

“One Nation Under a Groove”: ‘Nation’ as a category in popular music?

29. Annual Conference of the GfPM, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz

1. - 3. November 2019

The German pop star Xavier Naidoo, who appeared in the ZDF television studio for the 2006 World Cup Semifinal costumed in the colors of the German flag; the far-right “identitarian” group Les Brigandes, who ceremonially bury the French colors in the video for their song “L’heure de dire adieu”; the 12-point scoring system of the annual Eurovision Song Contest; U.S. “pop presidents” Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, the “national” and “international” categories of the (now defunct) German ECHO awards; radio quotas in France and Germany; continuing references to the “British Invasion” of the 1960s; even the *Global Popular Music Series* published by Routledge since 2015, of which almost every volume is titled “Made In (insert country here)”: examples of pop music being saddled with symbols representing or affirming “national identity” are practically endless.

Whether the concept of the ‘nation’ is understood as a “general model of the relationship between state and citizenry” (Eric Hobsbawm 2004) or as “an imagined political community” (Benedict Anderson 1983) makes little difference: in view of the “continuing necessity of taking the ‘nation’ into account, factually and analytically, without again falling prey to methodological nationalism” (Maria Alexopoulou 2016), the systematically ‘false’ - but sociopolitically highly potent - identification of people with nation, stemming from the nationalism of the late 19th century, presents enormous challenges to political science, historical scholarship - and to popular music research.

“Radical nationalism” (Gideon Botsch 2011) has made significant inroads into popular music, whether in the form of right-wing rock, turbo-folk, the continuing discussion vis-à-vis “German Leitkultur”, the “most German of all arts”, or in “Gotta Get A Grip”, Mick Jagger’s Brexit anthem. On the other hand - and in spite of the proliferation of pop nationalism - internationality and globalism are touchstones for the existence and development of popular music. One need only consider (superficially) anti-nationalist genre concepts such as “world music”, the transnational interweaving of media and

popular music markets, or the much-touted “international standards” with which Helene Fischer - the “all-in-all of German pop culture” - is supposedly able to keep up.

In view of these complexities, the 29th Annual Conference of the GfPM aims to critically reflect on the idea of ‘nation’ as a category in popular music. Against this backdrop, it will additionally focus on and update the previous conference themes “Typically German?” (Giessen 2013) and “Speaking in Tongues” (Osnabrück 2014).

Suggestions for possible presentation subjects include, but are not limited to:

- Nations and pop music scenes as “imagined communities”
- Pop music history as national history
- Pop music as a representation of ‘nation’
- Pop music as an affirmation of ‘nation’
- Pop music and ‘radical nationalism’
- Economic and/or media pop markets as national, transnational, and international markets
- National adaptations of transnational and international popular music
- ‘Nation’ as a code for state regulation (or control) of popular music
- ‘Nation’ as a ‘glocal’ concept (between ‘local’ and ‘global’)

It is clear that the central theme of this conference requires an interdisciplinary perspectivation. As such, we are particularly pleased to announce the confirmed participation of the following keynote speakers:

- **Maria Alexopoulou** (Historiography, University of Mannheim)
- **Gideon Botsch** (Political science, University of Potsdam)
- **Keith Kahn-Harris** (Sociology, Birkbeck College & Leo Baeck College, London)

Please send proposal presentations of up to 400 words as a Word document to gfpm2019@uni-mainz.de by 6. May 2019.

As always, we cordially invite all GfPM members (and all those who wish to become members) to present their current research as a free contribution, independently of the conference theme.

Proposals sent in before the deadline will be evaluated in an anonymous peer review process, to be completed by 30. June 2019.