standard Slovenian elements in Slovenian popular music, based on an analysis of selected Styrian popular music bands. In general, dialect prose and lyrical poetry have lately become more common in various kinds of media and in popular culture.

Their analysis is based on phonetic, morphological and lexical analysis of written and sung language. The lyrics in pop music, which are sensitive to musical expression such as rhythm, present a fairly accurate version of spoken dialect. The most evident Styrian dialectal characteristics appear in the lyrics of the group Mi2, mostly on the phonetic and lexical levels including colloquial or lower colloquially coloured vocabulary, as well as pejorative and vulgar vocabulary. The popular band Orlek use many distinctive dialectal lexical characteristic loanwords adopted into the Slovenian language, largely from German. In comparison, the popular band Nude's lyrics show almost no non-standard Slovenian characteristics.

Mihaela Koletnik and Alenka Valh Lopert's "Dialectal Imagery in *Murske balade in romance* (Ballads and Romances of the Pomurje Region)" performs a linguistic analysis of a number of songs written by contemporary popular songwriters for a festival in the north-eastern region of Slovenia. Koletnik and Valh Lopert focus on the use of the Pannonian Prekmurje and Prlekija dialectal features of songs written by the musicians, lyricists and writers Feri Lainšček, Vlado Žabot, Milan Vincetič, Dušan Šarotar, Štefan Kardoš, Marko Kočar, Vlado Kreslin and Vlado Poredoš. Performed by the Murska Banda instrumental ensemble and local vocalists, fourteen new romantic ballads were especially written for the *Murske balade in romance* (Ballads and Romances of Pomurje Region) music and literary project as part of the 2012 Maribor European Capital of Culture. The premiere took place on September 2012 at The Festival of Murske balade in romance (Ballads and Romances of Pomurje Region Festival) in Murska Sobota, Slovenia. Their key argument is that in Slovenia, as elsewhere in Europe, dialects have enjoyed a recent resurgence in use and acceptability. Even so trans-European a project as the Capital of Culture initiative can thus promote linguistic and cultural continuity on a regional basis.

Working between Europe and America, Nada Šabec's "Expressing Ethnic and Cultural Identity through Music and Song Lyrics: the Case of Slovenian Americans and Canadians" shows how songs can both reflect and preserve ethnic and cultural identity in expatriate Slovenian communities. Šabec draws on the immigrant experience of Slovenians and their descendants in the United States and Canada, specifically Cleveland, Ohio and Vancouver, British Columbia. Respondents from several Slovenian communities were asked about the role of music in their lives in order to determine the value they attribute to music in terms of maintaining their ethnic and cultural identity. In addition to exploring the social, ethnic and cultural aspects of music, Šabec also analyzed its linguistic aspects, in particular song lyrics, focusing on both their structure

and their message, paying particular attention to those lyrics that are written/sung partly in English and partly in Slovenian. In addition to the code switching and borrowing featured in such lyrics, she examined the influence of English on Slovenian vocabulary and syntax when the lyrics were written and sung exclusively in Slovenian. As regards the message, she examined the songs' themes, comparing them to those in similar genres in Slovenia. Her analysis focuses on the lyrics and songs themselves as well as on the immigrants' attitudes toward them, the aim of which is to determine to what extent their music and lyrics are still reminiscent of the homeland and how much they have absorbed from the new environment. Diasporic identity-formation can thus occur at a juncture between old and new musical cultures.

Focusing on expatriates from a different perspective, Victor Kennedy and Agata Križan discuss the music of Magnifico, the musical persona of popular Slovenian singer and songwriter Robert Pešut in "Magnifico: Slovenia's Musical Satirist." Magnifico is a slightly sinister comic character who embodies the *čefur*, the southern immigrant who threatens the identity and culture held dear by most ethnic Slovenes. Magnifico's songs and videos satirize the fear of foreigners with his exaggeratedly tasteless costumes and settings, his misspelling and mispronunciation of both Slovene and English, and his juxtaposition of traditional Slovene and Western music with Southern Turbfolk and gypsy music elements. This contribution addresses the ubiquitous phenomenon of migration, not out of, but *within* Europe, and shows how it results in radical performances that empower the margin to critique the perceived centre.

Another cross-cultural perspective comes from Janko Trupej, whose chapter "Ideological Influences on the Reception of Elvis Presley and The Beatles in Slovenia" takes a socio-political approach to the effect of "world" music on local culture. Western rock music had a long history of suppression in socialist/communist states, and it played a role in subverting the system in several countries of the Eastern Bloc. The situation was somewhat different in Slovenia, which was part of socialist Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1991; after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, the socialist regime became less hostile to Western influences, including rock music. When Elvis Presley appeared on the scene in the mid-1950s, Slovenia was closer to the West than was the case when The Beatles shook up the world in the mid-1960s; by that time Yugoslavia had co-founded the Non-Aligned Movement. Trupej focuses on investigating the extent to which the socio-political situation influenced the reception of these rock artists in Slovenian state-controlled periodicals. He compares the initial reception of Elvis Presley and The Beatles to that in later decades, when

they were already considered legends, and contrasts their status during the socialist era with their reception after Slovenia declared independence and began to move closer to the West.

Urša Marinšek and Tomaž Onič's "Davies' 'Orchestra' in the Celestial Dance with Slovene Culture" rounds out this section, dealing with literary adaptations of and parallels between English and Slovene serious and popular literature. Starting with the trope of "Celestial Music" at the heart of Davies' Elizabethan poem, Marinšek and Onič perform a stylistic analysis to trace the concept in modern Slovene popular songs starting with the 1962 hit "Zemlja pleše" (Eng. "The Earth is Dancing"), and demonstrate that this has become a common metaphor in Slovenian popular culture.

To complement this largely Euro-American perspective, we include three chapters that turn east to explore reflections of ethnic and cultural identity in ancient and modern Chinese poetry and songs.

Gill Holland, professor emeritus from Davidson College, North Carolina, presents the perspective of an American literary scholar on eighth-century Chinese poet Li Po in "Li Po's Essentially Chinese Poetry." Holland's focus is primarily on the structure and imagery of the poems, their poetic effect, and strategies of translation that allow non-Chinese speakers a way of approaching their subtlety and power.

Zhirong Yu's "Ci as the Origin of Chinese Pop Music" analyses the songs of Liu Yong (987-1053), a poet of the ancient Song Dynasty, who transformed the popular song form *Ci* into an accepted and serious poetic art form. *Ci* is written in variable line-length formal types, and the number of words and sentences is not fixed; *Ci* can also be called "long-short sentence." *Ci* consists of lyric and musical components, including the music for instruments and tune examples for choosing words. Different tunes or music are called "Ci Pai" ("Tune Title"), except in a very few cases; creating a *Ci* means writing a lyric according to a given *Ci Pai*. Yu argues that Liu's significance lies in his introduction of a new realism in the expression of emotion, a much freer use of colloquial language than previously seen, and various stylistic and prosodic innovations that remain influential in Chinese music today.

Cao Zhou's "Internet Meme Songs in China and the 'Diaosi' Identity of Youth Culture" brings our short survey of Chinese music up to the present day. She selects one of the most controversial Internet meme songs, "My Skateboard Shoes," to show the identity of *diaosi* as a subculture in modern China. Like the *čefur* of Slovenia, *diaosi* are a marginalized group on the outskirts of mainstream Chinese society. Zhou demonstrates that the unmusicality of and the contradiction between

ridiculousness and sincerity in the song are a precise expression of *diaosi* culture, which is why it enjoys such sweeping popularity in China.

The contributors to this volume come from many countries around the world, and from many different fields of expertise; each presents a distinct viewpoint on the topic of ethnic and cultural identity in songs, and each viewpoint complements the others. Each chapter shows, in a novel way, how songs not only express, but are instrumental in creating, identity. From ancient Chinese poetry and songs, to traditional British drinking songs, to modern rap, hip-hop, pop and folk music from all over the world, we will see how people everywhere use music and song to express their personal identities and their sense of belonging to a larger whole.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# FROM MOD TO PUNK: ESTABLISHING AND CHALLENGING NOTIONS OF BRITISHNESS

MAXIMILIAN FELDNER

The opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games offered an excellent opportunity for the United Kingdom to present a vision of how it wanted to be seen by the world. The show started with a video consisting of a long tracking shot along the River Thames into London towards the Olympic Stadium where numerous actors, dancers and volunteers staged the transition from rural pastoral to industrialised England. Later, the show focused on cultural achievements, with references to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, J. K. Rowling reading from *Peter Pan* and Kenneth Branagh reciting Shakespeare. One of the dancing scenes involved thirty-two women with flying umbrellas playing Mary Poppins, Monty Python's Eric Idle made an appearance and Mr. Bean's antics accompanied the London Symphony Orchestra's rendition of Vangelis's score for *Chariots of Fire*. One of the highlights involved the Queen and James Bond jumping from a helicopter into the arena, both the helicopter and the parachutes adorned with the Union Jack.

Celebrating Britain's popular culture, the proceedings included an extended sequence of dance routines performed to a medley of Britain's most recognizable pop songs including "She Loves You," "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," "My Boy Lollipop," "Bohemian Rhapsody," "Starman," "Pretty Vacant," "Going Underground," "Blue Monday," "Relax," "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)," "Born Slippy .N.UXX" and "Song 2." Finally, Pink Floyd's "Eclipse" formed the soundtrack for the concluding fireworks, before Paul McCartney took to the stage to perform the Beatles hit "Hey Jude." A large number of other British pop musicians were also featured during the opening and closing ceremonies, including The Rolling Stones, David Bowie, Queen, Led Zeppelin, the Sex Pistols, The Jam,

New Order, The Spice Girls, Amy Winehouse and Muse, with live performances by The Who, Ray Davies of The Kinks, Oasis's Liam Gallagher, Arctic Monkeys and Kaiser Chiefs. Britain celebrating itself by prominently including these bands indicates the importance of pop music for conceptions of British identity both at home and abroad. Pop acts such as The Beatles, The Who and the Sex Pistols are presented to the world as belonging to the same rank of iconic Britishness as the Queen, James Bond and the Union Jack.

By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, pop music had become an important component of British identity. The music of bands like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Kinks, originating in the 1960s, and their international success served as a new source of pride and identification after the disintegration of the British Empire. In the 1990s, buzzwords like "Britpop" and "Cool Britannia" came to mark the recognition of British pop music as an important cultural asset and an integral part of the British national imagination. Pop as a concept is notoriously fuzzy and hard to define because it encompasses a broad spectrum of diverse musical styles, as well as attitudes and ideas about it. On a very basic level, one can differentiate between two understandings of pop, an inclusive and an exclusive one (cf. Frith 2001, 94-5). In the first understanding, pop as a field comprises all varieties of popular music, such as rock, hip hop, soul, disco, country and reggae, while in the second pop is itself a variety of popular music. In the second sense, more negatively defined, "pop becomes not an inclusive category but a residual one: it is what's left when all the other forms of popular music are stripped away" (Frith 2001, 95). Preferring the inclusive view, the particular variety of pop that I will focus on is the music of predominantly male guitar bands whose line-up usually consists of drums, bass, rhythm and lead guitars, and who play music that is typically referred to as "rock." For my purposes, therefore, British pop music refers to the tradition of guitar-based rock music from Britain. Starting in the early-to-mid 1960s with bands like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Kinks and The Who, this tradition has dominated the British music scene, and has since evolved in a more or less straight line. Bands such as the Sex Pistols, The Clash and The Jam are representative of this tradition in the seventies; The Smiths, The Cure and The Stone Roses in the eighties; Blur, Oasis and Pulp in the nineties and The Libertines, Franz Ferdinand and Kaiser Chiefs in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> British rock music took other directions as well, especially as the field diversified in the late 1960s. Very schematically, one might distinguish, for example, between

This tradition has strongly contributed to conceptions of British identity and to the British national imaginary. According to Benedict Anderson, a nation is an imagined community because, despite the fact that its members can never know all the other members, they still feel a bond with them, “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 2006, 6). This imagined connection is based on “a sense of continuity, shared memories, and a sense of common destiny of a given unit of population which has had common experiences and cultural attributes” (Smith 1990, 179). Cultural identity in this sense is not essential, stable and true, but rather “a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall 1993, 392). In other words, a national imaginary in terms of a collective identity is created in the various fields of representation, such as literature, the news media and popular culture. Pop music can also be a relevant medium of a collective identity, as it “constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives” (Frith 1996, 122). British pop music is thus not only part of national and cultural British identities but has also vitally contributed to the meaning of Britishness in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Viol argues “that a good deal of British pop music is, in fact, permeated with national discourse(s)” and that pop is an important site “where national identity is negotiated and (re)constructed” (Viol 2000, 82).

Focusing on “the twinned totems of white British pop: mod and punk” (Savage 1996, 413), I will first outline British pop of the sixties and its successes in the cultural arena that account for this period’s reputation as the heyday of pop music, a reputation that is best captured by the terms “British Invasion” and “Swinging London.” The subculture of the mods and the song “Waterloo Sunset” (1967) by The Kinks, a quintessentially “English” band, illustrate the close connections between national identity and pop established during that period. Second, I will consider British punk of the late 1970s, which is a style that represents a continuation of and reaction to the musical developments of the 1960s. In addition, punk is a response to changed socio-political circumstances, reflecting a general discontent with the economic situation but also the multiculturalism of an increasingly diverse British society. Based on an analysis of “London Calling” (1979) by The Clash, one of the central British punk bands, I will

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the three traditions started by Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin/Deep Purple and David Bowie/T-Rex, which turned into psychedelic/progressive rock, hard rock and later heavy metal, and glam rock, respectively.

trace the changes in style, habitus and content of pop music to show that, while mod articulates a critical but ultimately affirmative stance, punk's attitude is characterized by hostility towards Britishness. This stance, however, has not prevented punk from being adopted as part of the national cultural heritage, adding to the curious situation that rock, a musical culture that is associated with "rebellion in musical form, distorted guitars, aggressive drumming, and bad attitude" (Keightley 2001, 109), has become an official bearer of national identity.

### **Mod and the Golden Age of British Pop**

By the early 1960s, England had lost not only most of its colonies but also much of its political influence and dominance in the world. While the British Empire had been at its territorial peak right after World War I, in the wake of the Suez Crisis and after widespread efforts towards decolonisation (India gained independence in 1947, and most of Britain's colonies in Africa followed within the next fifteen years), British power had been considerably diminished by the sixties. Richard Weight notes that "the 1960s, the end of Empire and the decline of the industry, together with increasing secularisation and the diminishing role of the monarchy, had eroded the economic and cultural framework of British national identity that had existed since Victorian times" (Weight 2013, 316). If England was no longer the political centre of the world, based on the cultural achievements during that period, it could at least imagine itself the cultural centre of the world. In a sense, national pride was shifted towards the cultural sphere. The former imperialist aspirations still resonated in expressions such as the "British Invasion," commonly used to describe the "conquest" of the United States by British bands, who, after the "Beatlemania" of 1964, dominated the American charts for a while. The decade produced most of the greatest British bands and artists, including The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Kinks and The Who. In addition, several of the artists who would celebrate their major successes in the 1970s, such as David Bowie, Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin, also started their careers in the 1960s.

The 1960s were an especially fertile moment in pop history, a time characterized by innovation and major changes in the production of music. Every new Beatles album, for example, was more advanced than the previous one, both stylistically and technically. Artists discovered the studio as a means not only of recording but also of composing their music. Better equipment refined and augmented the possibilities of expression and allowed for the creation of increasingly complex songs. Pop started to

be recognized as an art form that had to be taken seriously, which was expressed in the ambitious and complex albums that emerged in the second half of the sixties. In addition, technological developments and new means of distribution made it possible to reach wider audiences than ever before. These audiences existed because of the changed demographic and sociological circumstances of the post-war years, including the baby boom and years of unprecedented growth and wealth. The result was a significant increase in the numbers of teenagers and the amount of money they had to spend, making them an attractive target group as consumers. Weight describes this

confluence of trends within the developed world in the age of mass democracy after 1945: the baby boom, mass affluence, advances in media and communication technologies, wider access to higher education, civil rights for women and ethnic minorities, and a liberalisation of sexual mores. These changes, which took place in a relatively short space of time, made young people more numerous than before; they also made them richer, more connected to each other, more sceptical of the status quo and freer to indulge and articulate their desires and tastes. (Weight 2013, 15)

In addition to audiences being more liberal and better educated, what enabled the emergence of a certain pop sensibility were feelings of boredom and restlessness: “Despite the advances of the new Britain, many young people still felt trapped and marginalized; they weren’t exactly angry, but were bored and confused and they wanted something to happen” (Bracewell 2009, 70). Pop music channelled or absorbed these teenagers’ desires to escape conformity and served as an outlet for the conflicting emotions of frustration and excitement, infatuation and sadness. Value was also placed on pop music because it could aid in the search for self-knowledge, providing “a kind of map of a changing society just as it maps our own lives, helping give emotional shape to our memories of childhood, friendship, love affairs, life changes” (Frith 2001, 106). Adolescents reacted to the music, whose authenticity seemed heightened by the fact that during the period, pop musicians began to write and perform their own songs.

Much of the era’s brilliance is captured in the term “Swinging London,” which denotes London as a cultural centre leading in music, art, fashion and cinema. Smith argues that a national consciousness is founded in the notion of a common past that represents the glorious origins of the nation:

To create the nation [its members] must be taught who they are, where they came from and whither they are going. [...] Old religious sages and saints can now be turned into national heroes, ancient chronicles and epics

become examples of the creative national genius, while great ages of achievement in the community's past are presented as the nation's 'golden age' of pristine purity and nobility. (Smith 1990, 184)

Applying this notion to pop, the national heroes are The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Kinks, the defining bands of the 1960s, the decade that forms the golden age of British pop, and the songs and albums of these bands express the creative national genius and achievement.

In the 1990s, British pop was officially codified as a central national symbol. Damon Albarn claimed that

There was a time when pop music wouldn't have been able to define what being English was all about, but that's changed now. If you draw a line from The Kinks in the Sixties, through The Jam [in the 70s] and The Smiths [in the 80s], to Blur in the Nineties, it would define this thing called Englishness as well as anything. (Damon Albarn, quoted in Weight 2013, 336)

A statement like this might not be particularly surprising in its grandiosity, coming from the singer of Blur, a band he locates in the very tradition he advocates. What is telling, however, is that he identifies his art as an expression of national identity, especially considering that rock music has usually been defined by its rebelliousness and outsider status. Even more surprising is that Albarn's statement is not far removed from the claim made in 1994 by Labour Party leader Tony Blair that "Rock and roll is not just an important part of our culture, it's an important part of our way of life" (Tony Blair, quoted in Weight 2013, 334). On his way to becoming Prime Minister, Blair courted pop artists, such as the hugely popular band Oasis, and proclaimed the slogan of "Cool Britannia," using pop in the attempt to make nationalism seem sexy and cool.<sup>2</sup> "Cool Britannia" was fuelled by a revival of sixties pop by bands such as Oasis, Blur and Suede. Conspicuously subsumed under the genre rubric of "Britpop," these bands demonstrated the importance of pop music to British identity, as they tapped into the nostalgia for that era and contributed to its romanticisation: "Britpop was the most patriotic youth culture to emerge in Britain since the 1960s and was one of the few popular expressions of Britishness at a time when Scotland and England were becoming more politically divided than at any time since the eighteenth century" (Weight 2013, 316).

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<sup>2</sup> One of the key movies of the decade is *Trainspotting* (1996), directed by Danny Boyle, who would later become the creative director of the London 2012 opening ceremony.

The international success of British bands and the developments in music are two factors that help explain how the 1960s emerged as the most prominent era of the British pop consciousness. A third factor is the striking style of the mods that became the defining look of the period. The mod subculture most centrally influenced the image of Swinging London and is at the same time the prime emblem of Britishness in pop music:

Mod was a uniquely British hybrid of American, European and Afro-Caribbean styles in music, fashion and design, forming the DNA of British youth culture from the late 1950s to the late 1990s. Started in London by a highly elitist and self-regarding group of aspirant individuals, Mod was transformed via the mass media into a national youth movement that appealed to people from all social backgrounds and shaped the physical environment of many more who never belonged to it. (Weight 2013, 387)

Cobbled together from diverse influences, mod is a distinctly British style, defining for many “what it [has] meant to be young and British in the post-imperial age” (Weight 2013, 47). The mods defined the fashion style of the mid-sixties and with their slick Italian suits and colourful clothing provided a response to the greyness and drabness of post-war Britain. As its members invested their money in clothes, motor scooters and music, mod is also a form of consumerism. However, its ideal is not random consumption for consumption’s sake, but conspicuous consumption, where their highly selective taste and style allowed mods coming from working-class backgrounds to accrue symbolic capital.

As a subculture, the mod style provided a source of identity to young Britons who differed from common contemporary conceptions of Britishness. Since it “offered escape from and protest against the orthodoxy of English culture” (Bracewell 2009, 73), it also challenged the dominant values and styles of the time. Mod possessed “subversive potential as a threat to the older assurances of class and gender-based hierarchies and traditions” (Weight 2013, 392) and expressed a reaction against adolescent conformity. The mods’ combination of anger and sensitivity was “vividly articulated by rhythm and blues, soul, or early psychedelia” and provided them with “a version of manhood which blended melancholy, anger, and a quest for sincerity with what it actually meant to be young and male in modern Britain” (Bracewell 2009, 78). With their anthems, “My Generation” (1965) and “The Kids are Alright” (1966), The Who provided a soundtrack for disaffected mod youth.

Besides music and fashion, another way in which mods proved subversive was in their recontextualization of core British symbols such as the Union Jack and the Royal Air Force roundel. A classic example of this

practice is The Who wrapping themselves in the Union Jack or wearing Union Jack blazers on album covers. Even though nowadays the Union Jack can be found in all kinds of contexts, at the time the misappropriation of the flag was seen as an affront, as “the British flag was reconfigured from a symbol of state denoting order, tradition and conquest, into a fashion icon of post-imperial Britain” (Weight 2013, 131). But the meaning of the flag’s reconfiguration was already ambiguous at the time, indicating both the attempt to undermine the symbolism of the dominant culture as well as the mods’ identification with British culture. Weight argues that mods wore the flag “with two aims in mind: to affront the British Establishment and to proclaim the fact that they were still proudly and distinctively British” (Weight 2013, 132). Michael Bracewell asserts that the “flag had been perhaps the ultimate icon of English pop’s ambivalence towards Englishness” (Bracewell 2009, 225). This ambivalence partly helps to explain how British pop, originally rooted in subversive counterculture, could so seamlessly be adopted to signify Britishness decades later. By the 1990s, when British imagery played a prominent role in Britpop, with the Union Jack prominently displayed on the guitar of Oasis’s Liam Gallagher, or repurposed as Spice Girl Geri Halliwell’s tight dress, the ambivalence had vanished. The recontextualizations of the flag were less the subversive acts of their predecessors than simple fashion statements and unironic demonstrations of affiliation with the British nation.

The Kinks are one of the most important and influential British bands of the sixties. Strongly associated with Britishness, they provided many of the cues for the Britpop generation. Merging musical influences from rhythm & blues, folk and music halls, they established their own distinct style and sound, which would strongly influence later generations of British musicians. Their reputation as the most English band of their time rests especially on three albums released in the second half of the 1960s that portray post-World War II Britain. *Something Else* (1967), *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* (1968) and *Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)* (1969) are albums inspired by English lifestyles. They celebrate London as well as village life in rural England, pay sardonic homage to Queen Victoria,<sup>3</sup> and investigate British identities after the end of the Empire. Ray Davies, the singer and main songwriter of the band, made a name for himself as an attentive observer

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<sup>3</sup> The song “Victoria,” for instance, opens with the lines, “Long ago, life was clean/sex was bad and obscene/and the rich were so mean/stately homes for the Lords/croquet lawns, village greens/Victoria was my queen.”

of English life, writing songs rich in social commentary, most notably in “Sunny Afternoon” (1966), a satirical song dealing with the British tax system, “Dead End Street” (1966), an analysis of the British class system and “Dedicated Follower of Fashion” (1966), which lovingly mocks the fashionistas of mid-sixties London. Instead of adopting a US-American accent like many other pop singers at the time, Davies consciously sang with an English accent, sometimes even mimicking an aristocratic accent: “I didn’t want to sound American. I was very conscious of sounding English” (Davies, quoted in Weight 2013, 95). In typical mod fashion, the band’s name stands in an ambiguous position towards Britishness. With the play on the word “king,” it expresses a certain closeness to the monarchy, one of the most central institutions of Britishness, while being “kinks,” i.e. weird and twisted, but not necessarily with the sexual associations attached to the term today, marks them as outsiders.

If The Kinks are one of the most quintessentially “English” bands, their song “Waterloo Sunset” (1967) is one of the songs in which British pop truly came into its own.<sup>4</sup> Musically, it is defined by a simple song structure played in 4/4 time. At a little more than three minutes in length, the song consists of three verses, framed by an intro of the bass playing on a descending scale and an outro, on which piano, guitar and vocal melody are on a rising scale. It generally exudes a positive atmosphere, with its relaxed tempo, the steadily strumming acoustic guitar, the soft, bluesy bass and the simple and gentle percussion consisting of hi-hat, snare and bass drum. As is usually the case in pop songs, it is to a large degree carried by the singer’s voice. Ray Davies, whose vocal melody is doubled by an electric guitar, together with the background vocal harmonies (consisting of soft “uhuhs” and “shalalas”), evokes a positive mood.

The generally positive and relaxed atmosphere of the music is supported and confirmed in the lyrics, which are about the lyrical persona watching the London sunset, considering the river and thinking about the people who are getting ready for a night out. In the opening line, “Dirty old river, must you keep rolling, flowing into the night,” the river’s steadiness is musically imitated by the constant strumming of the acoustic guitar throughout the song, which indicates the stability and security experienced by the lyrical persona. Outside, the hustle and bustle of a Friday night is getting underway as people return from work and start to go out: “people so busy,” “taxi lights,” “millions of people swarming like

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<sup>4</sup> The song was released as a single in May 1967 and then on the album *Something Else by The Kinks* (1967). Ray Davies also performed it live at the closing ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games.

flies ‘round Waterloo underground.” Nevertheless, the lyrical persona feels safe and comfortable at home, feeling lazy and satisfied to “look at the world from my window.” Inside, the dizzying activity and the chilly evening air do not disturb the pleasure of gazing at the fine sunset. Among the masses of people are Terry and Julie, who meet at “Waterloo Station, every Friday night,” signifying that they are identifiable individual people in the crowds.<sup>5</sup> The city is not depicted as an urban abyss where the individual disappears in the uniform masses. At the same time, the lyrical persona, although alone, does not feel the alienating loneliness often associated with urban life. The sunset and the largely anonymous crowds are there for company so “I don’t need no friends.”

The references in the lyrics clearly make it an English song. The “Waterloo” in the song’s title and lyrics places the song’s action in Central London, which is confirmed and specified with the reference to “Waterloo Station” and “Waterloo underground.” Waterloo and the River Thames, serve as metonyms for London, which is depicted in a positive light. It provides “millions of people” with housing, work and entertainment and still is a source of stability, security and predictability; the river keeps rolling and Terry and Julie meet every Friday night. Looking at the river is a positive experience, making the lyrical persona feel safe: “I don’t feel afraid.” The claim that “As long as I gaze on Waterloo Sunset, I am in paradise” is understandable if one imagines the magnificence of the London cityscape as it is bathed in golden hour light. The river, dirty and old, further alludes to industrialisation and tradition, two aspects often associated with England, while Waterloo Station, one of England’s busiest train stations, is also a metaphor for connectedness to the world beyond the limits of London, which allows the lyrical persona to “look at the world from my window.”

In later songs, such as “Village Green,” The Kinks further pursue the celebration of England and Englishness, turning to the countryside. As the Village Green Preservation Society, they evoke the pastoral life of the village that is “out in the country far from all the soot and noise of the city,” and allude to the green hills that are a recurring trope of English national discourse” (Viol 2000, 85). The song wallows in memories of the “village green,” which has become a museum invaded by American tourists, and of the lyrical persona’s first love, Daisy, whom he left to seek his fortune in the world. He imagines that he will return one day, to

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<sup>5</sup> The names were likely inspired by the English actors Terence Stamp and Julie Christie, two of the central faces of mid-sixties Britain, who played the main couple in the 1967 adaptation of Thomas Hardy’s *Far From the Madding Crowd*.

reminisce with her over a cup of tea (and what could be more British than a cup of tea?) about the village green. Whether the nostalgia and conservatism of the song are sincere, or, as so often in Kinks songs, infused by a certain tongue-in-cheek attitude, the song is remarkable in its thorough activation of elements typically associated with Britishness.

As a result, The Kinks vitally contributed to the golden age of British pop, and make understandable why it is closely associated with Britishness. Several other central bands of the period also proudly exhibited features of Britishness. The Beatles, for example, celebrated the English music hall tradition with their *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album, or paid homage to their native city of Liverpool in songs like "Penny Lane." Mod bands like The Who and Small Faces similarly emphasized their Britishness in their style of dress, their accents or the subject matter of their songs. However, pop music history did not proceed in a straight line from the 1960s to the 1990s, and the transfer from the generation of Swinging London to their successors in Britpop was not entirely straightforward. One of the main ruptures that occurred along the way was caused by punk, where pop music challenged the unqualified equation of pop and Britishness. Although these challenges have since been recuperated, they still render somewhat ironic the important position of British pop in the British imaginary.

## **Punk: A Challenge to Hegemonic Notions of Britishness**

If, in "Waterloo Sunset," The Kinks depict London as a bustling but finally idyllic place, another song about London, released twelve years later, presents the city in a fundamentally different way. The Clash's "London Calling" (1979), from the band's *London Calling* album, is a tense, angry and loud song that envisions the destruction of London. Like The Kinks' song, it has a simple structure but is faster, louder and more aggressive, which is emphasised by staccato chords played on distorted guitars, driving drums, a dominant reggae bass, and the singer's barked singing. The menacing, riotous and disturbing soundscape is intensified by erratic guitar howls, and high-pitched cries and screams that might represent howling, laughter or war cries. During the bridge the song collapses for a moment, before the guitar plays a short, hard solo. The song's soundscape thus effectively evokes an atmosphere that supports the bleak message of the lyrics, which are captivating in their apocalyptic imagery.

The song's title is taken from the wartime broadcasts of the BBC World Service, whose station identification "This is London calling..."

aimed to bring news to occupied countries during World War II. Originally a beacon of hope, London is itself under attack in the song. “War is declared” and London is on the brink of catastrophe, as the chorus piles up disaster scenarios, evoking an ice age, global warming, nuclear meltdown and the flooding of the city: “The ice age is coming, the sun is zooming in/meltdown expected, the wheat is growin’ thin/engines stop running, but I have no fear/cause London is drowning and I, I live by the river.”<sup>6</sup> London is about to be destroyed by not just one disaster but several, happening at the same time. If the city were somehow to weather all of them, the lyrics indicate other imminent problems, such as power cuts as the engines stop running, and food shortages on account of the wheat growing thin. The idea of an apocalyptic future is intensified by the fact that the final chorus is set after the catastrophe has already happened, with the lyrical persona claiming that “I was there, too” and that “some of it was true!” Thus, the destruction and violence are not just possible but inevitable, having already happened by the song’s end.<sup>7</sup> Again, the River Thames plays a prominent role in the song, serving as an indicator of the setting and as a metonym for London. In contrast to “Waterloo Sunset,” it is not a benign presence conveying peace and stability, but a symbol of destruction threatening to drown the city.

Punk chronicler John Savage notes that “The Clash began as a classic Mod group: angry, smart, mediated, pop. They speeded up the heavily chorded, stuttering sound of The Who and The Kinks and added new variations” (Savage 1992, 232). But even though The Clash may follow The Kinks in a direct traditional line, “London Calling” has very little in common with “Waterloo Sunset,” aside from being a song about London. The Kinks’ depiction of London was informed by the optimistic mood and positive image of Swinging London as the cultural centre of the world. Similarly, “London Calling” can be understood as a product of its time, of an atmosphere that had significantly soured. It was released during a period of decline, marked by high unemployment, rising crime rates, racial tensions and riots. “By the summer of 1977, unemployment was up to 1.6 million, 6 per cent of the workforce; the public service cuts demanded by the IMF began to bite, and the polarizations of the time found their expression in street violence” (Savage 1992, 480). Social life seemed to be disintegrating, as strikes and the continuing terrorism of the IRA

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<sup>6</sup> The mention of meltdown is probably a response to the partial nuclear meltdown at the Three Mile Island power plant in Pennsylvania in March 1979, a few months before the song was released.

<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the song harkens back to T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1921), which similarly tells about a post-apocalyptic London destroyed by the rising Thames.

additionally contributed to the fragile social order. One reaction to the culmination of these tendencies in the “Winter of Discontent” of 1978-79 was the rise of Margaret Thatcher, who promised more social stability. After her election in 1979, her name became connected to the transformation of Great Britain in favour of neoliberalism, privatisation, deregulation and deindustrialisation, as well as the disempowerment of the unions and the dismantling of the welfare state.

Another reaction to the socio-political situation of the seventies was the emergence of the punk movement. It served as an outlet for the angry, confused, frustrated and alienated youth suffering from the country’s economic decline and lack of opportunities. Together with the Sex Pistols, another decidedly English band (cf. Adams 2008, 469), The Clash appeared as one of the prototypical British punk bands of the late 1970s. Especially with their first album, *The Clash*, they decisively contributed to the style, sound and mythology of punk. The music, short, simple and angry bursts of distorted guitars, was supposed to be a return to the roots of rock music, overcoming the overwrought and musically and conceptually ambitious songs of mid-seventies progressive rock. Punk was seen as a rejuvenation, a renewal of the energies of rock music that appeared to have been lost in the previous years. The name of The Clash, unlike the playful band name of The Kinks, encapsulates much of punk’s philosophy, signifying a loud, hard impact that points to the many collisions between the police and demonstrators, for example, and thus reflects the socio-political conflicts of the time. The cover of their first album looks like a picture torn from a magazine, in the DIY (do it yourself) aesthetic of punk’s bricolage style. The band members stare angrily into the camera, while their cropped hair and torn leather and jeans clothes are a far cry from the band outfits that were dominant in rock in the mid-seventies, such as the long hair and extravagant, colourful clothes worn by bands such as Led Zeppelin, Yes, and Emerson, Lake and Palmer. The famous album cover of their third album, *London Calling*, explicitly refers to Elvis Presley’s first album. If Elvis’s album marks the beginning of rock music, The Clash cover appears to allude to the end of rock music. The downward movement of Paul Simonon smashing his bass on stage is the antithesis to Elvis’s lifted guitar. *London Calling* represented a diversification of the punk style, at a time when the first wave of punk was already over. Nevertheless, the music and lyrics of “London Calling” capture much of the time’s punk ethos. Depicting London as a place of violence and brutality, it expresses the negativity of the punk movement, with the destruction of the city as a metaphor for punk’s nihilism and “no future” credo. The promises of the golden sixties are exposed as an empty