

‘Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it, and—which is more—you’ll be a man, my son’:

Myths of British masculinity and Britishness in the construction and reception of Iron Maiden

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### **Abstract**

In the years following the end of the Second World War, the British Empire declined as a global, hegemonic power. In the years of this decline, British children were still taught stirring tales and myths of British military might and British fair-play. In this paper, I argue that this mythic milieu served as source of inspiration for Iron Maiden’s songs from *Iron Maiden* (1980) to *Somewhere in Time* (1986). I show that themes on these albums deliberately reflect and construct this mythic version of Imperial British masculinity. I then explore how the band has continued to play with Britishness globally. I argue that Iron Maiden’s members and creators have constructed their creative art around imagined white, British imperial identities. They have been raised in the ways of the mythic milieu, and serve its hegemonic interest, whether they are conscious of that fact or not.

### **Key Words**

Iron Maiden; Britishness; imagined community; mythic milieu; imperialism; nationalism

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*In the chapel of a British public school, a private, fee-paying school for the elite of Great Britain despite the misleading description 'public', John Cleese's Headmaster character finishes an Anglican service with some messages and notices for the boys.*

*Headmaster (ending his reading of the Bible):* Yay, and placed they the bits in little pots. Now two boys have been found rubbing linseed oil into the school cormorant. Now some of you may feel that the cormorant does not play an important part in the life of the school, but I would remind you that it was presented to us by the corporation of the Town of Sudbury to commemorate Empire Day, when we try to remember the names of all those from the Sudbury area who so gallantly gave their lives to keep China British. So from now on, the cormorant is strictly OUT OF BOUNDS. Oh, and Jenkins? Apparently your mother died this morning.

(Jones 1983)

*Monty Python's Flying Circus* is a television sketch-show series created in the late 1960s and scripted by five young, white men born and raised in the heart of British upper middle-class life: John Cleese, Graham Chapman, Terry Jones, Michael Palin and Eric Idle.<sup>2</sup> All five had attended either Oxford or Cambridge, and all five had attended either grammar schools or public schools, the schools of the middle and elite classes of twentieth-century Britain. The comedy genius of television series reflected the tensions occurring in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, as the old ways of the established elites – the honouring of the Queen, country and Empire – were being challenged by a younger generation trying to make sense of their own place and identity (Morgan 2013; Parker 2007). In the film *Monty Python's The Meaning of*

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<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this paper was published in the conference proceedings of Modern Heavy Metal, Helsinki, June 2015 (Karjalainen and Kärki, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> The other member of Monty Python was the American Terry Gilliam, but he only contributed ideas and material for animations, before becoming a director.

*Life* (Jones 1983) the awfulness of the mythology and masculinity of the Empire is made visible in a number of satirical sketches played for real. If the cruel and jingoistic nature of the Headmaster in the public school is simply awful, in another sketch the heroic adventure of war films and comics is made clear. In this particular sketch, red-coated British soldiers of the Victorian age are fighting against crazed Zulus in the Natal, who are threatening to massacre everyone in the British camp. The 'men' of the other ranks are struggling and being killed, but the officers are calmly shaving and walking through the camp smoking pipes and chatting. This is a pun on the Battle for Rorke's Drift, the real story of how a small number of British soldiers fought off an entire army of Zulus. Monty Python show us the Empire at work, the correct behaviour for subalterns and officers, and the importance of the sacrifice and the violence of the working-class men. As one soldier says to the officers as they walk past him:

Here is better than home, eh, sir? I mean, at home if you kill someone they arrest you, here they'll give you a gun and show you what to do, sir. I mean, I killed fifteen of those buggers. Now, at home they'd hang me, here they'll give me a fucking medal, sir.

(Jones 1983)

Of course, until quite recently, major militaries around the world were exclusively masculine. As such, being a good soldier and being a good man were indistinguishable from one another. Monty Python's writers have grown up in a British popular culture that played these myths of Empire, of Britishness and British masculinity, over and over again, so that the tropes and the symbols became normal. This was the same period in which Iron Maiden's Steve Harris and Bruce Dickinson were young boys and young men. In these years following the end of the Second World War, the British Empire declined as a global, hegemonic power. In the years of this decline, from the 1940s to the 1980s, British children were still taught stirring tales

and myths of British military might and British fair-play – the poetry of Rudyard Kipling, for example, constructed an elitist myth of British, imperial, white masculinity for public-school boys and the children of the bourgeoisie; while comics such as *Victor* and *Hotspur* taught working-class boys the glory of warfare.

In this paper, I will argue that this mythic milieu served as source of inspiration for the lyrical content of Iron Maiden's songs during their 'classic' run of albums from the self-titled debut *Iron Maiden* (1980) to *Somewhere in Time* (1986). Drawing on the work of Anderson (1983) on imagined communities, and the notion of invented traditions taken from the work of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), I will show that the themes in some of the songs on these albums deliberately reflect and construct the mythic version of Imperial British masculinity that was taken for granted by the band as they grew up. In the final part of the paper, I will explore how Iron Maiden's Imperial British masculinity has been consumed globally, and how the band has continued to play with myths and narratives of Britishness. I will show that part of the appeal of Iron Maiden's adoption of the mythic milieu is the correspondence between imperial British masculinity and the nostalgia and desire for the mythological Gender Order (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), or what Hearn (2004) calls the hegemony of men. It is important to look at both at both the construction and the reception of Iron Maiden's songs, as both tell us about the salience of the mythic milieu, and its continued relevance for masculinity and identity in post-imperial times. Indeed, there has been an enormous amount of work exploring gender in metal, its construction and performativity, typified by the edited collection by Heesch and Scott (2016), the special issue of this journal, and relevant work in that special issue (Berkers and Schaap 2015; Hill, Lucas and Riches 2015; Kartheus 2015; Savigny and Sleight 2015; Spracklen 2015). Before I turn to a more focussed and critical discussion of the mythic milieu, I need to first outline my theoretical framework. This is the same theoretical framework I have used to explore masculinity, belonging and exclusion, authenticity and community, nation and

nationalism, in a number of papers on folk metal (Spracklen 2015), Scottish folk/black metal (Spracklen 2016), black metal (Spracklen 2013; Spracklen, Lucas and Deeks 2014) and English folk music and morris dancing (Spracklen 2013; Spracklen and Henderson 2013), so the discussion here will be brief.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Benedict Anderson (1983) describes a community of meanings when he discusses the 'imagined community'. Anderson's concept explores how a community in the present is defined by myths of the past it creates. In other words, the community makes a biased reading of the past to justify its values in the present, hence legitimizing itself as a coherent community. One can see that the imagined community is also one that is created and defined by symbols, though these symbols are historically contrived. Anderson's thesis explores how nations are maintained and legitimized through recourse to heroic, mythical pasts, such as the narrative and symbol of the British Empire.

The process that Anderson (1983) calls imagined communities, where historical invention has resulted in a cohesive structure for legitimizing a sense of community in the present, is also a process of reinvention of the past (Jenkins 1991; Pickering and Keightley 2013), inventing traditions that justified the values of the present (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Imagined communities (Anderson 1983) use history to justify and legitimize their existence. But they do not deal with the past: rather they work with myths and stories that are historicized. They are dealing with 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In other words, people in the present make use of the past as a place where they can place genesis stories, genealogies of structure (Foucault, 1972), in order to legitimate claims and structures they may use in the present (Pickering and Keightley 2013). This is not a conscious, manipulative design. Invented traditions serve a real need in the present, as they are the founding stories of the people

who use them (Cohen 1985; Jenkins 1991; Spracklen 2013, 2015; Spracklen and Henderson 2013; Spracklen, Lucas and Deeks 2014). It is clear that these invented traditions are more important in any research than a quest for ‘what really happened’, as they relate to the discourses that surround the community being studied. It is important to note that invented traditions exists in all modern nation-states, not just the United Kingdom. And, of course, these invented traditions have been at the heart of much of the black metal scene since its inception (Lucas, Spracklen and Deeks 2011; Spracklen 2013, 2015; Spracklen, Lucas and Deeks 2014). But the United Kingdom is the focus of this paper, and the construction and reception of Iron Maiden’s songs. In this paper, then, it is important to look not only at the facts of the British Empire, but more importantly the myths and symbols of the Empire that informed the invented traditions of the imagined, imaginary community of post-imperial Britain, and the people who lived in it. This, then, is the mythic milieu to which I now turn: the collection of ideas, norms and values around which the band members of Iron Maiden grew up.

### **The Mythic Milieu**

The British Empire was a socio-cultural and spatial construction of capitalist exploitation of global markets, political relationships between competing Western nation-states and hegemonic control over systems of colonialism (Hobsbawm 1987, 1992). It grew in strength in the nineteenth-century to become a global superpower, its military and cultural strength backed up by the material might of its army and navy. Its success was predicated on a number of ontological, epistemological and ethical assumptions: firstly, the British nation was successful because of divine favour; secondly, it was successful because of the intelligence of its rulers and the technological expertise of its capitalists and scientists; thirdly, it was a force for good in the world, bringing civilization and Christianity to the barbarians beyond; fourthly, its

success was dependent on the biological nature of the British as an Aryan, white or northern European race (Daynes and Lee 2008).

In the mythic milieu of the British Empire, British boys were taught how to be proper servants of the Imperial project, and to be proper men, through the use of sports and the re-telling of history and politics (Cannadine 2002; Dawson 2013; Mangan 1981). In the country's public schools, including the one in which Bruce Dickinson received his education, middle and upper-class elite boys were taught the values of Muscular Christianity alongside the virtues of being officers, subalterns and imperial officials. The rise of the popular media followed the growth in state school education, and lower-class boys and men were taught to cheer on the exploits of the Empire's soldiers, explorers and heroes. At the time of the height of the British Empire, the Houses of Parliament were re-built in Victorian Gothic, with decorations celebrating stories of King Arthur and his knights. The Empire was built on the construction of myths and invented traditions around events with a moral heart: the brave but foolish disaster of the 'Charge of the Light Brigade' in the Crimean War; or, as we have seen in the Monty Python spoof, the defence of Rorke's Drift against the Zulus in southern Africa (Dawson 2013; Holmes and Johnson 2012).

In this mythic milieu the work of writers and poets such as Rudyard Kipling came to be the self-satisfied, ethical exemplar for elite white British men, and for the men of the lower classes (the 'other ranks' of the Monty Python spoof). Kipling not only spoke of the white man's burden, he also wrote the poem 'If' in 1895 with its guide to being the right kind of man, which is based on a combination of Muscular Christianity, imperialism and classical Stoicism refracted through the neoclassicism of the age. The poem ends with the following rousing lines:

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,

Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
    If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
    With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
    And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

(Kipling 1895)

Kipling's poetry and example as a servant of the British Empire is encapsulated in those last lines of the poem, learned by heart by generations of children (or rather, more saliently, by boys and young men) at the height of the Empire and subsequently in the post-imperial decline where they form part of the mythic milieu in which Harris and Dickinson grew up.

But the Empire, like all empires, could not last (Hobsbawm, 1987). By the end of the First World War, British imperial hegemony was in decline, being out-eclipsed by the rise of the United States of America, Nazi Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union. The Second World War broke the Empire altogether, crippling its economy and confronting the British elites with post-colonial movements abroad and a strong left-wing turn at home (Kynaston 2010). In the years that followed Britain very quickly lost its pre-eminence on the global stage, and left behind a number of post-colonial nation-states that were created following its retreat. The British Empire shrunk to a handful of tax-havens, islands in the middle of the ocean and the contested region of Northern Ireland. The Empire transformed into the Commonwealth, and an idea that the British Crown still had some symbolic power over former colonies such as Canada and Australia. At home patriotism and nationalism continued to be part of everyday popular culture, as well as elite culture (Dawson 2013). Despite its reliance on the USA and allies in NATO, despite the reduction in the size of the military and the slow decline of industry, the



post-imperial Britain of the later twentieth-century continued to assume its imperial significance. The Royal Family maintained its grip (serving as a public symbol of banal, ceremonial, de-politicized post-colonialism while simultaneously remaining at the heart of British government) and the public-school educated elites continued to keep hegemonic control of the State, the media and the top jobs in society (Colley 1992; Wellings 2002).

At the same time that Britain was basking in this belief in its supremacy, and the strength of its hegemonically masculine white British men still fighting post-colonial conflicts in far-off places, changes were happening to British politics and society at home across the channel from Europe. Britain's post-war, post-imperial economy needed low-paid workers, and gaps in the labour market were filled by women, who had worked during the war and who continued to work and to struggle for the right to be educated and to be a part of the British public sphere. Alongside the increased prominence and importance of women in the public sphere came the increase in migration into the country of Commonwealth and Irish workers invited and recruited to fuel the economy. Although some of the Commonwealth workers were white colonists returning to Britain, most of them were people of colour: black people from the Caribbean and Africa, South Asians from what became India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Ramdin 1999). Despite this migration into the country from former imperial domains and the challenge to the gender order by middle-class women (or, possibly, because of those challenges to the established order), imperial, white British masculinities and hegemonies shaped both culture and society from the 1950s through to the 1980s (and possibly beyond – see Colley 1992; Goulbourne 1991; Knowles 2008). The mythic milieu continued to operate as if nothing had changed. Instead of telling stories about the latest exploits of the army or navy, the mythic milieu was forced to retreat to a (re)production of stories from the past (Dawson, 2013). This happened as before on two levels. For the ruling-class boys becoming men (such as Dickinson), public schools and the cultural spaces of the Establishment – rowing clubs, gentleman's clubs,

balls, grouse-shooting moors – became places where the old stories and narratives were recycled. Boys in public schools would be cloistered in gothic halls and chapels, saying prayers to the God of the Church of England and remembering the boys whose deaths in the two world wars were immortalized in cold stone. They would play team sports and learn discipline and leadership. And they would read Kipling and the other authors of Empire, alongside the Roman authors of the older empire to which the British aspired (Dawson, 2013; Kynaston, 2010; Reynolds, 2013).

In wider popular culture, for example in the streets of London where Harris grew up, working-class boys who wanted to be proper men still found exemplars in the films, books and other literature that circulated. The war that the British had won a few years previously was obviously the source for much of this material. Films such as *The Cruel Sea* (1953) and *The Dambusters* (1955) showed white British men at their heroic and noble best, either as officers or other ranks. In the first film, the exploits of the officers and men of a naval corvette are portrayed struggling against German U-boats. Their ship is torpedoed and most of the men die, but the survivors carry on the fight on new ships. In the second film, British bravery is shown in the true story of the Lancaster bombers and their crews that take enormous risks and suffer terrible casualties in their attack a series of dams in Germany.

This period saw a huge rise in the number of comics that told true stories of ‘men at war’, as well as fictional accounts of soldiers or others set in real places and real events in the war. These comics such as *Victor*, *The Hornet* and *Hotspur* were overtly tagged ‘for boys’, and included other warfare and other stories of men (such as the ‘tough of the track’ Alf Tupper in *Victor*, a working-class runner who ate chips and took pleasure in racing ‘toffs’), but the main focus of the stories was the mythic milieu of white, imperial British masculinity: for example, showing working-class boys how others like them fight brave and fair, either in those ‘true-life’ stories of real men at war, or works of fiction that took place in the first or second world war;

or showing them example of good practice from the officer classes, such as the fighter pilots of the Battle of Britain attacking and downing German planes. In the first set of examples, working-class, white British soldiers were often scripted with accents and dialect words that identified them as cockneys from London, or taffs from Wales, or jocks from Scotland. They had nicknames for the Germans such as ‘squareheads’, ‘Huns’ or ‘Fritz’, which legitimized anti-German prejudice that continues to this day in Britain, shaping the tone of media coverage of soccer matches between the two nations and even the Europhobic leave campaign in the 2016 EU Referendum in Britain. The key lesson from the first set of examples was that soldier should never surrender and should always fight, stand their ground and take the fight back to the enemies of the British Empire, no matter how difficult the odds.

In the second set of examples, white British officers and pilots (and pilots are nearly always presented as officers) master their Hurricanes and Spitfires as they chase the Germans fighters and bombers; or they continue to fly their Lancaster bombers even as the Germans fighters, in turn, take ‘pot-shots’ at them. The key lesson from the second set of examples was to keep one’s head, trust those around one and stay calm in the face of adversity, and one can make a contribution to saving the Empire. The reader of these stories of elite endeavour in war is also encouraged to normalize the notion that the officer class of the British Empire is good and moral because they are naturally superior to the other ranks and foreigners. We can imagine the young Harris reading these comics and imagining being the cheeky cockney sticking his bayonet in the belly of the Hun, even as bullets fly all around him; one can also imagine countless others who read the story of the upper-class British pilots smoking their pipes at Biggin Hill airfield before making sorties above London, taking to heart the lesson that the Empire has been made and saved by the calm and morally correct leadership of its officer class (even if this myth had no authentic basis in the reality of the twentieth century). In both of the forms of narrative in the comics, the fact of British Empire’s goodness is taken without

question: the British are the right side, the Germans and the enemies of the Empire are on the wrong side. These examples are both ideal types of behaviour clearly associated with the mythic milieu, the ethics of Muscular Christianity and its ancient Roman precedents. They also prefigure the themes of Iron Maiden.

### **Iron Maiden's Imperial British Masculinity**

Iron Maiden's first two albums are products of a working-class masculinity enthused with a love of horror. On *Iron Maiden* (1980) there is the anthem to individualism and anti-authoritarianism 'Running Free', and the misogynistic 'Charlotte the Harlot', while on *Killers* (1981) listeners are offered the thrill of the killing spree in 'Murders in the Rue Morgue'. More sophisticated influences have to await the arrival of Bruce Dickinson as lead singer, whose arrival on the album *The Number of the Beast* (1982) coincides with main songwriter Steve Harris writing the epic 'Run to the Hills', a story of white Americans taking Native American land, and Native American attacks on white Americans. In this song, there are hints of both the working-class Britishness of reading comics and watching 'Westerns', and a reification of the notion of conflict.

Iron Maiden's first explicit narrative of imperial British masculinity is found on *Piece of Mind* (1983) in the form of three songs: 'Where Eagles Dare', 'Die with Your Boots On' and more obviously 'The Trooper'. 'Where Eagles Dare' takes its name and plot from the film of the same name, which tells the story of Allied soldiers fighting the Nazis and being heroically brave against the odds. 'Die with Your Boots On' is rather oblique in its themes but the title and chorus phrase refers to the idea that one needs to stand up and fight for what one believes to be true. 'The Trooper' echoes the masculine sentiment of both songs, but focuses squarely on the Charge of the Light Brigade. The message is that dying foolishly for the cause of Empire is okay so long as one dies without crying. The cynicism of the Victorian poem by Tennyson

is lost to the notion that what counts is one's duty to fight the enemy, even if the song claims 'no one wins' the fight. The single of 'The Trooper' was released with a cover featuring Eddie<sup>3</sup> dressed as soldier of the Victorian British Empire, grimly holding onto a British (Union) flag. This song is clearly a product of the mythic milieu in which Harris (songwriter) and Dickinson (singer) grew up.

If the song 'The Trooper' is the most important single that encapsulates the ways in which Iron Maiden drew upon imperial British masculinity, the fifth album *Powerslave* (1984) is the most important album that belongs to the mythic milieu. The album's cover (and related marketing and touring material) has an ancient Egyptian theme, an act of Othering orientalism through the use of exotic, British/western ideas of Egypt (Said 1978). The album cover claims ownership of this foreign land, which was a key possession of the British Empire. The orientalism continues with some of the musical themes on the song 'Powerslave'. Lyrically, there are two songs that continue the construction of the symbolic boundaries of the imagined community of imperial British masculinity: 'Aces High', 'Two Minutes to Midnight' and 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. The former takes its name and theme from a film of the same name, and tells the story of a fighter pilot (an 'ace' is a fighter pilot who has shot down a number of enemy planes in combat) scrambling to attack enemy bombers. The lyrics could have been about any fighter pilot in any war, but the final verse makes it clear that this is the second world war, and quite probably the Battle Britain, as the enemy 'bandits' are 'Me-109s' (planes flown by the Germans in the second world war) and the hero of the song identifies with 'Spitfires' (planes flown by the British in the second world war, and famously associated with Britain and the battle of Britain) that are facing the enemy. The cover artwork for 'Aces High' reaffirms this: the enemy plane is German, possibly a Me-109, there is definitely a British Spitfire in the

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<sup>3</sup> Eddie is the grotesque monster who serves as the mascot for the band, appearing on album covers, other publicity and even live on stage.

sky, the ground below looks like London and Eddie is flying a plane that has British camouflage colouring.

‘Two Minutes to Midnight’ is actually a warning about the threat of total annihilation in a nuclear war of some kind (the two minutes to midnight being the status of the metaphorical doomsday clock), but its contempt of the instrumental ethics of modern wars might be read as a desire for the time when men could be honourable warriors. ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ is based on the poem of the same name by Coleridge, and its imperial masculine theme is about the expectation that men become men through adventure and exploration, whether on the high seas or in the cold northern latitudes (Roberts 2017).

The sixth album, *Somewhere in Time* (1986), has two songs that might fit the mythic milieu. ‘The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner’ refers to the story and film of the same name, which strongly critiques the post-imperial status of Britain and its schooling system. Here, it seems, Harris does include the possibility that the runner might not behave right and win, but this only appears at the end of the song, once we have been told the value of running and winning. What ‘The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner’ provides is some proof that Harris has read Victor comic, because the song’s opening line (‘The tough of the track with the wind/And the rain that’s beating down on your back’) refers to the *Victor* character Alf Tupper, The Tough of the Track, mentioned earlier in this paper. ‘Alexander the Great’ is more surely from the mythic milieu, drawing on the idea of glory, military adventure and Empire that inspired the founders of the British Empire (Cannadine 2002; Mangan 1981).

### **Iron Maiden’s Continuing and Evolving Britishness on the Global Stage**

Despite this embrace of a narrow and exclusive Britishness in much of their imagery, symbols and lyrics, Iron Maiden the band have transcended their British roots to become a global brand for Britain, and a global brand in heavy metal (Bayer 2009; Gregory 2013; Puri 2015; Wallach,

Berger and Greene 2011; Weinstein 1991). The success of the albums between *Number of the Beast* and *Somewhere in Time* was a combination of talent, luck and strong management. The band's individual musicians and songwriters (especially Harris) are talented artists who understand the power of heavy metal and the desires of the metal audience. They were lucky in the early 1980s to ride a wave of interest in British heavy metal (the New Wave of British Heavy Metal [NWOBHM]) that made heavy metal as a genre a mainstream concern in Europe and America (Weinstein, 1991). This interest was helped by Iron Maiden aligning their music and the themes of their music with other bands singing about masculine themes of fighting, drinking and getting laid (Kartheus 2015; Puri 2015; Weinstein 1991) at a time when the supposed 'crisis' of (hegemonic) masculinity was taking place (Hearn 2004; Spracklen 2015). They were lucky to recruit Dickinson as lead singer, someone with drive and energy, as well as someone reasonably well-known to metal fans. And their management team, led by Rod Smallwood, was and is very careful to allow the Iron Maiden product and brand to be promoted carefully. Although the band lost audiences and record sales when the mainstream of rock music started to reject heavy metal in the 1990s, and the band lost Dickinson following guitarist Adrian Smith, Smallwood and Harris steered Iron Maiden's professional career steadily onwards. They continued to spread the word of Iron Maiden into new markets, and by the new century Dickinson and Smith were back and Iron Maiden were recognized as being world leaders in the metal music industry (Puri 2015). They have become the one metal band that everybody who listens to rock and pop music knows about.

Iron Maiden's masculinity and ethos of individual pride is something that gives them a quasi-universal appeal in countries across the global South, especially among young, urban middle-classes seeking to reject local traditions for things associated with modernity and Western/European liberal values (Wallach, Berger and Greene 2011). The stories about warriors, standing against the odds, fighting and dying for a cause, strike deep inside male fans

everywhere (Snell 2014), but the particular version of imperial British masculinity that is been presented creates contestations for meaning for the band. Dickinson, for instance, waves a Union flag whenever the band play 'The Trooper' live. Most fans and critics are happy to cheer the British flag as a harmless piece of showmanship, but the glorification of the flag can be seen as a normalization or sanitization of the imperial power relationships it represented in places such as India, where the band has a large following (Unni 2014). Iron Maiden's live shows and recordings – whether of concerts or promotional videos – project to this global audience a philosophy of proud individualism, belonging and being part of a the metal community. But they also project and construct hegemonic masculinity, as with most other traditional and extreme metal music genres (Spracklen 2015; Spracklen, Lucas and Deeks 2014). And I argue here that this performativity by Iron Maiden re-invents the Imperial British mythic milieu for contemporary audiences: Iron Maiden embrace their peculiarity as British musicians in a world that is happy to see Britishness as something merely quaint and faintly nostalgic. This is the Britain of tour guides and Hollywood movies, with its red telephone boxes, strange beer, its mad monarchy and its working-class scruffs with bad teeth (Bowman 2010; Iwashita 2006; Palmer 2005).

The fan-base in India is a result of the post-imperial relationships between the two countries, but also the imbalance of cultural power - in metal, as in history, Britannia rules (Reynolds 2013). That is, British and American bands dominate the mainstream of heavy metal, and are the first to reach new markets. Global brands such as Iron Maiden fly in with their private jets and their professional PR teams, but Indian bands find it almost impossible to build careers by travelling the other way. The British Empire was a tragedy for India and countries like it, yet India owes its modern culture to its imperial encounter. Post-colonial theorists might view the acceptance of the waving of the flag as another form of colonization, whitewashing away the horrors of genocide and starvation (Brah 1996). The band's lawyers and PR managers



presumably see such (British) Union flag-waving and military imagery as playful and inclusive, a piece of theatre, a piece of show-business stagecraft designed to make everyone feel a part of heavy metal enough to buy the band's merchandizing products on the way out.

It is not just former countries of the British Empire, where there is a shared culture and language (and an unequal power relationship between the North and South) to help the band, where Iron Maiden have huge followings. Iron Maiden's success in South America can be traced to the soft power held by the British Empire in these countries. Although these countries found independence from Spain and Portugal, these countries were part of the British Empire's economic sphere of interest. British engineers built railways, British teachers taught in schools, and British capitalists built factories and brought soccer to the locals. As such, Britain's military might was always close in the form of British army trainers, as well as in the form of the Royal Navy guarding the economic interests in the South Atlantic. In the 1980s and 1990s, as these countries found new democratic public spheres and a generation grew up disenchanted with the Cold War dichotomies, previous embraces of British culture came to be re-valued and re-appreciated, especially in the years following the Falkland War (Reynolds, 2013). Iron Maiden, by being uncompromising in their Britishness, and with their love of soccer, were able to take advantage of this and build their presence as the definitive NWOBHM band – especially among young men who embraced the myths of hegemonic masculinity at the heart of the songs. A similar cultural appreciation of Britishness (and Iron Maiden) occurs in other countries that were never part of the British Empire, such as Japan (Iwashita 2006). Fans of Iron Maiden, then, are consuming both a universal masculinity and a form of Britishness.

This consumption is literally at work in the leisure spaces of gigs and music shops around the world, where fans purchase tee-shirts and patches emblazoned with the artwork for 'The Trooper' and 'Aces High'. It can now be consumed in *any* leisure space (subject to local licensing laws) with the creation of the beer branded 'The Trooper' by the traditional

Robinson's Brewery in the UK. This beer is what Americans would probably call a craft beer, though it is in a traditional British bitter style. It is not an authentic British real-ale when it is bought in a bottle form, but it is real-ale when served in a bar that has the beer kept in a British beer cellar and served via a real-ale pump system (Spracklen, Kenyon and Laurencic 2013). The bottled version of this British beer has become an enormous success for its brewers and for the band, selling to Iron Maiden fans around the world. In an article on the launch of the beer, the brewery's brand manager John Robinson explains:

We very quickly realised when we started brewing three times a day, five days a week for the first time in our history, that this was going to be big. The Maiden following is crazy! They have an incredibly loyal fan base, who are almost a massive sales force in their own right promoting the beer.

(cited in Tierney-Jones 2016, p. 34)

On the label, or on the hand-pump, we see The Trooper clutching the British flag, in the colours of the Victorian British imperial army. Dickinson claims to be a real-ale fan himself:

I was very lucky that we had a mini beer festival at my boarding school. Beers included Ruddles County, Pedigree and Adnams among others, all from wood casks and served on gravity.<sup>4</sup> I was hooked forever!

(cited in Tierney Jones 2016, p. 35)

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<sup>4</sup> Dickinson's mention of beer being served 'on gravity' means beer served straight from a cask. This is real-ale beer served in its most traditional style, a usage that became almost obsolete when real-ale pump systems were invented at the height of Victorian Britain's re-invention of real-ale (Spracklen, Kenyon and Laurencic 2013).

By drinking this beer, fans are legitimizing post-colonial hegemonic power relationships and savouring the success of British bitter over foreign lagers, as well as buying into the mythic milieu of a white, imperial Britain. They are also toasting the ubiquity of the band and the ways in which this particular, narrow form of imperial British masculinity has become the last symbol for an army and navy now too small to protect one country, let alone invade and control dozens (Reynolds 2013).

## **Conclusions**

Anthony Smith (2013) argues that traditions and their role in defining nationhood cannot be described as inventions, and suggests that fabrication and manipulation are not the primary means through which the construction of tradition takes place. In particular, there is concern in Smith's work, in his critique of Anderson, that nations and nationalisms are more than just a psychological invention or mythological concept. In response, I would argue that although the discourse in this chapter uses terms such as 'invention', 'imagined' and 'imaginary', this does not imply that the external is dismissed in place of a community or historical story that someone just made up in their head while sitting in front of a fire. What Hobsbawm, Anderson and Cohen are saying is that discourse, symbols, perceived realities, shared understandings, and hegemonic ideologies are far more persuasive in both defining history and identity - what actually happened, who we actually are, become meaningless questions, because we cannot answer them without recourse to these imaginings. Secondly, by speaking of imagination, we are not saying these ideas and perceptions are wrong, or false. Rather, for the people doing the imagining, it is the reality they use to shape their everyday life (Cohen 1985). Paraphrasing Marx, this implies the very shape of identity and history is realized through constructing meaning and understanding - but the construction of national identity and community is limited to those who have the hegemonic power to shape it (Gramsci 1971).

Heavy metal is already identified as a key site for the construction of such hegemonic identities and structures such as gender and nation, as I have previously argued in this journal (Spracklen 2015). Iron Maiden, then, play a key role in the reproduction and maintenance of a particular imagined and imaginary community: the symbolic community bounded by the British Empire, which produces in its turn exclusive versions of hegemonic masculinity, whiteness and belonging (Spracklen 2015; Spracklen, Lucas and Deeks 2014). Iron Maiden construct hegemonic masculinity and Britishness from the mythic milieu, then their fans embrace and align with that construction. Carrying the British flag, flying around the world, selling beer emblazoned with Eddie in the guise of The Trooper, Iron Maiden do their best to do their duty for the honour of the country and empire in the stiffed-lip manner of the officers and men of the Light Brigade. Like the five British members of Monty Python, Harris and Dickinson have constructed their creative art around imagined white, British imperial identities. They have been raised in the ways of the mythic milieu, and serve its hegemonic interest, whether they are conscious of that fact or not.

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