

12 'Revolution'

Social change, conscience rock and identity politics

In the general sense of the word, 'politics' permeates popular music studies. Practically every aspect of the production and consumption of popular music involves theoretical debates about the dynamics of economic, cultural and political power and influence and the reproduction of social structures and individual subjectivity. In addition to ongoing debates over the perceived negative 'effects' and influence of popular music (considered in Chapter 13), there have always been attempts to harness the music to social and political ends and arguments around the validity of notions of music as an empowering and political force. My discussion here is on the role of popular music in fostering social change and its mobilization within social movements. I consider several examples of direct political activism and the phenomenon of 'conscience rock'. A major issue in each case is the influence of such cultural interventions and the role of music in bringing about social change. The last part of the chapter continues my earlier theme of identity and popular music, introducing the role of music in constructing identities in relation to gender (and sexuality) and, more briefly, to ethnicity and social class. While each of these 'classic' social categories is considered separately, their interrelationship needs to be kept in mind, as they frequently reinforce and interact with one another.

Music and social change

A central problem in social theory has been to explain how cultures change and to identify the forms of social activity at work in processes of social transformation. While there is considerable theoretical debate over the relative importance of social structures and human agency, a key part of social change are changes in the cognitive identity (the 'head space') of the individuals involved. Popular music has played a prominent role in articulating this process, at both the individual and collective group level. At various historical points, popular music has translated political radicalism into a more accessible idiom, identifying social problems, alienation and oppression and facilitating the sharing of a collective vision. Performers and songs contribute to forging a relationship between politics, cultural change and popular music. Popular music has frequently acted as a powerful means of raising consciousness about political causes and funds for them. At

the same time, however, there is a tendency for such popular music genres, texts and their performers to be co-opted, marketed and watered down or neutralized by the music industry.

There is a lengthy historical tradition of popular music playing an overt political role, including commentary through individual songs and campaigns and interventions at several levels (see Denselow, 1990; Lynskey, 2011; Street, 2012). Internationally, the global phenomenon of Live Aid in 1985 addressed the issue of famine in Africa and the Mil Foundation and the various Concerts for Tibet (since 1995), initiated by the Beastie Boys, raised issues of repressive Chinese government policies in that country. Examples at a national level include the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament movement in the UK in the late 1950s; civil rights and the anti-Vietnam war movement in the US in the 1960s; Rock Against Racism (RAR) in the UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Rock Against Bush in 2004–2006, and Live 8. I shall have more to say about several of these later.

Further, many artists have individually used their music to make political statements on a variety of issues, including racism, class, gender politics, sexuality and environmental concerns. At times 'mainstream' artists usually regarded as purely commercial and 'apolitical' also grasp the opportunity to present assertive messages, as in Destiny Child's huge hit 'Independent Women' (2001) and country star Shania Twain's 'Black Eyes Blue Tears' (1998), which alerted listeners to domestic violence.

Dorian Lynskey (2011) provides an insightful and detailed and discussion of 34 examples of individual songs, ranging, from Billy Holiday's 'Strange Fruit' in 1939, to Green Day's 'American Idiot' in 2004. These are frequently within the strong historical tradition of protest song, particularly in folk music, which has been carried on in genres such as reggae, punk and alternative music. A recent example is Bruce Springsteen's album *Wrecking Ball*, with its core argument that the current financial crisis and rising social inequality have ruined the American dream: 'We've destroyed the idea of an equal playing field. And there's a critical mass where society collapses. You can't have a society as fractionalized as that' (*The Times* in *Dominion Post*, 18 February 2012: B2). The songs on the album draw on folk melodies, welded to Springsteen's trademark big rock sound, with the lyrics echoing the early 1960s' protest songs of Bob Dylan, whom Springsteen cites as a primary influence. Springsteen compares the 2008 banking crisis in the US to theft and endorses the Occupy protest movement that sprang up in New York, London and many other cities worldwide.

The politics of rock

Rock, especially in genres such as punk/indie, is the popular music genre arguably most commonly associated with political potential. There is, however, disagreement as to the cultural significance and force of rock musicians' political statements and their role in various campaigns. For Lawrence

on the one hand, so much activity is attempting to explicitly articulate rock to political activism; on the other hand, this activity seems to have little impact on the rock formation, its various audiences or its relations to larger social struggles.

(Crossberg, 1992: 168)

This argument rests on a perceived 'radical disassociation' of the political content of the music of bands such as Rage Against the Machine, NOFX and Midnight Oil 'from their emotionally and affectively powerful appeals' (ibid.). It is clear that many listeners derive pleasure from such performers without either subscribing to their politics or, indeed, even being aware of them. Theodore Gracyk is also not confident of the revolutionary potential of rock music:

Rock, infused with the mythology of rebellion, would seem to attract an audience who could actually rebel and overthrow the system. We are to conclude that middle-class white teens are attracted to counterculture music ... because it openly speaks of an oppressive system that they dare not confront; the temporary release comes from the frank admission that contemporary life sucks.

(Gracyk, 1996: 158)

This is to see rock's frequent oppositional stance as diluted into symbolic consumption. By way of contrast, a variety of examples have been adduced to illustrate that many listeners *do* have their ideological horizons both confirmed and extended by association with political rock. This can also have practical benefits: for example, the Amnesty International tours of 1988 are estimated to have added some 200,000 new members to the organization in the US alone.

It has been argued that the history of such attempts to use popular music to forge mass movements will always face two problems. First, the power of popular music is transitory by nature, novelty and shock value have a short life span and routinization and disempowering follows. Second, there is the confused nature of musical power's 'collectivity':

The power of mass music certainly comes from its mobilization of an audience; a series of individual choices (to buy this record, this concert ticket) becomes the means to a shared experience and identity. The question, though, is whether this identity has any political substance.

(Frith and Street, 1992: 80)

A further dimension of this question is the tendency of many commentators to incorrectly assume that 'youth' represent some sort of 'natural left' political constituency. Furthermore, popular music is hardly the preserve of the political left and broadly progressive politics. It can be, and has been, used to support a broad range of political positions. President George Bush's inaugurations included impressive line-ups of blues and soul artists; white supremacist organizations like

the National Front in the UK and neo-Nazi groups in Germany have used punk rock and hardcore bands to attract new recruits; and US anti-abortion activists have co-opted 'We Shall Overcome' to maintain solidarity at sit-ins outside abortion clinics.

I want to situate this debate in relation to three brief examples of the politics of rock; each a particular historical moment in what is a broader history.

The 1960s: 'Give Peace a Chance'

The 1960s were a benchmark for popular music and political activism. Music played a role in the US civil rights movement of the early 1960s, the student protests of 1968, especially in Europe, and in the anti-Vietnam war movement (Doggett, 2009). Musicians wrote, performed and recorded songs about these events and their commercial success drew wider attention to the issues involved. There are numerous examples; a few must suffice here:

- Crosby, Stills and Nash, 'Chicago', on the harsh treatment by the police of demonstrators at the Democratic Convention in that city in 1968.
- John Lennon, 'Give Peace a Chance' and 'Power to the People', whose chanted lyrics provided anthems for peace marches and rallies internationally.
- Marvin Gaye, 'What's Going On' arguably the most politically explicit no. 1 record ever.
- The Byrds, 'Turn! Turn! Turn! (to everything there is a season)'. While this is not on the surface a protest song, Roger McGuinn added the line 'a time of peace, / I swear it's not too late', to Pete Seger's bible-based song lyrics.

A number of songs spoke directly to the soldiers fighting in Vietnam, as with the Fugs, 'Kill for Peace'; CCR's 'Run Through the Jungle' and 'Fortunate Son', on the ability of middle-class youth to avoid the draft; the Doors, 'The Unknown Soldier'; and Edwin Starr, 'War', which spent three weeks at no. 1 on *Billboard* in 1969. At Woodstock in 1969 Jimi Hendrix deconstructed the US national anthem, 'The Star Spangled Banner', as a series of sirens, explosions and shrieking feedback.

As the Vietnam War escalated, opposition to it grew. Events at Kent State University, in Ohio in 1970, were a defining moment in the anti-war movement in the US. The National Guard fired on student demonstrators, four were killed and many more injured, several seriously. Responding the same night the news was broadcast, Neil Young composed 'Ohio'. (The song is on Neil Young, *Greatest Hits*, Reprise, 2004, CD; Young has mixed personal introspection and the political issues of the day throughout his career.) Of course, the impact of these songs is difficult to judge and the meaning and clarity of their lyrics are at times unclear. Yet their commercial exposure, and the widespread media and public interest in them, suggested they certainly had an impact. As Graham Nash, who wrote 'Chicago', later observed: 'people like us probably don't have any real answers, but at least we brought up the questions' (*Get Up*, 2004).

Rock Against Racism (RAR)

RAR is a further example of such associations between music and politics, conducting a partially successful mass campaign to confront the racism arising in the harsh urban landscapes of inner city Britain in the 1970s. The 1950s and 1960s had seen increased immigration to England from former colonies in the Asian subcontinent and the West Indies, but the new immigrant communities were often targeted by racist organizations such as the National Front. In the three years under a Labour government between 1974 and 1977, unemployment had risen sharply, especially among youth; the National Front gained support, and racial tension increased. A later retrospective summarized the period: 'Power blackouts. Endless strikes. Police brutality. Race riots. Currency freefalls ... the mood of the country was bleak and growing bleaker' (*Uncut*, February 2003).

RAR was formed against this background, following a widely reported provocative remark by Eric Clapton, during a concert, that Britain would become 'a black colony within 10 years'. RAR used demonstrations, concerts, a magazine and records to mobilize upwards of half a million people: 'black and white people, outside conventional politics, inspired by a mixture of socialism, punk rock and common humanity, got together and organized to change things' (Widgery, 1986: 8). In February 1981 *Rock Against Racism's Greatest Hits* (Virgin Records) was the first album made as a political gesture, providing a precedent for the subsequent efforts of groups such as Band Aid. Leading groups and artists (Tom Robinson Band, the Clash) contributed to mass concerts and carnivals, and anti-National Front rallies, which served to politicize but still entertain. While the campaign failed to stop racist attacks, far less racism, it was a factor in the sharp decline of the National Front's share of the vote in the general election of 1979, following the fascist organization's surge of support in the mid-1970s.

RAR strengthened the idea that popular music could be about more than entertainment and in a sense provided the inspiration for similar campaigns in the 1980s. But as John Street notes, the RAR campaign illustrates 'the delicacy of the relationship between a cause and its music', as the reliance on the music as the source of unity and strength threw into sharp relief differences of stylistic affiliations. Political strategies were 'played out and resolved in terms of musical choices', a process which indicated 'the limitations of a politics organized around music' (Street, 1986: 78; see also his fuller discussion of the campaign in Street, 2012: Chapter 5). Similar difficulties were evident in attempts to harness rock to the cause of the striking British miners in 1984–1985 and with Red Wedge, the opposition Labour party's attempt to use rock to win the youth vote in the 1987 UK general elections. In both cases, strongly held views about the correct relationship of political principle and musical style arguably seriously limited the impact of the efforts (see Denselow, 1990; Street, 2012).

Rock Against Bush; the Dixie Chicks

During the 2004 American presidential campaign, several organizations worked to get young people to register to vote (*Rock the Vote*; *Punk Voter*). Some,

including Punk Voter, were explicitly against President George Bush, who was running for another term of office. Their activities included websites (Rock the Vote was originally created through MTV in 1990); concerts and, in the case of Punk Voter, compilation albums: *Rock Against Bush*, volumes 1 and 2. The proceeds from these were used to support the concerts staged during the election year.

A number of punk bands were very active in these campaigns, including NOFX, whose singer Fat Mike (Michael Burkett) helped found Punk Voter. 'Mainstream' stars, too, were part of the presidential race. Bruce Springsteen endorsed Democratic candidate John Kerry's campaign against Bush and the star's song 'No Surrender' became its unofficial theme song. Springsteen performed it, along with 'Promised Land', at campaign rallies, referring to how 'Senator Kerry honors these ideals'. International media coverage featured images of Springsteen and Kerry, arms around one another, with press captions asking 'Who Will Be the Boss?' (*Dominion Post*, 30 October 2004) neatly linking the election outcome to the title Springsteen fans have long accorded the rock star.

The hugely successful country crossover trio, the Dixie Chicks, endorsed Rock the Vote, but became more directly involved when singer Natalie Maines confided to British fans at a London concert on 10 March 2003: 'Just so you know, we're on the good side with y'all. We do not want this war, this violence, and we're ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas' – the band's home state. Her comment was widely reported in the international media, but was often abbreviated to 'we're ashamed that the President of the United States is from Texas'. This took the words out of their original context and left out the back story to why the comment was made and ignored the Chicks' support for the American soldiers fighting in Iraq, expressed in their single 'Travelling Soldier'.

As MOJO put it, 'the Dixie Chicks went from being country darlings to being enemies of the state' (*MOJO*, October 2003: 44). Maines' remarks touched off an extreme response, with a considerable public backlash: radio stations, mainly in the American south, banned the group's new release and attempts were made to boycott their concerts. In June 2006, as the war in Iraq continued to escalate and US casualties mounted, the earlier episode and Maines' remark were reprised when the Chicks launched a new album (*Taking the Long Way*) and tour. A media marketing blitz, and numerous interviews with the group, used the 2003 episode as a starting point: did Natalie regret saying it? Was she surprised at the backlash? Of course, not only did this draw attention to Bush and American policy in Iraq, it also gave the Dixie Chicks a good deal of useful publicity: the album went to the top of the charts. After George Bush was re-elected, criticism continued of his policies and musicians remained part of this; for example, Neil Young released *Living With War* (2006), featuring lyrics condemning the president and the war in Iraq.

Conscience rock

In the 1980s questions about the viability of music in the direct service of organized political movements were addressed by a different style of cultural politics:

the 'mega-event' or what I term 'conscience rock'. This new phenomenon of political rock saw popular musician stars joining and reinforcing international concern at the grim effects of mass famine in Africa, Third World debt and taking up anti-nuclear, environmental and other international causes. The list of causes here is now a long one and includes the Concert for Bangladesh, Live Aid, Sun City, Farm Aid, Rock the Debt, the Nelson Mandela tribute concerts, several Amnesty International tours, numerous Greenpeace concerts and Music for Tibet. Such efforts are not purely political: Rock Against AIDS has raised awareness about the epidemic and funds to help combat it.

Here I want to consider Live Aid in the 1980s as an example of 'conscience rock', opening up the question of the political potential of popular music to raise consciousness and money for social interventions. Band Aid's 'Do They Know it's Christmas?' was the first of a number of singles to raise public consciousness and funds to aid famine relief in Africa and established the pattern and format for those that followed. While the very name of the effort conceded its limitations, given the scale of the problem, Band Aid proved far more successful than any of those involved had anticipated. Recorded by 37 English pop stars in London in late November 1984, the record was perfectly timed for the British Christmas market; it sold about 10 million copies and raised about £8 million (Rijven and Straw, 1989: 200; see also Denselow, 1990: 244ff.).

The record cover contrasted the well-to-do children of the west with the poverty of their Ethiopian counterparts. The back of the cover sleeve constructed and celebrated a brotherhood of rock, in contrast to the music press's usual stressing of the individual image of performers. USA (United Support of Artists) for Africa followed with 'We Are the World'. The song title neatly suggested global interdependence, while its lyrics reaffirmed nineteenth-century charity: 'Its time to lend a hand to life, so let's start giving', adding an echo of the Beatles' idealism with 'and the truth, you know, love is all we need'. The single became CBS's fastest seller ever. Together with an album, videos and the sales of posters and t-shirts, United Support of Artists grossed \$50 million dollars; the bulk of this went to famine relief and longer term aid in Africa, with 10 per cent going to the hungry and homeless in the US. A number of similar regional and national Band Aid singles followed.

On 13 July 1985 Live Aid was broadcast worldwide via television, directly from Sydney, Australia, Wembley Stadium in London and the JFK stadium in Philadelphia. The performers included David Bowie, Queen, U2 and Paul McCartney in London; Eric Clapton, Duran Duran and Bob Dylan in Philadelphia. With the assistance of Concorde, Phil Collins even performed at both shows. Seven telecommunications satellites beamed the event live to an estimated one billion viewers in some 150 countries, including the Soviet Union and China. Viewers were encouraged to phone in to their national contact and pledge their contribution. The records and concerts shared an air of patriotism; the notion of each nation doing its bit for the common cause – 'donationalism' – and collectively they emphasized a sense of community and togetherness.

The Band Aid phenomenon raised a host of questions about the motives of the celebrities involved, marketing politics and the reasons for the overwhelming public response to charity rock in the mid-1980s. Much analysis was critical, finding 'the various charity projects tasteless, self-serving for those involved, symptomatic of existing geo-political relations and politically inappropriate' (Rijven and Straw, 1989: 206). There was also criticism that the line-up of artists performing at the two main Live Aid concerts consisted primarily of white stars and the majority of the recordings reflected 'the same muzak characteristics, transparent frameworks built on the conventions of pop song writing that only sell because of the Band Aid connotation' (*ibid.*: 203). Pragmatic rock politics, observed Will Straw, were now taking on the crasser aspects of the pop music industry.

Such criticism reflected a tendency on the part of the political left to claim the moral high ground and was rooted in a 'rock ideology' preoccupied with notions of sincerity and authenticity. This rather misses the point that Band Aid was essentially not about music and youth, but rather about using the connection between them to raise money and consciousness. The critics' preoccupation with credibility and ideological purity is accordingly misplaced. Nonetheless, the Band Aid projects showed 'a high media sensibility that feeds on itself – charity opens all doors' (*ibid.*). This is to acknowledge the multimedia nature of such high-profile public events, which became a feature of them in the 1990s.

Rijven concludes by critiquing Band Aid for 'a naive political attitude combined with a moral superiority' (*ibid.*: 204). This was certainly evident, although to go beyond it was expecting too much of the musicians involved. After all, how many people are aware of the international dynamics of the international economy and their contribution to the Ethiopian situation? At least charity/aid is a first step, even if based initially on a simple apolitical humanitarianism. Political sophistication comes later, as Bob Geldof himself found when investigating the use of the funds the Live Aid concert generated:

he was inevitably involved in a crash course in food aid politics, the realities of the African scene, the problems of debt, and an understanding of the strings often attached to aid offers from West or East, and the amounts Africa spends, and is encouraged to spend, on armaments.

(Denselow, 1990: 246; see also Geldof, 1986)

As Will Straw puts it, 'rock's discourse on politics is primarily concerned with nudging people rather than instances of political intervention'. He makes the point, usually overlooked, that the participation of artists in the various Ethiopia records is in many ways less significant than the involvement of the music industries: 'The waiving of record label, distributor and retail profits is much more unprecedented and spectacular than the gathering of artists for charity purposes' (Rijven and Straw, 1989: 204, 208). Since this industry concession provided the bulk of the money to the cause, it rendered irrelevant the debates over the credibility, motives and sincerity of the artists involved. The cultural significance of

Live Aid's 'We Are the World' lay in its commercial form as much as in its political focus.

Conscience rock has continued to be part of political culture, with various causes and campaigns using music and musicians to animate political participation. As John Street shows in relation to Live 8, the culmination of the campaign for debt relief through the early 2000s, 'the conjunction of music and politics is not a product of spontaneity, but of hard work and planning, of networks and various forms of capital' (Street, 2012: 74).

Music, gender and sexual politics

The term 'sex' is used to refer to biological differences between male and female, whereas gender applies to everything that is socially constructed and culturally transmitted. Masculine and feminine are characteristics of men and women respectively. The major debate in gender studies, sociobiology and sociology more generally is between those who believe that these characteristics are indicative of men's and women's biological natures (essentialists) and those who argue that masculine and feminine are ascribed roles and masculinity and femininity are cultural, shaped by socialization rather than biology (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2006). For musicians and music consumers/fans, gender identity or *identities* can be seen, in part, as constructed through musical institutions, texts and practices. Accordingly, the significance of gender is evident in a number of areas of popular music studies; these can only be briefly alluded to here and warrant further investigation.

It has been forcefully argued that the dominant ideologies and discourses throughout popular music generally privilege males, while at the same time constructing a normative masculinity. The dominance of male–female binaries in popular music's analysis of gender has been challenged by studies of 'queer music', a term appropriated by gays and lesbians. There is rather less literature on male gender issues in popular music and the construction of masculinity (although see Hawkins, 2009, on the British pop dandy).

Writing in 1977, Chapple and Garofalo described a situation that has been slow to change:

The absence of women as creators in pop music can be called sexist. Sexism is the systematic discrimination against and degradation of women, and the denial of equal power to women in human affairs. Sexism is as pervasive in rock music as in any other form of music. It pervades the structure of the music industry along with the lyrics and instrumentation of the music itself.

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A number of studies provide examples of the continued difficult struggle experienced by women in all phases of the music business (see Carson, Lewis and Shaw, 2004). There remains a lack of women in the male-dominated music industry; traditionally they are largely in stereotypically 'female' roles, e.g. press,

office personnel. There are few women working in A&R, or as producers, managers and sound mixers; these are all spheres that are male dominated, a situation partly related to technologies as masculinist.

The history of popular music is largely constructed around male performers and male-dominated genres. While women's contribution to gospel, the blues and soul are generally recognized, there is a tendency to marginalize their place in the development of rock, metal and dance music. Compare, for example, the status accorded contemporaries Jim Morrison (heroic, romantic 'rock icon') and Janis Joplin (a 'sad figure'), despite her critical and commercial success that more than matched his in the late 1960s. Even when they are credited, their contributions are seen in stereotypical terms: divas, rock chicks (e.g. Suzi Quatro, Janis Joplin), men-pleasing angels (Doris Day), victims (Billie Holiday) or problem personalities (Judy Garland). These narratives have been challenged by popular music histories focused on women and through re-evaluations of phenomena such as girl groups and fandom. Linked to this, both traditional musicology and the popular music press have constructed a male-dominated musical canon, with this challenged by feminist scholars and music critics. A *MOJO* special issue, *ICONS* (2004), is typical of the popular construction of a gender-based canon. Of the 100 featured performers, only 14 are women; of these, Madonna is at number six, followed by Kate Bush at 29, with most women performers placed towards the bottom of the list.

In relation to audiences and consumption, girl fans and their musical tastes are often denigrated (e.g. pop's teenyboppers), while male fans are validated (especially in legitimating non-mainstream musical styles); record collecting presents itself as a highly gendered practice; and youth subcultures have been historically a male preserve, with girls generally absent, 'invisible' or socially insignificant.

The perceived masculine or feminine nature of particular genres has been vigorously debated. Pop is often seen as a genre supported by girls and younger women, while hard rock and heavy metal are regarded as primarily male-oriented genres: encoded as signifying masculinity. Even genres which, at least at the level of rhetoric, challenge gender stereotyping, such as indie and punk, demonstrate considerable sexism. Women performers predominate in a capella and gospel music and are prominent in folk and country and among singer-songwriters. These are socially constructed patterns, reflecting differential expectations and resources, including access to musical knowledge and equipment.

Mavis Bayton's discussion of 'women and the electric guitar' is a good early example of the social processes at work here (Bayton, 1997). Her Oxford study showed only between two and four per cent of instrumentalists in local bands were women and 'the reasons for women's absence are entirely social'. Gender socialization teaches girls how to be 'feminine' and not to engage in 'masculine' activities:

Playing the flute, violin, and piano is traditionally 'feminine', playing electric guitar is 'masculine'. On TV and in magazines, young women are presented

with repeated images of men playing electric guitar; there are few female role models to inspire them.

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Further, compared to boys, teenage women lack money, time, space, transport and access to equipment. Even if a girl does take up the electric guitar, they have difficulty gaining access to the informal friendship groups within rock music making, which are crucial learning environments. Guitar shops are 'male terrain' and nearly all Bayton's interviewees regarded them as alien territory. The technology associated with the electric guitar – leads, amplifiers, plug boards – is strongly categorized as 'masculine' and presents another hurdle to female performers. The association of guitar playing with masculine prowess, the 'axe' as an extension of the male body, and playing it a pseudo-masturbatory act, consolidate its status as an exclusively 'masculine' idiom. A more recent study by Monique Bourdage found that the same barriers that prevent women from succeeding in other male-dominated fields continued to apply to the electric guitar, including 'a scarcity of role models, a lack of access to education, and the masculinization of prestigious technologies'. She considers attempts to break down such barriers, including women's music festivals, rock camps for girls and riot grrrl (Bourdage, 2010).

In a classic early investigation, Sara Cohen found that in the Liverpool rock music scene she studied, women were not simply absent, but were actively excluded. All-male bands tended to preserve the music as 'their' domain, keeping the involvement of wives and girlfriends at a distance. This situation reflected the more restricted social position of women, with greater domestic commitments and less physical freedom; the lack of encouragement given to girls to learn rock instruments; and rock sexuality as predominantly masculine. Consequently, there are few women bands in rock or women instrumentalists and most women rock performers are 'packaged as traditional, stereotyped, male images of women' (Cohen, 1991: 203). In the 1990s the situation Cohen identified was challenged by the Riot Grrrl movement.

Riot Grrrl

Initially based in Washington, DC, and Olympia, Washington, in the early 1990s, Riot Grrrl quickly became the focus of considerable media attention. Through fanzines and sympathetic role models among female musicians, riot grrrls asserted the need to break down the masculine mateship of the alternative and hardcore music scenes, which marginalized girls and young women. They drew on feminism and punk DIY ideology to question conventional ideas of femininity and rejected rockist ideas of cool and mystique, challenging the view that enhanced technical virtuosity is necessary to create music. Some writers referred to them as 'punk feminists', as riot grrrls aimed to create a cultural space for young women in which they could express themselves without being subject to male scrutiny (Leonard, 2007). In the process, they played with conflicting images and

stereotyped conventions; e.g. the appropriation of 'girl' and their assertive use of the term 'slut'. Musically, the performers linked to the Riot Grrrl movement (e.g. L7, Bikini Kill) sounded very like traditional hardcore and late 1970s' punk bands, but their emphasis was on the process rather than the product.

Inspired in part by Riot Grrrl, a number of prominent women-led bands emerged during the 1990s, including Hole, Veruca Salt and Echobelly. Performers associated with the 'angry women in rock' media tag of the mid-1990s, notably Alanis Morissette and Fiona Apple, selectively appropriated key concepts from the riot grrrls, with considerable commercial success. To a degree, this represented the incorporation of Riot Grrrl and a dilution of its oppositional politics, a common historical theme in popular music. Other performers, however, remained more closely aligned to the founding philosophy, including Sleater-Kinney, formed in 1995 (they broke up in June 2006), and Le Tigre, formed in 1998 by Kathleen Hanna, after she had left Bikini Kill (Marcus, 2010). Along with their predecessors, these performers have remained linked to locally based labels and continue to assert a political feminism in their work. Many contemporary local indie scenes, including Wellington, New Zealand, include bands that identify themselves with the Riot Grrrl movement.

Woman- or 'female-centred' rock bands are now more common, especially in the alternative and indie music scenes, although their members still have to negotiate the gendering of rock as masculine (Leonard, 2007) and social expectations of performers sexuality.

Sexuality

Sexuality refers to the expression of sexual identity, through sexual activity, or the projection of sexual desire and attraction. Sexuality and desire are central human emotions, or drives, that have been an essential part of the appeal of the culture/entertainment industries, including popular music and the social processes whereby performers and their texts operate in the public arena. Popular music is a significant site for the operation of sexual politics and struggles around them.

Sexuality is central to discussions of how male and, more frequently, female performers are conceived of – socially constructed – as sex objects or symbols of desire. Here certain forms of subjectivity and identity are projected as 'normal', traditionally white, male heterosexuality. The operation of this process is a major focus in studies of music video and stardom and in relation to particular genres of music and types of performer (for example the diva, the dandy; see Hawkins, 2009). Central here are considerations of the nature of spectatorship and the (gendered) gaze, as evident in the discourse surrounding Madonna's early career (see Schwichtenberg, 1993). In the early 2000s Christina Aguilera utilized modes of sexual expression similar to those of Madonna and situated herself in the now familiar debate. On the one hand, she could be seen as presenting her body as an object for the male gaze and voyeuristic desire, through provocative poses in CD sleeve booklets (*Stripped*, 2002) and magazine covers and stories. On the other hand, she could be regarded as subverting dominant patriarchal attitudes and

practices in her work, with songs following the standard heterosexual romantic narrative (woman falls in love with/desires a man), while also 'voicing compelling feminist notions of female independence, autonomy and sexual expression' (Smith, 2003), on songs such as 'Can't Hold Us Down' (on *Stripped*). Other women performers to use their careers and public/stage personas to comment on female sexuality, vulnerability and power include Polly Harvey, Tori Amos and Björk (see the discussion of each in Whiteley, 2005) – not forgetting Lady Gaga.

Sexual ambiguity is central to many forms of popular music, which has frequently subverted the dominant sexuality constructed around male–female binaries. Discussion has concentrated on exploring the relationship between sexual orientation, public personas and a performer's music. Some performers openly represent or subvert and 'play with' a range of sexualities. Others constitute themselves, at times very self-consciously, as objects of heterosexual desire or as icons for different ('deviant?') sexualities and their constituencies. Several 1950s' male stars were 'adored objects', catering to both homosexual desire and female consumption, for example Elvis Presley and Fabian. Later performers include representations of the homoerotic (e.g. Madonna, Morrissey), androgynous (Bowie during the Ziggy period), effeminate (the Cure), asexual (Boy George), bisexual (Morrissey again; Suede) and gay and lesbian (the Village People; Freddie Mercury; k.d. lang). The application of such labels, their connotations and their relationship to actual gay communities have been at times strongly contested (Hawkins, 2002; Whiteley *et al.*, 2004).

Some genres and performers are linked to particular sexualities/communities. Disco, for example, generally celebrates the pleasure of the body and physicality and is linked to the gay community and specific club scenes. 'Hard rock', as the label suggests, was traditionally associated with overt masculinity, dominated by male performers, it has even been referred to as 'cock rock' (Frith and McRobbie, 1978). Robert Walser argues that heavy metal has historically been actively *made* as male and acts to 'reproduce and reflect patriarchal assumptions and ideologies' that underpin western society (1993: 111). He suggests that HM bands promote male bonding and legitimate male power through a combination of misogyny (in song lyrics, videos) and exscription: the creation through the music, album covers and videos of fantasy worlds without women, in which male heroes battle against monsters and superhuman villains (110). Arnett observes that even though some HM fans are women, their involvement is often through a boyfriend or due to the sexual attraction they feel toward the performers or fans; consequently they struggle 'to reconcile their enthusiasm for heavy metal with their sense of being not quite welcome in that world' (Arnett, 1996: 140). Later metal studies have taken issue with these earlier studies, arguing for a more complex process of gender negotiation within the genre (see Chapter 6). There is considerable argument over how the lyrics and the associated cultural values in 'gendered' musical genres are understood and responded to by their listeners, audiences and fans. Are the artists intended or preferred readings, embedded in their recordings and performances, acknowledged *let alone* assimilated into individual and social values and meanings?

In addition to gender, ethnicity and class are social categories, which have the subject of considerable attention within popular music studies. Considerations of space have necessitated a very gestural treatment here, which can be followed up through the Further Reading at the end of the chapter.

Ethnicity

The term 'race' is still widely used in popular discourse; it has historically often been considered as a biological concept, whereby humans can be classified according to a number of physical criteria. Cultural theorists now generally regard this as an untenable and ideologically motivated view, associated with *racism*. The alternative term 'ethnicity' is defined on the basis of shared cultural characteristics for a group of people, based in part on cultural self-identification, but can also include an overlay of cultural criteria onto perceived racial characteristics. There is considerable debate around both terms, which should be considered *social* categories. Ethnicity has been an important consideration in virtually all aspects of popular music studies, particularly in regard to African-American music in the US. Popular music is also involved in the social processes of 'racialization' internationally and can both cross and reinforce ethnic/racist boundaries.

The concept of 'black' music is sometimes equated with African-American music (which replaced the earlier term Afro-American) or the two terms are used interchangeably. Both concepts are linked to emotive arguments over essentialism, authenticity and the historical incorporation and marginalization of the music of black performers. The existence of black music is predicated on a notion of musical coherence and an identifiable constituency. According to Nelson George (1989: Introduction):

black music is that which is recognized and accepted as such by its creators, performers and hearers ... encompassing the music of those who see themselves as black, and whose musics have unifying characteristics which justify their recognition as specific genres.

In such formulations, particular genres are considered 'black', most notably the blues, soul and rap. This has led to questions and debate over how this 'blackness' can be musically identified, how 'black' performers can be defined or recognized and how do we situate a song by a white composer being performed by a black artist? In the development of popular music, it has generally been agreed that the interaction between black and white styles, genres and performers has been crucial. Black slaves shipped from Africa to the Americas brought with them their own kinds of music, which eventually mixed with the European music of white Americans to produce a fusion of styles. Early African American music had had three characteristics: a melodic line; a strong rhythmic accent; and songs that alternate improvised lines, shouts and cries with repeated choruses. These were incorporated into ragtime, the blues and R&B. These characteristics aside, it

has been argued that it is difficult to identify common factors that characterize black music, rejecting the idea that there is an 'essence' to black music (Tagg, 1989).

Nonetheless, some writers demonstrate that 'black music' to be a useful and important term. Brackett (1995), for example, uses 'the presence or absence of musical elements that many writers have identified with African-American musical styles, elements derived in particular from gospel music and African-American preaching', to consider the relative success of a number of songs that crossed over from *Billboard's* R&B to the Hot 100 charts in 1965. However, it is difficult to identify common factors, an 'essence' that characterizes black music (Gilroy, 1993; Tagg, 1989). The concept of diaspora has been applied to the notion of black music to signal a community of musical expression transcending nationalism, but which avoids musical essentialism (Gilroy, 1993). More recent scholarship in relation to such issues is discussed by Ronald Radano (2012).

Class

Class is one of the fundamental types of social classification. Most contemporary discussions rely on employment categories, with class formation and identity variously related to educational attainment and life chances and to patterns of cultural consumption. It is the last that has been a significant part of popular music studies. The class nature of popular music preferences is international, with class-linked taste cultures seemingly fairly fixed over time. Bourdieu claimed 'nothing more clearly affirms one's class, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music' (1986: 18), but the relative and sometimes greater influence of gender, ethnicity, age and location as influences shaping musical tastes must also be acknowledged (see Chapter 10).

Genre studies include consideration of the class location of audiences and fans, linking this to the nature and the appeal of the genre. Wiseman-Trowse (2008), for example, extensively considers the role historically played by class in popular music in the UK, through case studies of folk music, punk and hardcore, dream pop and 'Madchester', with an emphasis on 'the ways in which representations of class in British popular music are used to articulate authenticity' (2). He considers class to be 'a mythological concept, constructed through the musical text' in order to assure the listener of the authenticity of their tastes. More specifically, Chris McDonald (2010) explores the ways in which Canadian progressive rock band Rush has been the voice of the suburban middle class: 'Rush's critique of suburban life – and its strategies for escape – reflected middle-class aspirations and anxieties, while its performances manifested the dialectic in prog rock between discipline and austerity, and the desire for spectacle and excess.'

Conclusion

The examples referred to in this chapter demonstrate the range and complexity of the role of popular music in cultural politics. For every case of a performer, genre, text or consumer constrained and regulated by gender expectations,

capital, pressure groups and the state, there are counter-examples of the successful use of the music to raise political consciousness, finance political causes and support social movements. In terms of the identity politics of gender and sexuality, ethnicity and class popular music is a site of cultural struggle, with constant attempts to establish dominance, exploit cultural contradictions and negotiate dominant norms and expectations.

Further reading

Political rock

- Doggett, P. (2009) *There's A Riot Going On: Revolutionaries, Rock Stars and The Rise and Fall of 60s Counter Culture*, London: Canongate.
- Lynskey, D. (2011) *33 Revolutions per Minute: A History of Protest Songs from Billie Holiday to Green Day*, New York: HarperCollins.
- Viewing: *Get Up, Stand Up: The Story of Pop and Politics*, a Dora Production, documentary series, 2004.

Gender and sexuality

- Bourdage, M. (2010) 'A Young Girl's Dream: Examining the Barriers Facing Female Electric Guitarists', *LASPM Journal*, 1, 1: 1–15.
- Carson, M., Lewis, T. and Shaw, S.M. (2004) *Girls Rock! Fifty Years of Women Making Music*, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Leonard, M. (2007) *Gender in the Music Industry Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

In addition to 'academic' studies, popular biographies and autobiographies of women performers can provide considerable insight, for example, Pat Benatar (2010) on her career as a female 'rock' artist in the 1980s.

- Benatar, P. with Patsi Bale Cox (2010) *Between a Heart and a Rock Place: A Memoir*, New York: HarperCollins.

Ethnicity

- Radano, R. (2012) 'Music, Race and the Fields of Public Culture', in M. Clayton, T. Herbert and R. Middleton (eds), *The Cultural Study of Music*, New York, London: Routledge.
- Ramsey, G.P. (2003) *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Tagg, P. (1989) "Black Music", "African-American Music", and "European Music", *Popular Music*, 8, 3: 285–98.

Class

- Wiseman-Trowse, N. (2008) *Performing Class in British Popular Music*, Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.