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The Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music, Space and Place

Edited by Geoff Stahl and
J. Mark Percival

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Music and the nation

Melanie Schiller

Music and the origins of nations

Music has been fundamental to the establishment of modern nations. Nearly all the nation-building movements across Europe in the nineteenth century find some of their most influential and lasting expressions through the art of nationalist composers, who took an active part in those movements (Curtis 2008) But not only composers were important for the consolidation of a national culture, as Cecilia Applegate and Pamela Potter for instance argue for the case of Germany, the national project was just as much advanced by writers, music critics, conductors, organizers, musical amateurs and singing organizations (2002: 12) Besides art music, folk music was equally important for establishing and consolidating ideas of nationhood when Johann Gottfried Herder for instance began to refer to songs associated with modern nation-states as *Volkslieder* (folk songs) (Bohlman 2015) Music, therefore, does not simply represent the nation; music is mustered for the making of the nation (Bohlman 2009 83) and it has implicitly and explicitly made a fundamental contribution to imaginings of collective identity and nationhood.

In his seminal *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1991) theorizes the emergence of the nation-state as dependent on its collective imagination and its rootedness in everyday life By reading the daily newspaper, or collectively singing the national anthem on national holidays, people imagine themselves as forming a nation, and 'in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 1991. 6). It is in synchronized experiences like this, Anderson argues, in which the collective recognition (or imagination) of a community constitutes national identification 'Nothing connects us all, but imagined sound', Anderson concludes his celebration of unisonality in collectively singing the national anthem. 'People wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. [. .] If we are aware that others are singing these songs precisely when and as we are, we have no idea who they may be, or even where, out of earshot, they are singing' (Anderson 1991: 145) It is in this simultaneity of singing the anthem, Anderson argues, that the nation is manifested in the imagination of the people.

Popular music and everyday nationhood

Clearly, music and the history of nationalism are intrinsically intertwined, but the connection between national identity and (popular) music reaches beyond this historical dimension. As imagined communities, nations are social constructions imagined by the people who perceive themselves to be a part of it, articulated in narratives that are always open for reinterpretation (Bhabha 1990, Anderson 1991; Balibar 1991). These narratives are created and negotiated in culture, and, as Stuart Hall (1996) aptly reminds us, are of course also told and retold in the media and popular culture. National identity therefore is not only grounded in the realm of 'high culture' (Gellner 2006: 56), art music, political institutions, invented traditions (Hobsbawm 2012: 1) and folk culture, but also in the mundane, everyday life and experiences, routines and habits. Popular culture therefore provides an important resource for the production of social identity as 'the constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experience' (Fiske 2011: 1). 'Traditional' cultural forms and practices of the nation, Tim Edensor argues, are supplemented, and increasingly replaced in their affective power, by meanings, images and activities drawn from popular culture (2002: 12). The fundamental importance of mundane details of the everyday in creating and maintaining a collective sense of identity and feeling of national community, is what Michael Billig describes as banal nationalism (Billig 1995). Arguing that everyday representations of the nation build a shared sense of national belonging, Billig mentions weather forecasts, national emblems on bank notes and the flag, which hangs unnoticed outside a public building. International sporting competitions, for example, are often perceived through national perspectives with the respective teams or athletes representing a nation. Here also, it is music that 'flags' and announces the nation: the national anthem of the respective teams played at the beginning of the competition or to honour the victory of teams or individuals during award ceremonies.

Popular music can also fulfil the function of reproducing the nation in seemingly banal and innocuous situations, as everyday culture, popular music is closely connected to the lived experience of people, or as Andy Bennett argues popular music has become a central means for the framing of discourses concerning national culture and identity (Bennett 2016: 6). Musicians for instance have become signs of the nation – as Bruce Springsteen in the United States, Björk in Iceland, ABBA in Sweden or the Beatles in the UK (McLeod 2016: 157), and popular music genres have been connected to notions of national identity. Brit pop of the 1990s, for example, was associated with a particular idea of Englishness, discussed in the language of nationalism (Cloonan 1997) and embraced by politicians like Tony Blair (McRobbie 1999: 4). Another example of the interconnection between seemingly banal popular music and the nation is the Serbian variant of a wider pan-Balkan musical phenomenon and pop-folk musical style: 'turbofolk'. The genre emerged in the 1990s and has been discussed as being a lever of the Milošević regime – an inherently nationalist cultural phenomenon which developed due to the specific sociopolitical conditions of Serbia in the 1990s (Archer 2012). The pervasiveness of nationalism, as Clifford Geertz has described (1973: 306), then lies in its ability of transforming pre-existing ties and identities into national ones and, as I will work out in more detail below, the nation remains a crucial but ambivalent category for understanding how cultural texts and practices function in the construction of personal and collective identities (Biddle and Knights 2007: 1).

Popular music and the collective performance of nationhood

Popular music is a central means for constructions of identity, both individually as well as collectively (Connell and Gibson 2003). With its strong affective potential, music is often linked to a personal experience and a private self, channelling emotions and offering a 'kind of self-recognition, [freeing] us from everyday routines, from the social expectations with which we are encumbered' (Frith 1996: 275). As such, music can function as a marker for personal taste, style and identification, an empowering tool for self-expression and identity. However, the individual experience of music and its role as a resource for identity formation is never isolated and, as Tia DeNora points out, is always based upon reflexivity and on seeing the self in relation to another (2008: 155). Music, as a 'technology of the self' (DeNora 2000: 46) then also has a profoundly social function, and often plays an important role in constructing a collective sense of identity and feeling of community; it is at the heart of our most profound social occasions and experiences from sporting events to national celebrations and religious holidays (DeNora 2000, Turino 2008). Besides individual identification, music can therefore also create companionship, and invite collective identification: music makes us *feel* part of a community (Frith 2007, emphasis in original). Music is hence not only 'embedded in the creation of (and constant maintenance of) nationhood' (Connell and Gibson 2003: 117), but it is also an integral component of processes through which cultural identities are formed, and popular music is an important cultural sphere in which national identities are affirmed, challenged, taken apart and reconstructed (Connell and Gibson 2003: 18).

One illustrative case for the formative role of popular music as everyday culture and expression of banal nationalism is the popular German Carnival Schlager 'Trizonesien-Song', which first consolidated a post-war West-German identity in 1948. After the unconditional surrender in 1945, Germany was divided into four zones, occupied by the Allied forces. The 'Trizonesien-Song' mockingly refers to the Tri-zone: the combination of the American, British and French occupied zones, which collaborated and later, on 23 May 1949, became the Federal Republic of Germany, commonly known as West Germany. During those years of disorientation, no nation-state existed on German territory, and cultural life was heavily censored and regulated by the occupying forces. Popular music, however, was primarily ('apolitical') entertainment, and was hence almost ignored by the regulatory institutions (Thacker 2007: 23). When in 1948 the traditional local carnival celebrations in Cologne were permitted again for the first time after the war, Karl Berbuer's humorous 'Trizonesien-Song' became a major hit. The song – a catchy sing-along-march in B flat and two-two time signature – mockingly addressed the political situation at the time. Disguised in humour it criticized the allies as colonizers, it bemoaned a loss of national sovereignty, it denied guilt and performativity introduced and created a collective identification as West-Germans (the Tri-zone) against the Allied forces, excluding east-Germany from its national narrative. In fact, the song was so popular that, in lieu of an official national anthem (and the non-existence of a nation-state for that matter), the carnival Schlager was on occasion used as a substitute national anthem during sporting events (Schiller 2020: 64). The popular song consolidated an emerging West-German imagined community, by drawing on its 'banal' everyday-ness as a carnival sing-along Schlager, collectively sung and celebrated by the people in the streets of Cologne. Although, of course, only an 'unofficial' national anthem for the yet-non-existing nation, the 'Trizonesien-Song' was the first to unite the people under the new common denominator, and as such the song not only symbolically represented the newly imagined community but is also provided a context for the nation's people to participate and actively perform 'Trizonesianness' (West-German identity) (Schiller 2020). The 'Trizonesien-Song' therefore illustrates how popular music does not merely represent the nation, and citizens do not merely 'read' the nation in music, they 'see, hear, and participate in it' (Tuohy 2001: 124), but they also *produce* it through music (Schiller 2020). Popular music as everyday culture can therefore be understood as facilitating a collective experience, and music's affective quality offers 'a platform to negotiate questions of belonging or to challenge national [...] identification' (Stehle and Kahnke 2013: 123).

Popular music and nation-state policy

Thus far I have discussed how (popular) music has been instrumental in building, shaping and representing nationhood as everyday culture, and I showed how music is an active participant in the formation of national identity discourses. However, it also needs to be noted that the relation between popular music and the nation is reciprocal, and the nation-state remains crucial in determining the construction of meaning in popular music (Homan et al. 2016: 2). The actions of nation-states are important factors in musical life: in the form of subsidies and other kinds of cultural policy, or in the form of sanctions and laws (Fornas 2002). As Homan et al. point out, the range of popular music funding and activities facilitated by the state has increased in western nations over the past two decades (2016: 2). As national governments are increasingly interested in popular music (cf. Cloonan 2016: 3), state music policies are often developed to encourage greater local (national) musical activity (Connell and Gibson 2003: 118). Such state policy generally aims at protecting national music cultures and strengthening a national music market in the face of an increasingly global music industry. Extreme forms of such regulations may go as far as banning all non-national music from its airwaves, as was decided by the Iranian leaders in 1994 (cf. Cloonan 1999). A less radical measure employed by nation-states to ensure the presence of domestic music is the implementation of national quotas for radio stations, requiring public broadcasting to dedicate a certain percentage of airtime to recordings by domestic artists. Countries like Australia, France and Canada for instance have been relying on national radio quotas for decades (cf. Shuker 2008) and, as Shuker shows, the willingness of New Zealand's government to introduce a (officially voluntary yet de facto compulsory) radio quota[1] has had tremendous impact on the national music industry and contributed to the present success of both the mainstream commercial and the indie sectors in the country, primarily by creating a changed musical climate that has ensured the greater viability of 'the local' generally (Shuker 2008: 282).

Other important realms of influence for nation-state policies in relation to popular music are national legal systems like for instance censorship laws – and the ability and willingness to implement these (Cloonan 1999: 197). In the German Democratic Republic, for instance, GDR officials initially tried to exploit the apolitical nature of a new popular music genre in the 1960s – Beat music – by appropriating the new sound for their own political agenda. Beat was temporarily supported as 'socialist dance- and entertainment music' (Grabowsky 2005: 48) and the state-owned company Amiga released records by the Beatles in an effort to ideologically commit the youth to the state (Schildt and Siegfried 2009: 206). In 1965, however, state policy suddenly changed: fearing it was losing its grip on the youth to western values, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany's (SED) chair Erich Honecker declared that the 'detrimental factor of such music on the thought and actions of adolescents had been crudely underestimated' (Peters 2010: 162). This 'misjudgment' was henceforth rectified by a complete ban of Beat music in the GDR (Schiller 2020). Another instance of GDR state-policy affecting popular music was when in 1975 a purge of rock bands, including the popular Klaus Renft Combo, were forced to disband because they were considered to be a threat (Cf. Cloonan 1999: 198).

Another way for the nation-state to utilize popular music for its own ideological purposes is the development of cultural policies related to popular music heritage. In her discussion of the relationship between rock music, collective memory and local identity, Sara Cohen (2013) analyses Liverpool's status as European Capital of Culture 2008. While European nation-states have traditionally turned to classical and folk culture to promote national identity, Cohen describes a pan-European trend involving national policies designed to protect and promote local cultural traditions and identities within a context of globalization and shows that the development of popular music heritage industries is an important trend in cultural policy: the commercial selling of the local musical past within a global marketplace. Roberts and Cohen (2014) also highlight that the promotion of a national popular music legacy can function as symbolic affirmation of collective structures of national cultural memory and identity. Popular music heritage may for instance be promoted by the tourism industries and as part of commercial place-marketing initiatives, as illustrated by maps of popular music heritage sites such as England Rocks!, developed by the UK's national tourism body Visit Britain in 2007. The complex double move of simultaneously celebrating local cultural heritage as a means of protecting national identity in the context of globalization, and the effective rebranding of that heritage for global consumption, shows that discussions around national music policies exemplify the complex relationship of popular music and place: between local practices, national policies, international influences and global music industries.

Popular music and the nation: between local and global

Besides exemplifying the strong potential of popular music in processes of forging collective identities, articulating a symbolic sense of community and belonging and anchoring institutionalized representations of nation-state politics, Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights refer to Hesmondhalgh and Negus in their influential edited volume Music, *National Identity and the Politics of Location* (2007) arguing that the nation also functions as 'a prime focus for understanding the relationship of popular music to places' (2007: 2). Popular music research, as Hesmondhalgh and Negus observe, is defined by a conceptual binarism focusing, on the one hand, on extreme local practices and micro-communities as 'authentic' scenes and emphasizing the increasing flow of transnational influences and international music movements of pop music as a global commodity on the other (Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2002: 8). Research on the former, in its extreme form, tends to celebrate 'local' engagements of musical communities, idealize place and romanticize their subversive, oppositional and dissident character (Biddle and Knights 2007: 3). The latter on the other hand, tends to stress international flows of cultural influences and capital. In this disjunctive syllogism, the national dimension can function as the missing middle ground, as space in which local and global are mutually imbricated, Biddle and Knights argue.

All popular music, Shuker (2008) argues, embraces a mix of the local and the global, which cannot be considered binary categories, but exist in a complex interrelationship. One illuminating example that teases out these tensions between local and global is Jeroen de Kloet's *China with a Cut. Globalisation, Urban Youth and Popular Music* (2010). In his study of rock music and youth culture in China from the 1990s to 2008, de Kloet addresses the – only apparently – mutually exclusive categories of local and global. Readings of rock in China often either stress that it is a copy of Western music or point out its specific Chinese characteristics. The paradox however, he concludes, is indeed that popular music in China, and elsewhere, is as local as it is global. 'The local and global are complementary rather than contradictory' (2010: 195). Another example of music's equivocal double bind between local and global, and the tension between non-Western and Western popular music is Keith Kahn-Harris' analysis of the Brazilian hard rock band Sepultura drawing on national identity in a globalized world (2006). Kahn-Harris shows that in its career trajectory from 1989 onwards, Sepultura needed to establish itself in the global Extreme Metal music scene by sonically distancing itself from its local context and musical traditions and adopting the English language in their lyrics, to be able to cater to an international market. Only after positioning itself as one of the most successful Death Metal bands in the world, musically and physically distanced from Brazil, the band could afford to increasingly incorporate 'Brazilian' elements into its music. The 'return' to national identity was especially marked by the release of the band's 1996 album called *Roots*, on which the band attempts to signify Brazilian-ness sonically through instrumentation, lyrically by commenting on national politics as well as by drawing on national cultural resources (2006: 132). In Kahn-Harris' discussion of the Extreme Metal scene it becomes clear that the national is indeed tightly interwoven with the global and the local.

Popular music and Nationalism-with-a-big-N

Music with its affective power can become a strong marker of national identity – pride, patriotism and what Anderson calls Nationalism-with-a-big-N (1991: 5). As mentioned earlier, music has been instrumental to the formation of modern nation states and has been used to mobilize the people in the name of the nation ever since. Although not in its mass-produced and mediated form as today, popular music was for instance important in forging nationalist sentiments and bellicoseness since the beginning of the nineteenth century, leading up to – and during – the First World War. Music production, entertainment music in music halls and cabarets in Germany for instance – but equally all over the Europe – readily subscribed to nationalistic jingoism and informal propaganda between 1914 and 1918 (Schiller 2019) and singing became a vector for patriotic support for the war (Mullen 2019). As one of the most popular forms of entertainment, cabarets in Berlin – either out of conviction or due to financial considerations – contributed their share to the war propaganda efforts of the military as they were caught between economic hardships, official encouragement for light entertainment, strict censorship supervision and a general sentiment of extreme nationalistic patriotism. That way, cabaret was an important factor in consolidating nationalist patriotism in society during the First World War, and its popular music and humour ideologically justified the war and emotionalized the German nation (Schiller 2019).

During the First World War, Music halls were submitted to censorship exerted by the military, precisely because of music's affective potential. John Street highlights that the urge to censor music is as old as music itself, and every century on every continent has seen those in authority use their powers to silence certain sounds or performers (Street 2017: 9). Political censorship of music is therefore widespread, he points out, but it remains associated with particular systems and ideologies (Street 2017: 11): both Stalin and the Nazis took music very seriously as a form of propaganda and as a form of oppression (Street 2017). Music that did not align with the political agendas, opposing dominant ideology or perceived as subversive or threatening, was denied public hearing and musicians subjected to any number of threats to life and liberty (Street 2017). While the Soviet Union, especially under Joseph Stalin, was very committed to realizing the potential of music in propagating communism's triumph over capitalism and the heroism of the Soviet people, the Nazi regime actively censored music and musicians for nationalist purposes and it used (popular) music to promote its racial politics. In line with the ideal of Aryan identity, German music was also expected to be free of 'other' influences or racial impurities. Music was considered to represent the 'proper' German-ness and expediting identification with the Nazi's ideology. The act of censorship was therefore not per se aesthetically motivated, but rather grounded in the notion that musical style conveyed political values (Street 2017).

Another instance of what Billig refers to as 'hot' nationalism (as opposed the earlier described 'banal' nationalism as everyday experience) connected to music is that some forms of popular music have become the voice of neo-Nazi subcultures or right-wing extremists. Tracing the history of racist skinhead culture and 'Nazi Rock' in England and Germany, Timothy S Brown discusses the phenomenon as having become increasingly salient since the fall of Communism (2004), and as Fleischmidt and Pulay (2017) argue for the case of Hungarian nationalist music music can function as a means of making the national imagination emotionally and ideologically appealing to new audiences (2017). As Futrell, Simi and Gottschalk show in their discussion of the US American White Power Music Scene (2006), participants in this musical culture of racist, militant nationalist white supremacy claim strong feelings of dignity, pride, pleasure, love, kinship and fellowship through their involvement with what they consider to be 'Aryan' music (2006 275) Stylistically, this genre can vary from rock, and heavy metal, to country and western, while lyrics generally evoke notions of brotherhood, 'volk', 'white pride' and 'Aryan' heritage (2006 281) As Futrell et al. highlight, the music of the White Power movement is what emotionally binds the participants and what continually reinforces collective identification with its ideology, mobilizes continued participation and motivates further actions (2006· 294) Similarly, albeit in a very different national context, Benjamin Teitelbaum traces in *Lions of the North* the importance of music in the establishment, rebranding and flourishing of radical nationalists in the Nordic countries. While this scene was also dominated by so-called White Power Rock, national populists now produce and consume a much wider range of genres from light pop, folk music and singer-songwriter balladry to techno and even rap and reggae (2017)

In recent years especially, the populist radical right and extreme right are increasingly drawing on popular music that explicitly avoids aesthetic associations with national 'radicalism', and instead produce and embrace popular music that can best be described as (aesthetically) 'mainstream' In the United States, for instance, prominent neo-Nazi and White Supremacist websites like the Daily Stormer and Breitbart publicly embraced the likes of country-pop superstar Taylor Swift as supposedly representing an 'Aryan goddess' and turning her persona into alt-right memes (Prins 2020). This movement, prominently supported by president Donald Trump, also started producing its own popular music based on popular synthwave and vaporwave aesthetics labelled as fashwave. In their retro-futurist music productions, fashwave artists copy popular styles to overtly celebrate neo-Nazism, and fascism, while explicitly and strategically steering clear from sounding radical in their musical marketing strategy for White Supremacy 'We want to hit the average. We want normal people. We have to be hip and we have to be sexy', Daily Stormer founder Andrew Anglin wrote in 2017 (Spitznagel 2020)

In turn, popular music culture in Europe has been increasingly marked by a rise of populist radical right discourses (Dunkel and Schiller forthcoming). In Austria and Italy, for instance, popular musicians like Andreas Gabalier and Giuseppe Povia have been described as performing populist discourses for a mainstream audience and thereby contributing to a social normalization of formerly radical politics (Dunkel, Schiller et al. 2021) In Germany, mainstream successful artists like Xavier Naidoo or prominent rappers like Kollegah actively participate in the spreading of populist and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, and the South Tyrolian rock band Frei Wild, who are known for promoting radical right populist and nationalist discourses in their music, not only sell millions of records but have also won the most prestigious German music awards. In Sweden, the popular singer Peter Jezewski has been supporting the populist radical right Sweden Democrats with his nostalgic rock'n'roll music and thereby successfully articulated rock culture with its associated 'authenticity' and the myth of subversion with populist and nativist discourses (Schiller, forthcoming) These new phenomena, again, highlight how popular music and nationalism interact in various ways across genres and aesthetic boundaries

Popular music and alternative narratives of the nation

While some forms of popular music have become aligned with extreme forms of nationalism, others challenge normative narratives of the nation and offer competing notions of national identity Especially in the current context of the rise of radical right populism all over Europe and beyond, investigations into the role of popular music in the maintenance of national identifications, as well as the formation of diasporic identities and alternative narratives of national belonging become increasingly important. Populist radical right parties in Europe like the Freedom Party of Austria, The Alternative for Germany and the Sweden Democrats, for example, are drawing heavily on the affective potential of popular music in their promotion of essentialist ideas of the nation and its history, claiming that 'true' nationals are white, Christian and of European descent (cf Ginkel et al. forthcoming). Some leading politicians are active as musicians themselves, like Jimmie Åkesson of the Sweden Democrats, who plays in a band promoting patriotism, and others work closely with popular bands and well-known musicians, or appropriate existing popular songs that align with their ideological agendas.

On the other hand, musicians with migrant backgrounds - among others - are increasingly outspoken about their critique towards right-wing populist and nationalist rhetoric in and through popular music. In Sweden for instance, mainstream successful hip-hop artists like Erik Lundin or Silvana Imam use popular music to share their experiences of 'foreignness', racism and social exclusion to tell alternative narratives of Swedish-ness. they undermine populist 'us versus them' narratives (Mouffe 2016) by highlighting cultural hybridity and the multi-directional as well as processual character of culture (Hall 1990) Through these counter narratives, popular music remains an important cultural sphere of negotiating national inclusion and exclusion, as well as collective identity, spatial belonging and national heritage.

Note

1 Shuker notes that the quota was strongly 'encouraged' with the threat of license renewal being used as a tool to make it *de facto* compulsory: 'A voluntary NZ Music Code was negotiated (late 2001) between the Radio Broadcasters Association and the Minister of Broadcasting and began operating in 2002. While not mandatory, the new targets were "strongly encouraged" with the implicit threat of non-licence renewal, and in practice the quota was compulsory' (278).

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