- ARTICLE -

Re-Establishing Britishness / Englishness: Representation Through Music in a non-Parliamentary Nation

Robert Burns

Abstract

The absence of a contemporary English identity distinct from right wing political elements has reinforced negative and apathetic perceptions of English folk culture and tradition among populist media. Negative perceptions such as these have to some extent been countered by the emergence of a post–progressive rock–orientated English folk–protest style that has enabled new folk music fusions to establish themselves in a populist performance medium that attracts a new folk audience. In this way, English politicised folk music has facilitated an English cultural identity that is distinct from negative social and political connotations. A significant contemporary national identity for British folk music in general therefore can be found in contemporary English folk as it is presented in a homogenous mix of popular and world music styles, despite a struggle both for and against European identity as the United Kingdom debates 'Brexit', the current term for its possible departure from the EU.

> My mother was half English and I'm half English too I'm a great big bundle of culture tied up in the red, white and blue (Billy Bragg and the Blokes 2002).

When the singer and songwriter, Billy Bragg wrote the above song, *England, Half English*, a friend asked him whether he was being ironic. He replied 'Do you know what, I'm not', a statement which shocked his friends. Bragg is a social commentator, political activist and staunch socialist who is proudly English and an outspoken anti–racist, which his opponents may see as arguably diametrically opposed combination. The theme of this article unpacks the sentiment expressed in these lyrics, which reflect the links between music, politics and their effects on how both are represented in contemporary media. Since Woody Guthrie's songs of the 1940s and 1950s to Bob Dylan's lyrical commentaries in the 1960s—the combination of folk or 'traditional' western popular

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music in a political context has become a potent symbol for social comment. Textual content in Dylan's pre–1965 repertoire often originated from external stimuli, such as the Vietnam War and other political and social issues of the time. While Dylan's socio–political commentary and criticism remain primary aspects in his song writing; he has consistently reinvented his performance style, and the media in which it is presented, to the present day. Billy Bragg follows this tradition, and makes political statements largely criticizing the way the United Kingdom has been governed since the 1980s, in his songs, books and popular media. His song writing and singing career started in the 1980s during which period he was particularly vocal about Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government and he continues a campaign that supports multiculturalism in the UK and what is more commonly known as 'Britain'. Most importantly, he is critical of the fact that, while most components of the UK have national assemblies, England does not. He is one of several 'British' (which I define as English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh, although that is also often an issue of contention) singer–songwriters, musicians and social activists, some of whom have publically voiced opinions on the possible future dissolution of the United Kingdom. These composers and performers are what might be termed 'folk singers' although that term has now become extremely broad, as I will discuss later in this article. Since the late 1960s, when folk music and rock music were often combined, many of these performers sang songs with historical political themes. These included content about Tom Paine and Wat Tyler and criticism of past monarchs and the UK class system. Bands such as Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span, and singers such as Ralph McTell and Barry Dransfield have drawn on social issues, both historical and recent, to continue the tradition of folk music being a vehicle by which social and political information is disseminated and criticised. The central issue I will explore in this article is English identity in an England that is increasingly multicultural, as well as the potential impact of UK dissolution that will ultimately reflect traditional and politically orientated musics that, as stated, are often intertwined in terms of lyric and melody.

This research initially related to the referendum concerning possible Scottish independence from the United Kingdom that took place September 2014. Its subject came from an interview in 2012 with Bragg, who had views about the way in which the referendum was being reported by media outlets in the UK but, as stated below, most English people were either unformed or were disinterested in the effect of a vote in favour of Scottish independence. In fact, the British *Guardian* newspaper journalist, John Harris stated that, while Welsh nationalists eagerly await the outcome of the Scottish referendum, most English people were either unaware of it, or were not interested (Harris, 2012). This article therefore investigates how music, politics and national identity become entwined through what used to be referred to as 'music of protest'. While partial devolution of the United Kingdom since the late 1990s has enabled individual national assemblies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the absence of an English national assembly remains antithetical to the consolidation of a modern English identity. The emergence of a post progressive rock–orientated English folk

music style has, however, enabled new folk music fusions to establish themselves in a populist performance forum that is both club and festival orientated. In this way, English folk–rock has enabled the emergence of a new English cultural identity that is distinct from negative social and political connotations that are often linked to nationalism, colonialism and xenophobia. A significant contemporary national, and often radical, identity for British folk music consequently exists in contemporary folk music of the British Isles as it is presented as part of a homogenous mix of world music styles presented to a multi–cultural audience in the UK.

For Bragg, the absence of a contemporary English identity (and a separate English parliament or assembly, such as those established in the late 1990s for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) and that is distinct from right wing political elements has reinforced negative and apathetic perceptions of English folk culture and tradition among populist media, particularly given the histories of England's xenophobia to the Welsh, Irish and the Scots in past centuries. This sentiment is reflected in the emergence of a modern English folk–rock style, which has enabled new folk music fusions to establish themselves in a populist performance medium that attracts a new folk and to an extent, a rock, audience. In this way, what UK record companies of the 1970s branded as 'English folk–rock' has facilitated an English cultural identity that is separate from negative social and political connotations, although this notion of Englishness is easily conflated with what Benedict Anderson has described as the manufacture of notions of 'tradition' and 'community' that act as a means of promoting aspects of antiquity in nationalist and preservationist nostalgia (Anderson, 1991, 5). This is especially true, given that 'English folk–rock' bands are able to perform a repertoire drawn from all over the United Kingdom into the twenty–first century. A significant contemporary national identity for British folk music in general can therefore be found in examples of contemporary folk and rock music, as they are presented in a homogenous mix of popular and world music styles.

In his study of the deconstruction of 'Great Britain' as a nation state, Tom Nairn is critical about a 'slow foundering' of the British state since the nineteenth century that has taken place, rather than the 'Titanic–like disaster often predicted' (Nairn, 1977, 13). Conversely, many members of folk–orientated bands, such as Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span, and Waterson:Carthy repeatedly state their awareness of the national origins of their repertoires within the United Kingdom, and, moreover, they express positive descriptions of collaborations between performers from different regions and cultures in the UK in their approach to shared performance (Burns, 2012, 161–65). Thus, Nairn's dire predictions do not seem to have occurred. Billy Bragg, however, composes songs that make political and cultural statements about the contemporary United Kingdom and he promotes the multi–cultural nature of British society. What became apparent in our discussion, however, was that while he sees a need for English political representation within the United Kingdom, he sees Englishness from the perspective of the multicultural diaspora, more usually referred to as 'Britishness', from which he originates.

For this article, while drawing to an extent on primary data gained from informants, I provide a concise comparative analysis of historical accounts, particularly in relation to themes identified by UK singer–song writers who work in the broad folk idiom. This article aims to provide an historical and contextual overview for a larger study. It frames Bragg's statements and lyrics by initially providing historical context for such perspectives, which seem to be gaining currency, as the United Kingdom becomes more multicultural. It is significant that, since the late 1960s, English folk–rock bands have recorded folk music from all of the British Isles, a stylistic policy that enabled them to remain detached from existing notions of Englishness that have often attracted negative connotations. More recently, this earlier detachment has situated English folk–rock as a significant representation of contemporary British folk music that contributes to a revised notion of Englishness located individually and collectively within the folk music of other parts of the British Isles, and without negative associations with nationalism. While a larger study (which I refer to later in the article) would include the views of several prominent folk–related informants, I base my statements in this article on interviews carried out with Bragg and Simon Nicol, a founder member of Fairport Convention who also has views on the ways in which contemporary folk music is galvanising a new English identity. Nicol also maintains that there now exists a younger Fairport Convention audience, which has been attracted to the band through the acoustic folk scene in the UK, and that this audience also listens to performers he regards as the 'high profile young Turks' of the contemporary folk scene, such as Eliza Carthy, Kate Rusby and Seth Lakeman. Nicol has it that members of these performers' audiences judge Fairport Convention in the context of contemporary music and that, if they wish to gain more from folk music, 'the history is there IF they choose to go back and explore it'. Thus, contemporary folk music provides an ideal forum through which national identity politics are played out.

A Brief Historical Background of the United Kingdom

In writing about how the contemporary United Kingdom was formed, one must acknowledge the suffering caused by English rule of its neighbours since the time of King John 1 (1166-1216), under Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), and then by successive British Parliaments. The conclusions to my territorial descriptions do, however, have a common outcome: political representation for all components of the UK, except for one – England. While this short sub–section is not a critical analysis, it is included to place what follows later in this article into a localised chronological context. Prominent historians, such as Clark (2005), Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and McCrone (1992) separately state that the United Kingdom was established in 1707 under the Acts of Union that followed the 'Glorious [and bloodless] Revolution' of 1668 to 1669, and a further revolution in Scotland in 1702 to 1703. They also comprehensively describe how the United Kingdom gradually became an imperial power. Before 1707, England and Scotland had separate parliaments but politicians from both sides were aware of Scotland's precarious financial situation, which relied on support from England. It is

worth noting, however, that in the fourteenth century, Robert The Bruce (1274-1329) slaughtered as many Scots, as had the English, in order to establish his family's kingship (but this is beyond the scope of this article). The 1707 Act was also passed to prevent an attempt at Jacobite restoration, an attempt which finally occurred, and failed, in 1745 (but was influential to the beginnings of patriotic national songs and anthems). Under the Act, England compensated Scotland by enabling forty-five commoners and sixteen Lords to represent Scotland in the UK Parliament. Scotland was, thus, underrepresented. England, as it had done and would do with its other neighbours, treated Scotland with brutality and disdain (Stokes, 1994, 1–28; Symon, 1993, 203–05). However, during the Industrial Revolution and the Imperial Wars of the nineteenth century, England and Scotland shared trade. Moreover, in 1998, the newly elected Labour government, which represented the entire UK, with a parliament housed in the Palace of Westminster, passed the Scotland Act that re-established the Scottish Parliament.

The Laws in Wales Acts passed between 1535 and 1542 annexed Wales to England, and Wales remained under English rule in what was mostly a state of poverty (a travesty considering that the Tudors were of Welsh origin and gained the English crown following the defeat of Richard Plantagenet at Bosworth Field in 1485) (Llewellyn, 2000, 321–22). Welsh agricultural entrepreneurialism, however, flourished during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Wales later contributed manpower to a United Kingdom Industrial Revolution and several wars waged by the 'British Empire' (Welsh nationalism was put aside during the Second World War as this was seen as a war against fascism). Distinctive Welsh politics had emerged, however, during the early twentieth century during the Prime Ministership of David Lloyd George (1863–1945), who was a member of the Liberal Party. This move towards nationalism was gradually displaced by the growth of socialism in Wales and interest in the newly emerging Labour Party since 1900.

During the 1960s, Welsh nationalism re-emerged and became militant with the formation of the Free Wales Army and the Welsh Defence Movement. In 1967, the Wales and Berwick Act was repealed. This act, passed in 1746, strengthened the annexation of Wales to England (an annexation which had been in place since the time of Henry the Eighth [1491-1547]) and meant that English law applied to Wales. The repeal of this Act also established a set boundary between England and Wales. In 1998, the Labour government passed the Government of Wales Act that gave Wales its own National Assembly.

The existence of Eire and Northern Ireland, and their connections to the United Kingdom issue, is more recent in terms of political history than the previous discussions on Scotland and Wales. Following the two English Civil Wars (1642-1651), Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) became the Lord Protector of the English Commonwealth (which included Scotland and Ireland). Irish rebellion against English rule restarted in the early 1640s and led to Irish defeat at the Battle of the Boyne in 1649. Brutal treatment of the Irish followed and continued into the twentieth century (Woodham–Smith 1991, 31). It is

enough to say that English politicians regarded Ireland as a 'problem best ignored' (such as the 1845 potato famine) prompting a leading British politician, Lord Palmerston (1784-1865) to comment 'The only Irish problem is the weather'. A Parliamentary Committee of the time, however, reported that 'without exception their findings prophesied disaster; Ireland was on the verge of starvation, her population rapidly increasing, three-quarters of her labourers unemployed, housing conditions appalling and the standard of living unbelievably low' (Woodham–Smith, 31). Palmerston's comment was also later countered by an Irish member of the UK parliament, Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) who stated in 1875, 'Why should Ireland be treated as a geographical fragment of England . . . Ireland is not a geographical fragment, but a nation'. In the twentieth century, the Easter Rebellion of 1916 led to the Declaration of Independence for Eire and stated that Ireland was no longer a part of the United Kingdom. The Republic of Ireland Act, however, was passed by the UK parliament in 1948 to acknowledge those Irish people who wished to remain under British rule. This Act separated what became Northern Ireland from Eire, and ultimately led to what is nowadays referred to euphemistically as 'The Troubles' between the 1960s and the 1990s. In 1998, the Labour government passed the Belfast Agreement in which Eire revoked its territorial claim to Northern Ireland and the Agreement established a Northern Ireland Assembly.

Roger Scruton incisively states that, following the Act of Union, the English began to call themselves 'British', particularly during the acquisition of empire and that the Scots, Irish and Welsh all played an active part in its construction (Scruton, 2000, 1–2). Scruton adds that the English notion of 'country' was unlike that of France, Germany and Italy, each of which had an established national identity. England, however, was represented as 'British' with a vague notion of 'kith and kin' (Scruton, 2). Scruton is also critical of Nairn's description of a slow disintegration of Britain throughout the twentieth century (Nairn, 1977, 13). Scruton regards this view as a 'sustained rejection of British nationalism, and of the pride and loyalty that made Britishness into a coherent project and a serious ideal' (Scruton, 5). Having briefly explained, however, why the United Kingdom is still currently 'united', albeit with Scruton's notion of 'kith and kin' sense of Britishness, there remains Bragg's question, 'Why does modern England (with its ongoing notion of 'British' identity) not have an individual parliamentary assembly?' This is despite the notions of 'Empire' that were gradually established during the Elizabethan period, reached their peak in the nineteenth century and dwindled in the early twentieth century following World War One. Thus, while I do not wish to equate hegemony with representation, given the existence of the UK's political power base in the Palace of Westminster in central London, it is ironic that, after centuries of England's mistreatment of its neighbours, it is now without its own national assembly.

A Flag for England

Billy Bragg discusses why even the English flag (which has no sense of 'Britishness') has become contentious, having been misappropriated by the British National Party (BNP),

the English Defence League (EDL) and a new political party that mainly exists online with no elected political representatives, Britain First. When I asked Bragg about his monograph, *The Progressive Patriot* (2006) being an intensely personal statement of his own identity, his views on contemporary England and current xenophobia, he stated:

> So the book [*The Progressive Patriot*] was an attempt for me to get to the heart of why I feel strongly about my personal identity and about belonging to a place. You know about an Englishness that's about where you are, rather than where your grandparents are from. So starting with those first feelings [and that] seemed to me to be a good place to start. Because it's kind of based on a huge influence by *The Lion and the Unicorn* by George Orwell [1940]. I read that as him trying to work out if he felt patriotic at the time of the war. He's kind of feeling his way around Englishness. Does he trust Churchill any more than he trusts Hitler or not, having been through the Spanish Civil War and everything in his own background, does he love this country enough to defend it against fascists?

While his monograph is based somewhat on *The Lion and The Unicorn*, Bragg puts it both verbally in song and in text (for example, *A New England* [1983], *England, Half English* [2002] and Collins' biography *Billy Bragg: Still Suitable for Miners* [2007]) that a new English identity encompasses all of the cultures now present in England, and, most importantly, among its UK neighbours. The difference between 'British' and 'English' is, however, vague. Sociologist Krishan Kumar puts it that this uncertainty is based on former imperialism and that many residents of the United Kingdom refer to themselves as 'English' or 'British' when they actually come from regions such as Scotland, thus raising a further question 'Why does "patriotic emotion" attach itself to 'England' and not to 'Britain'?' (Kumar, 2003, 2). New cultures living in England include all of the migrants from the former British Empire who have been part of the UK for centuries and, in particular, since the period following the Second World War. Bragg supports this view with an anecdote about a friend of his in the UK (which was particularly appropriate given Bragg's public debates with the BNP's former Member of the European Parliament, Richard Barnbrook):

> If you could see Paul and you heard him talk, he's got more of a Cockney accent than I have. You'd never guess he was a big black guy in the slightest, but ultimately identity is a personal construct. . . . I couldn't tell Paul that he was English. He was born in England, obviously spoke English, he liked being in England, but his concept of it was that he was a Londoner... He used to laugh because every night he'd be selling t-shirts on the *England, Half English* tour and he heard me every night struggling with a lot of the ideas that were in here, trying to explain to my left wing audience why this shit isn't possible, it is important rather, that we need to talk about this. I mean, one night after England qualified to get into the European Cup Championship, someone in Wolverhampton threw a full-

> sized flag of St George on the stage in front of me. We were all talking about it and how great it is, and I lifted it up like this and a lot of people booed, and I said you know what, if we can't live with this, the BNP will win.

This is a further illustration of Bragg's view that a multicultural United Kingdom exists with its population regarding themselves as having several points of origin with, perhaps, one particular place being regarded as 'home'. Moreover, it refutes any argument that his perceptions of Englishness, or that of Britishness, are in any way critical of the structure of the UK, constituting Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. Since the time of that concert, however, the BNP and the EDL have become political organisations, a fact that Bragg became very animated about during our interview. He mentioned how, as he predicted in his statement above, the BNP have attempted to gain support in the east London suburb, Dagenham, where he grew up, which is now an extremely multicultural community. There are many YouTube videos of Bragg's public debates with former BNP member, Richard Barnbrook who campaigned in east London.

For Bragg, there remains the issue of an 'acceptable' English identity, and he campaigns for a new 'Englishness' through his musical performances. From a musical perspective that might therefore be constructed from the traditional musics of the various components of the UK, and then combined with English traditional music. I would argue, however, that contemporary perceptions of English identity have influenced the promotion of a 'new' Englishness. Moreover, I suggest that this has occurred through increased popularity of English folk–rock and folk-orientated music since the late 1960s to the present day. Significantly, however, while a gradual 'devolution' of the UK since the late 1990s has enabled the establishment of national assemblies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the absence of an English national assembly has been problematic in the consolidation of a modern English identity that reclaims Englishness from links to right wing politics.

Bragg mentioned the flag of St. George in his earlier statement. While the flag of St. George is often used as a national symbol at many televised sporting events, its use as a banner for the British National Party since 1982 (and the more recent English Defence League), as well as its connections to football hooliganism, has prevented its use as a symbol of Englishness in the same way as national flags represent Scotland, Ireland and Wales. It is, thus, not widely perceived as a 'British' flag. In an online debate on the BBC News website in 2001, readers were asked to comment on their views concerning whether the English should be patriotic. While responses to this question do not represent a rigorous statistical survey, the majority of the respondents, 67%, thought that the English should be patriotic, although 6% stated that they preferred to be regarded as 'British' as well as 'English'. 9% of respondents favoured multiculturalism. In 2002, the same site posed a similar question concerning support for St. George's Day becoming an official national holiday in England. Again, the majority of respondents, 75%, supported the concept while 8% preferred to be regarded as

British and were opposed to another national holiday. Only 10% of respondents expressed a preference for multiculturalism, a viewpoint referred to by Marxist journalist Paul McGarr as 'fluffy popular nationalism', indicating his view that multiculturalism is as unappealing to the far left as it is to the far right. Significantly, a third of all respondents from both debates whose comments were posted on the site expressed dissatisfaction with what they perceived as a missed opportunity to establish an English national assembly, and a new English identity (and distinct from right wing politics, as stated above), during the political changes in the United Kingdom in the late twentieth century. Respondents blamed the Labour government of the time for establishing other national assemblies, and consequently reinforcing notions of separate individual national identities, for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, while omitting to do so for England.

English 'Traditional' and Multicultural Music

In the context of commercial and political relationships that have influenced the promotion of Englishness through English folk–rock from the late 1960s to the present day (hence my choice of interviewees listed below), there still exists an absence of a contemporary English identity distinct from right wing political elements that has reinforced negative and apathetic perceptions of English folk culture and tradition. Negative perceptions such as these have to some extent been countered by audience reception of folk and popular music hybrids within a broad English folk–rock musical category, which has become apparent since the decline of the progressive rock movement in the late 1970s. The emergence of a post–progressive rock–orientated English folk–rock style has enabled new folk music fusions to establish themselves in a populist performance medium that attracts a new folk audience. In this way, English folk–rock (or as Britta Sweers puts it as the title of her monograph, 'Electric Folk') has facilitated an English cultural identity that is distinct from negative social and political connotations. A significant contemporary national identity for British folk music is consequently apparent in English folk–rock as it is presented in a homogenous mix of popular and world music styles. From the perspective of national identity, while independent representation within the United Kingdom since the late 1990s has enabled the establishment of national assemblies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the absence of an English national assembly continues to be problematic in the consolidation of a modern English identity that reclaims Englishness from recent links to xenophobia, as described above. Prior to any discussion of commercial links between English folk–rock and contemporary British folk music revivalism, I acknowledge the scholarly debate that surrounds perceptions of Marxism in consumerist aspects of folk revivalism in the context of folk music and English folk–rock (for example, Harker, 1985 and Bearman, 2000). Scholarly debate in the second half of the twentieth century indicates diverse stances on the commoditisation of tradition and culture. Thus, while Nairn is critical about a 'slow foundering' of the British state, many performers from folk orientated bands such as Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span, and Waterson:Carthy state

their awareness of the national origins of their repertoires within the United Kingdom, and, moreover, they express positive descriptions of collaborations between performers from different regions and cultures in the UK in their approach to shared performance indicating that Nairn's dire predictions do not seem to have occurred (Burns, 2012, 161–65). Billy Bragg, however, composes songs that make political and cultural statements about the contemporary United Kingdom and he promotes the multicultural nature of British society. What became apparent in our discussion, however, was that while he sees a need for English political representation within the United Kingdom, he sees Englishness from the perspective of the multicultural diaspora, more usually referred to as 'Britishness', from which he originates. The selling of national 'self', particularly from the perspective of re–orientation of a contemporary English identity, is currently situated within broad notions of Britishness in a post–devolution United Kingdom. English folk–rock has established itself as a cultural commodity that also reinforces notions of tradition and national identity, and it both unites and separates politically devolved locations in the UK (Frith, 1996, 109). In his discussion on globalism, Stuart Hall suggests that the United Kingdom might be perceived as in 'a very privileged corner of the process', although in his view it is a 'declining corner', particularly when viewed from the English perspective. To Hall, globalisation in the United Kingdom, and, again, particularly in England, is an historical process forged from economic growth and perceptions of empire in which English identity not only placed the colonised 'other' but in which it also placed '*everybody*' (sic) else. Hall observes that, to be English is to know your self in relation to others—'to know what you are and what they are not'—and he posits that, in this respect, notions of identity become a structured representation in which the positive is achieved through the narrow eye of the negative (Hall, 1991, 19–21).

From the perspective of English 'tradition', Kate Crehan maintains that any notion of tradition—if the tradition is considered authentic—carries considerable weight, particularly if a group that is accepted as having its own 'culture' makes the claim to tradition (Crehan, 2002, 54–5). Drawing upon Eric Hobsbawm's views on the invention of tradition, she observes that much of what is said to be 'traditional' is often of 'more recent coinage', while stating that 'culture like tradition is understood as something that, by definition, is not consciously created or invented' (1983, 2–3). I support Crehan's views, as well as those of Hobsbawm, in that notions of tradition drawn from recent history are an aspect of British folk music revivalism that has been apparent since the early stages of the first folk revival in the early twentieth century. These notions remain apparent in a new phase of revivalism within the English folk–rock movement. For England, therefore, the absence of an independent Bill of Rights and the problematic question of re–branding its status as a member state within the UK remove an easily accessible repositioning of national identity distinct from previous negative connotations. In his comprehensive commentary on the devolution of Britain, Michael Gardiner proposes that 'England has a longer history of direct connection with the land in democratic local systems—a history becoming divergent when images of a

countryside home were put into propaganda use in World War 1'. He states that, in Scotland there has been a tentative movement towards rethinking the concept of 'our', although in England the ethnocentrism of Englishness remains more or less synonymous with the ethnocentrism of Britishness (Gardiner, 2004, 106–7).

Andrew Blake maintains that most 'English' art music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had its origins in European art music and Beethoven and Haydn composed arrangements of Scottish and Welsh folk songs (Blake, 1997, 44). I am, thus, not addressing notions of Englishness in western art music of the UK, but it is significant that English (and by default perhaps, 'British') traditional music is still used as a national statement, as well as a statement indicating place of family origin. Many respondents to the BBC online surveys mentioned above also replied that they identified as having dual-identities, such as 'Asian/English', 'Jamaican/English', 'Indian/British' but also 'European' (there were many other combinations), but there are many musical performers in England who regard themselves as part–English along with the culture of their family's origin, and whose lyrical and musical aesthetic combines these aspects successfully within an English traditional framework. United Kingdom music is nowadays articulated through musical hybridities that exhibit multiple signifiers of various traditions. One such group of performers that demonstrate this concept is The Imagined Village, who take their name from Georgina Boyes' monograph (1993), a historiographical and cultural study of English folk music that has informed my own research into English folk-rock music. Their albums include *The Imagined Village* (2007), *Empire and Love* (2010), and *Bending the Dark* (2012). The band is made up from members of other established folk and world-music groups and performers, including The Transglobal Underground, The Afro Celt Soundsystem, Billy Bragg, Martin and Eliza Carthy, Johnny Kalsi, Sheema Mukherjee and The Young Copper Family. The band's albums also contain contributions from Sheila Chandra and Benjamin Zephania. Music from this genre has also now become part of what was, and still is, referred to as the 'tradition', an accepted statement among the more traditional folk audience that denotes a form of folk 'knowledge' and even cultural belonging. Moreover, the band's recordings feature musical influences from many of the communities now present in England, and for that matter, the United Kingdom. Yet, they primarily record updated traditional songs from the British Isles. Their performance of 'Cold Haily, Windy Night', which took place on *Later with Jools Holland* in 2008, starts with a Dhol drum solo by Johnny Kalsi followed by Chris Wood's traditional approach to the lyrical delivery of the tale of a soldier waiting for his chance to enter his girlfriend's bedroom while he stands in the cold weather. I have traced the song back to the Napoleonic Wars but my more recent research suggests that it could go back as far as the War of the Spanish Succession between 1701 and 1714. The Imagined Village accompany this ballad with sitar, cello, electric bass and drum samples from Afro–Caribbean Transglobal Underground performers, and Martin Carthy and Eliza Carthy on guitar and violin respectively. Backing vocals are provided by The Young Copper Family, descendants of The Copper Family (traditional folk singers of the early to mid–twentieth century whose English

lineage can be traced back to the sixteenth century). This mixture of cultural influences in that performance is indeed indicative of contemporary multiculturalism in the United Kingdom. I regard this performance, and this group of performers, as an overt statement that mobilises hybridity and it is a political expression creating otherness by projecting a manufactured sense of togetherness, perhaps even 'Britishness'. It might also be argued that, clearly in opposition to racially intolerant political bodies whose members are in the European Parliament such as the BNP, The Imagined Village represents a perhaps tokenistic (although I do not support this view), albeit multicultural, musical mix as a salve to existing division.

Simon Nicol suggests that English folk–rock (as described earlier)—as well as more recent folk and popular music amalgamations—is listened to on various levels and that its United Kingdom, especially English, musical identity is able to remain separate to notions of heritage and preservation. Moreover, folk singer Martin Carthy notes that there is 'a new folk circuit' that is independent and 'has its own rules' for 'a very young and vibrant audience'. It is the same audience that Nicol has observed following Eliza Carthy, Rusby and Lakeman, as well as, arguably, Jim Moray and Bellowhead, among others. This audience is also part of the fragmentation described by Carthy and it has initiated many sub–genres of folk music, such as 'nu–folk', 'twisted folk', 'alt–folk' and 'folktronica', all of which attract a youth following that is conscious of national identity issues (Burns, 2012, 230).

In final analysis of the outcome of the referendum, it is significant that the highest proportion of voters arguing for devolution was among Scots aged between 25 and 39 years of age. On the other hand, it might be argued that, if another referendum were to be held in twenty years, these voters would be the Scottish citizens who would vote against dissolution if it were to affect employment and financial security in Scotland. It is therefore significant that a new political party, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which is both right wing and against the UK's membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), is gaining popularity while the incumbent Conservative party is losing its own. Examples of their anti–European policies are:

- UKIP will leave the EU and save at least £8bn pa in net contributions.
- UKIP will cut the foreign aid budget by £9bn pa, prioritising disaster relief and schemes, which provide water and inoculation against preventable diseases.
- UKIP will abolish the Department of Energy and Climate Change and scrap green subsidies.
- UKIP will reduce Barnett Formula spending and give devolved parliaments and assemblies further tax powers to compensate.
- UKIP will abolish the Department for Culture Media and Sport.
- We would review all legislation and regulations from the EU (3,600 new laws since 2010) and remove those that hamper British prosperity and competitiveness.

- We would negotiate a bespoke trade agreement with the EU to enable our businesses to continue trading to mutual advantage.
- UKIP would not seek to remain in the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) or European Economic Area (EEA) while those treaties maintain a principle of free movement of labour, which prevents the UK managing its own borders.

Given the current financial status of many EEC countries, it is perhaps unsurprising that a new right wing party proposing policies such as these is almost as popular as the well established centre–right party currently in government. Surveys (which took place in early 2015) also suggest that the Labour Party is overtaking both of these parties. Thus, the issue of English identity, currently only in existence due to its inclusion in the arts and cultural traditions or in radical right wing politics as discussed above, has become less relevant. Each of the three main UK political parties are now debating on a platform more related to European identity than British 'ethnic' identity within what is a relatively small component of the EEC, and Bragg's prediction of an English assembly embracing multiculturalism within the UK therefore seems, at least in the preparation for a 2015 UK election, unlikely.

In order to broaden this field of research, I have approached several prominent performers in the field of traditional folk music of the UK whose repertoires include songs of a socio–political nature. While some were wary of discussing personal politics (despite my explanation that I would not be following that line of questioning), most agreed to be interviewed in relation to a possible larger project that would examine UK multiculturalism in English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish, and what most regard as 'British' folk and popular music. These performers include Simon Emmerson (founder of The Imagined Village), Maddy Prior MBE (of Steeleye Span), Simon Nicol (of Fairport Convention), Paul Ubana Jones (a Nigerian/English folk and blues singer, currently resident in New Zealand), Billy Connolly, as well as Malcolm Taylor MBE, the senior librarian of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. All were already aware of the forthcoming Scottish referendum of September 2014 concerning Scotland detaching itself from the rest of the United Kingdom. Equally, all had views of possible outcomes that might occur in the cultural arts depending on the result of the vote. It seemed from the initial reactions from these potential interviewees, however, that perceptions of national identity within an undivided UK were more evident in the folk orientated music that they performed or with which they were familiar.

For a final word in this article on perceptions of Englishness, and the effect of potential future UK devolution on traditional English or British musics, however, I return to the views of Billy Bragg and his predictive statement about what could happen to England, and perhaps perceptions of 'Britishness', if the vote had been in favour of devolution:

> But the thing that's going to change it all, I think, is the Scots referendum.
> The Scots have got a date for their referendum now, [September] 2014.

That is going to allow we, the English, to have debate about who we are and what we think. Whichever they decide, I think what will happen is they'll probably not vote for independence, but by the time it gets to the wire, Cameron will have offered them so much in devolution that it won't make a huge amount of difference. And then people in England will start to say 'well hang on a minute, how come they can do that and we can't?'

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