Intersections of Politics and the Sacred in Music

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Introduction

In late 2016 and early 2017, the Finnish Immigration Services, known colloquially as Migri, denied several residence permit and asylum applications from Iraqi artists in particular. While the decisions are classified documents, some of them were brought into the open by the artists themselves; in the decisions, the mortal threat posed by "certain extremist quarters" to especially musicians is noted and linked to Islam, yet the negative decision was based centrally on the claim that if would be safe for the artists in question to return to Iraq if they changed their occupation, since musicianship, or being an artist in general, is not "a distinctive characteristic that is […] essential for a person's conscience or realisation of human rights." (YLE 2017; MS 2017; see also Freemuse 2017.)

Migri's claims violate both national legislation and United Nations' covenants, and they have been associated with the shift in Finland's domestic politics that took place in early 2015, as a result of which a government based on a coalition of conservative parties was formed. More specifically, the tightened policy of Migri and the dubious arguments caused by it have been linked to the openly nationalist, xenophobic and racist demands and doctrines of the political party Perussuomalaiset (known in English as the True Finns), who after the second significant success in the parliamentary elections in a row gained several seats in the Cabinet. In fact, in May 2016 the party itself celebrated on its website that the immigration policies designed by them we finally being fulfilled (Eerola 2016). A number of Migri's employees, in turn, have complained how they have to do hasty decisions and feel that there is an external pressure towards more rejections (Manner & Teittinen 2016). And, hardly by coincidence, at the same time the Finnish Aliens' Act was amended by revoking the statutes that concern residence permits given on the grounds of humanitarian protection, in order to "secure that the legislation and legal practice in Finland are not more propitious than in other member states of

the European Union and the minimum level set by the legislation of the European Union" (HE 2016).

I am using this episode in the recent history of Finland as an example of how different forms of sacred phenomena intersect with political aspects of life, and musical life in particular. To be sure, the episode in question is not an isolated one, and the ways in which the notions of politics and the sacred become conceptualised and amalgamated in it are by no means the only possible indications of the intersections in question. Thus it is my aim to delve deeper into these quandaries through a conceptual analysis that stems from the recognition of the multidimensionality of both politics and the sacred. Hence my treatment is mainly theoretical in nature, and I rely on existing scholarship and available musical examples in order to point out tendencies and possibilities rather than systematically proven facts.

The Multiple Forms of Sacred and Political Life and Music

As both "the sacred" and "politics" can be understood in myriad ways, there are issues of definition to be addressed. Regarding the former, the case of Migri brings forth first of all the association of the sacred with religions, especially in relation to Islamic interpretations of and violence against music. Second, one might discuss human rights and humanitarian protection as sacred phenomena. And third, regardless of the fancifulness involved, it is clear that for some it is of utmost importance to secure such sacred entities as national and regional ones against a perceived threat stemming from migration, particularly from Muslim societies. In order to comprehend such variety of sacred forms, I have found Gordon Lynch's (2012b, p. 29) definition of the sacred useful; according to him, at issue is "what people collectively experience as absolute, non-contingent realities which present normative claims over the meaning and conduct of social life" (see also Lynch 2012a, p. 32).

This stance is by and large adopted also in the recent *Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music*, as its editors Marcus Moberg and Christopher Partridge (2015, p. 7) suggest that the notion of the sacred might be of aid in overcoming the obstacles that are formed by "certain blinkered discourses within academia" or, to be more precise, by "the dominant ideological positions informing much critical theory and the study of popular music." While there may be some disciplinary need for recognition and even jealousy at work in the words of the two scholars of religion in question, their application of the sacred as a Durkheimian, sociologically more nuanced concept that is not limited to religious discourses, provides possibilities for a more sophisticated examination into "historically contingent expressions of particular cultures" and the given conceptualisations of absolute, ultimate concerns as well as "ideas which exert a profound moral claim over peoples' lives." (Moberg & Partridge 2015, p. 7.)

While religions provide some of the clearest examples, similar claims are arguably exhorted through the "sacred values of freedom, democracy, and justice" (Lynch, 2012b, p. 37), as well as the ideas about a nation state as the fundamental geopolitical entity and the contingencies surrounding child abuse. Indeed, it becomes paramount to acknowledge and recognise the moral ambiguity of the sacred, as "sacred commitments can be the source of much harm" (Lynch, 2012b, p. 48). Moberg and Partridge (2015, p. 7–8) for their part note with respect to this that the manifestations and cultural constructions of the sacred should be considered as relational phenomena that are connected particularly to that which is perceived as profane, or, "a threat to the sacred." Depending on the strength of the sense of the sacred and hence the strenght of the threatening profanation, they maintain, the revulsion evoked by the threat can lead to moral panics and even endorse extreme violence (Moberg & Partridge 2015, p. 7–8.) In conclusion:

> The threat of profanation must be expunged at all costs in order to limit its pollution within society and restore the authority and integrity of the sacred. In short, sacred forms communicate the core values of a society, those collective certainties that must be protected from profanation. (Moberg & Partridge 2015, p. 8.)

It is worth emphasising here that the collective certainties and conceptions of absolute, normative values in question vary not only in type but also in scale. That is, while in many cases there appears to be a tendency to equate the sacred forms of "a culture" with "a nation", without considering the latter as a particular (political) sphere conditioning the manifestations of the sacred and usually including diverse cultural spheres. For example, as noted by Heikki Ylikangas (2015, p. 37), a Finnish historian of some reverence, in all societal systems, whether authoritarian or democratic, treason is a crime most severely punishable – although he adds sarcastically that this is the case for unsuccessful acts of treason only, since successful ones become extolled fights for freedom. The differences in scale become further accentuated when such state-level manifestations of the sacred are juxtaposed for instance with the rights of indigenous and other ethnic minorities. When these ideas are transferred into the musical realm, alongside national anthems and indigenous Saami *joik* for instance, one can deliberate how such "subcultural" genres and communities as Goth, Techno and Metal with their non-religious, (super)liminal, neoshamanist and occult features and dimensions contribute to the multiplicity of sacred forms (see Van Elferen 2015, p. 316; St John 2015, p. 278–279; Granholm 2015, p. 198).

Moberg and Partridge (2015, p. 8) link these issues further to transgression, particularly in the context of popular music. In fact, for them popular music is transgressive by nature, as it "articulates the profane in the contested spaces of the modern world" and "has always, in varying degrees, constituted

a threat to the sacred centre" on the basis of being "[o]ften composed at the liminal edges of hegemonic culture, on the rejected periphery". Moreover, they maintain that "the liminal cultures of popular music" interrogate, challenge and even weaken hegemonic forms of the sacred, and thus the transgressive qualities of popular music invest it with a pronounced political significance. In their final estimation,

> the analysis of the cultural and social significance of popular music's relationship to the sacred can be usefully framed […] as a challenge to order and stability. Hence, whether it functions explicitly as a vehicle of protest […] or not, popular music tends towards transgression. As such, it often oppugns religious discourses and, more often, is perceived as a challenge by religious communities[.] (Moberg & Partridge 2015, p. 8.)

While the grounds to deem popular music fundamentally transgressive appear rather intentional and circular, the remark about the interconnections between transgression, the sacred and politics is a valid one. But if there is a multiplicity of sacred forms, the equally multifaceted nature of the notion of politics should be also recognised. As the case of Migri demonstrates, two to the most common threads in this discussion involve the sovereignty of a nation state on one hand and the internal arm-wrestling within a nation state by different political parties – not forgetting though that things usually are worse in countries where there is only one arm doing the wrestling. Through the emergence of such activist slogans as "the personal is political" since the late 1960s, also less institutional forms of participation in societal decision-making have been included in the discussion. Yet as John Street (2012, p. 6) in his book on *Music and Politics* notes, to claim that everything, including all music, is political risks emptying the notion of politics of all meaning and confusing "those activities that can affect the exercise of public power [with] those that cannot", even if the underlying idea is to point out that "in all aspects of our lives choices are being made and values being articulated." For Street (2012, p. 7), a situation counts as political when it presents people with a choice they can act and deliberate publicly upon, and whose outcome has a social impact. On the basis of these general points he approaches the relationship of music to politics by stressing the following:

> It is only when musical pleasure (or musical displeasure) spills over into the public realm and into the exercise of power within it that it becomes political. It is where music inspires forms of collective thought and action that it becomes part of politics. It is where music forms a site of public deliberation […] that we talk of music as political. (Street 2012, p. 8.)

The insistence of public deliberation as the basis of politics might at first appear incommensurable with the emphasis on experiences of non-contingent, absolute realities as the bedrock of the sacred. Yet as Lynch (2012a, p.

2) argues further, the sacred needs to be understood as profoundly social category: "human society is necessarily bound to collective notions of what is sacred that compel social action through powerful moral sentiments". For him, the sacred constitutes in addition "a particular kind of communication" about the absolutes and moral demands in question (Lynch 2012a, p. 11,34), and hence it may be suspected that the difference between political deliberation and sacred communication depends ultimately on historically situated ideas about the aspects of social life that are axiomatic beyond deliberation.

Lynch (2012a) does not discuss the political implications of his definition of the sacred in detail if at all, but the implications are clear enough for instance when he elaborates on the profane as "the evil that threatens to pollute and destroy the sacred order of societies", therefore providing self-evidently legitimate grounds, in the case of human beings, for execution, torture, incarceration or denial of human rights (Lynch 2012a, p. 27). Thus, echoing René Girard's (1977, p. 31) ideas about the fundamental importance of violence for the sacred, about violence as "the heart and secret soul of the sacred", Lynch (2012a, p. 26) maintains that if one wishes to find out what people hold sacred, one of the key ways to achieve this is to understand "what they believe can legitimize violence against other human beings". As national military and police forces all over the world attest, the legitimation of violence is a state business and hence political to its core – and, given the volatility of state boundaries, historically contingent beyond a doubt. Indeed,

> if we allow ourselves to recognize that things we treat as obviously sacred (such as the care of children or patriotism) are peculiarly modern phenomena, the sense of universal and timeless moral weight attached to these sacred commitments can feel less secure. Coming to see that something of such obvious sacred significance as the Holocaust only acquired these sacred meanings through a gradual process lasting many years after the concentration camps were liberated can induce a similar uneasiness. (Lynch 2012a, p. 13.)

Financial Freedom in the Age of Commercial Censorship

While religion and the sacred do not feature as headwords in the index of Street's (2012) book, one of his opening examples is linked to questions of sacred political violence as it builds on "the silence imposed on the Afghan people" by the Taliban regime between 1996 and 2002, relating it to not entirely dissimilar bans on music by Quakers, Trappists and the Russian Orthodox Church in earlier centuries. Furthermore, what connects the Taliban and the Russian church is "a tradition that [sees] the alliance of state and religion operating to deny all kinds of public festivity" (Street 2012, p. 4). Such an alliance is indeed not uncommon but manifests itself in myriad historical and local forms. With respect to the Taliban, Street (2012, p. 4) for instance

notes how definitions of music entered the conundrum, especially in relation to religious chanting, and how, in general, "the Taliban's strictures owed more to their politics than to any widely sanctioned reading of Islamic scripture." By this he means that for the Taliban, the primary reason behind banning music had less to do with music as such than its political associations with the former Soviet oppressors and their use of music to maintain authority (Street 2012, p. 13).

Whatever the case, it is undeniable that in certain Islamic states and societies to occupy oneself as a musician may be literally a matter of life and death, even if the fundamentalist interpretations of music are used for internal purposes rather than because of their assumed doctrinal content. Yet what is of equal importance in this discussion is to be attentive to the ways in which the extremist interpretations are utilised in allegedly secular Western societies, in their policy-making and mass media, to demonise all Muslim communities as music-haters and by extension, opponents of freedom of expression. Such Islamophobic practices and discourses disregard the empirical evidence about the variety of Muslim musical phenomena (see Otterbeck & Larsson 2015) and build on two loci of the sacred simultaneosly. On one hand, they rely on the conservative and restrictive Islamic legal interpretations about music as something that "draws people from the remembrance of God [and] might even be considered the voice of the Devil" (Otterbeck & Larsson 2015, p. 113). On the other hand, the Western criteria and ideals of freedom of expression emerge as fundamental sacred values in themselves, without any consideration over the restrictions and regulations posed on this freedom on capitalist economic grounds in particular.

Islam of course is not the only institutionalised religion within which music is being restricted and regulated, if not censored even. As Street (2012, p. 9) notes, "[t]he urge to censor music for fear of its effects is as old as music itself", and whether one focusses on ancient philosophers, state governments or religious authorities, congruent worldwide attempts "to silence certain sounds and performers" are demonstrable. Following from this, it is less sensible to ask whether or not a given religious authority or institution exerts censorship on music than to ponder what are the acceptable forms of music censorship in a given socio-historical situation (see Street 2012, p. 17–18). This points also to the multiplicity of the sacred, especially when approached in the Durkheimian sense by emphasising the restrictive and prohibitive mechanisms surrounding the sacred phenomena, in order to prevent profane pollution (Durkheim 1965). In this sense, the perceived acts of censorship indicate the presence of the sacred, in whichever form and regardless of the consensus over the matter. In other words, conceptualisations of the sacred and censorship both reveal a great deal about the fundamental social and societal values at stake.

The somewhat unreserved celebration of freedom of expression in liberal

Western societies provides a case in point. The right to express oneself freely in any medium, including also the right to receive information without the hindrance of a third party, is included in the constitutions of many countries and in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948, article 19). Yet on a closer examination, freedom of expression is not an absolute right but contingent on other constitutional rights; in the words of UDHR:

> In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society. (UN 1948, article 29 ¶ 2.)

The majority of relevant limitations may be found in the penal or criminal codes of given states. In the case of Finland, for instance, these include such potentially music-related phenomena as ethnic agitation, breach of sanctity of religion, criminal disturbance, distribution of depictions of violence and sexual obscenity, public obscenity, defamation, forgery, and copyright and intellectual property offences (RL 1889). Indeed, with the heightened importance of intellectual property rights within a capitalist, commercial system, some scholars of censorship have suggested that the Western democracies have moved from earlier forms of church and state censorship into so-called market censorship (Jensen 1988). Street (2012, p. 16), for his part, is somewhat suspicious towards this idea and deems such a broad definition of censorship practically meaningless, even if it were possible to conceive the capitalist music industry as "a censoring machine".

Yet whether the notion of market censorship is sensibile or not, it is impossible to deny the importance of the economic dimensions of both politics and the sacred. States are, by definition, political entities that govern and manage the variety of material resources within a given geographical territory, and quite often these resources have a monetary value, especially through taxation. Regarding the sacred in this respect, there are those who warn against serving Mammon, one of the seven princes of Hell, the god of material things and greed. This medieval biblical stance is echoed in some more recent rereadings of Durkheim's (1965) ideas about the elementary forms of religious life; sociologist Kenneth Thompson (1998, p. 101) for instance maintains that:

> The 'sacred' is that which is socially transcendent and gives a sense of fundamental identity based on likeness (kinship), constructed and sustained by difference or opposition over and against: (1) the alien Other (which may be another culture that threatens takeover or some other danger to the maintenance of its identity); (2) the mundane/profane i.e. the world of everyday routine, particularly economic activity and its rationality.

While the remark about the sacred as a fundamental aspect of identity construction finds support for example in Lynch's (2012a; 2012b) work, the suggestion that rational economic activity constitutes an opposing form of profanation deserves a closer scrutiny. Not only it appears to disregard the historical interconnectedness of religion, politics and economy, particularly within the Catholic Church, or with respect to the Weberian postulations about the affinities between protestant ethics and capitalism, it risks ignoring the emergence of consumerist identities. In their introduction to *Religion in the Neoliberal Age*, François Gauthier, Tuomas Martikainen and Linda Woodhead (2013, p. 4–5) posit that such a focus on the allegedly negative impacts of consumer culture on religion is haunted by either Marxist or nostalgic variants of cultural pessimism, or both. Less distrustful approaches in turn centre on questions about the changes stimulated by consumer capitalism within religious institutions, the impact of so-called prosperity religion on work ethics and social networks, and the collaboration between religious organisations and public authorities for the common good, for instance in terms of welfare provision (Gauthier et al. 2013, p. 6–8).

While Gauthier, Martikainen and Woodhead (2013, p. 8) do not pay any attention to music, in relation to prosperity religion they point especially to Pentecostalism with its promise of "salvation under the form of worldly as well as spiritual prosperity", one aspect of which is of course the highly influential and economically salient Hillsong megachurch with its own music production company and transnational dissemination. According to Mark Evans (2006, p. 94), the "juggernaut that is Hillsong" owes much to the role of music in the attempts to achieve the mission of the Hillsong Church "to reach and influence the world by building a large bible based church, changing mindsets and empowering people to lead and impact every sphere of life." Evans (2006, p. 96) further quotes Brian Houston, the co-founder and "Global Senior Pastor" of the church, whose vision in the early 1990s was "[a] Church so large in size that the cities and nations cannot ignore it." (See also Hillsong 2018.)

Some twenty years later, the church Houston visioned was "a global church", and there is a fair deal of evidence in favour of this. Yet it remains an open question to what extent Hillsong has empowered people "to lead and impact every sphere of life", to quote the church's mission again. In the sensation-seeking tabloids Hillsong has been associated with "allegations of homophobia, child abuse and financial greed" (Beal & Nauman 2017), and even on the basis of more credible scholarly sources there is an apparent tension between conservative values and social justice commitments within the community (see Hartje-Döll 2013).

Naturally National, Exceptionally Ethnic

Despite such global aspirations, the permanence and persistence of nations should not be ignored either. In many respects, it is the attribute "national" that provides the most potent examples of socio-cultural amalgamations of the political and the sacred. While the Latin etymology of the word refers to "birth", especially in the sense of family relations and a common lineage within a group of people, in the modern usage the national is frequently understood as a reference to "a political state" (OED 2018). Often there is moreover a conflation between the national frame of reference and the ones based on conceptualisations of ethnicity and cultural traits. This is particularly evident in public debates over multiculturalism, as the multiplicity of cultures involved is commonly conceived in the "narrow" sense that equates culture with ethnic, linguistic and religious differences alone (Modood 2007, p. 2). Despite their naivety, such debates nevertheless provide a useful point of departure when considering the sacred politics of music, as they foreground the amalgamation of political and ethno-religious aspects in cultural expression. To concretise, when hearing *adhān*, the Muslim call for prayer, on the streets of an average European metropole, one is immediately reminded of the presence of a religious community that in many parts of the so-called western world is a source of much anxiety, prejudice and even outright fear. In a similar fashion, the ubiquity of roots reggae provides the metropolitan inhabitants with an acoustic articulation of racial and sexual politics, Jamaican-ness and Rastafarian religiosity.

In the narrowly multicultural debates, to apprehend ethnicity primarily in terms of visible and religious deviations from the norm is to invest it with a certain degree of minoritarian politics. In this sense, ethnicity is a designator of a minority group, otherness, and hence always both oppositional to and constitutive of the majority – whose own ethnic qualities remain largely invisible and, in the musical context in particular, inaudible. If yet another etymological detour is allowed, one might note here how "ethnic", on the basis of the use of the Greek *ethnos* (ἔθνος) and *ethnikos* (ἐθνικός) in Biblical translations some two millennia ago, has come to imply foreign, heathen or pagan properties (as opposed to the Judeo-Christian beliefs) instead of its more neutral basis as a denotation of a nation or a people (OED 2018). Similarly, the notion of ethnomusicology was initially coined by Jaap Kunst (1950) as an indication of a field of study that deals with the metaphorically pagan types of music as opposed to the "righteous" European art and popular musics. While Kunst (1974, p. 1–2) duly notes the Western misunderstandings of "all exotic music, even it its highest forms, as nothing more than either expressions of inferior, more primitive civilizations, or as a kind of musical perversion", he nonetheless purports there is a "psychophysiological" – or racial, to a considerable degree – connection between music and its "organic" community:

> The position, after all, is that each race, each population group has its own manner of musical expression, and this special manner strikes a different race or people, on first acquaintance, as strange. This manner of expression, characteristic of a race or people, is not only bound to its specific psychic structure, but is also physiologically conditioned. […E]ach bird is known by its song. (Kunst 1974, p. 2.)

Since the 1950s, much has of course changed particularly with respect to the speed and profundity of intercultural connections, rendering it more difficult to recognise a bird by its song. More importantly, however, Kunst's (1974, p. 2) postulation – which in fact takes its authority from a musicological tract "with real German thoroughness" – reveals the ideological circumstances and premises of early ethnomusicology, which effectively was not much more than a neologism for the comparative musicology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (see Kunst 1974, p. 1). These premises were based on one hand on ideals of cultural sensitivity and relativism, as suggested by the above critique towards Western misunderstandings, yet treating cultural differences fundamentally racial in quality. According to Kunst (1974, p. 12), intervals, rhythm, formal structures and performance styles are all "characteristic of the manifestations of a race", exemplified for instance by "the passionately 'pinched' vocal sound of the Japanese and Chinese actors; the nasalized melodics of Indonesian women; the pathos in the vocal rendering of the American Indians; the vital jollity as well as the sonorous seriousness of the Negro singing".

On the other hand, the ideological basis of early ethnomusicology was founded on an unwavering belief on the existence of certain unequivocally national characteristics of music, particularly regarding European musics (and regardless of the fact that by 1950, European national borders had been redrawn and palisaded anew several times). Quite often, the national qualities of music were conceived in terms of singular ethnicity, even if the "e-word" was reserved mainly for traits considered as foreign and especially non-European. It is nevertheless worth noting that occasionally aspects of cultural hybridity were (inadvertently) recognised, as in the case of a particularly influential account on the formation and essence of Finnish cultural identity, namely *Maamme kirja* by Zacharias Topelius ('The Book of Our Country', originally written in Swedish as *Boken om vårt land* in 1875). In the book, Topelius (2018, ch. 2, par. 66–68) writes that while most of the inhabitants of Finland have "other nations' blood running in the veins of some family members", they nonetheless "have become one", as "God has conjoined inhabitants from different families on the same soil to live with same responsibilities" and branded them with "national character", or the sense of mutual communality. Regarding music, Topelius (2018) cites numerous "folk songs" representing different segments of the Finnish population, yet does not delve into the possible hybrid dimensions of these. Instead, he emphasises the age-

old love of Finnish people towards rune singing, to be found still only in Karelia, and to be distinguished from hymns and the artistic songs of the gentry, "as a forest is different from an artificial park" (Topelius 2018, ch. 2, par. 121–122). Birds of course reside in both.

The tendency to nationalise certain genres and ethnicise others is a common trend in the contemporary world of music, too. Quite often, there are obvious connections to marketing and promotion, as national epithets can serve as shorthands that are based on general knowledge (or stereotypes) about a given region's musical features – or, perhaps more crucially, on a reliance on the assumed difference between various national(ised) genres. This difference, especially in the guise of the uniqueness of one's own national musics, is linked to the idea of the sacred as based on experiences and assumptions about absolute realities and their associated normative assertions on social conduct (Lynch 2012b, p. 29). A case in point is provided by *iskelmä*, the allegedly quintessential form of Finnish popular music, canonised by the late 1980s as "the secret memory of the nation" (Bagh & Hakasalo 1986, p. 9) and, musicologically, as a unique combination of Karelian folk tunes, Russian romances, European classical music and African-American music (Jalkanen 1996). While these ideas may not be totally void of insights, doubts have been cast upon the canonising tendencies in question by pondering to what extent at issue are general musical characteristics of the minor mode instead of uniquely Finnish musical features (Henriksson & Kukkonen 2001, p. 127, 149), or whether all rests primarily on a translational act that through linguistic peculiarity downplays interconnections between regional and international styles. According to record industry historians Pekka Gronow and Björn Englund (2007, p. 299), the modern Scandinavian popular song, or *iskelmä* in Finnish, "is closely related to its German namesake ['schlager'] and the Tin Pan Alley song, and it lives both as original compositions and translations of international repertoire."

Indeed, one of the "unofficial national anthems" of Finland is the translated version of Toto Cotugno's hit *L'Italiano*, as *Olen suomalainen* ('I am Finnish/a Finn', 1983). In 2014, journalist Pekka Mykkänen coordinated a re-recording of the song with a group of people of recent immigrant background, or "Finns who deviate from the mainstream". In a feature article on the project, an incident is mentioned where one of the singers was accused of not being entitled to sing the song in a karaoke bar as one of the customers felt she was not Finnish enough. "Can singing depend on the fact that her father happens to be born in Senegal", Mykkänen (2014) asks in the article, "and that her skin is darker than the skin of an average Finn?" It is also pointed out that as the singer in question has lived all her life in Finland, she is "in fact more Finnish than the song *Olen suomalainen*."

All this serves as a reminder of the variety of reasons and agendas, more often implicit than not, behind the construction and maintenance of allegedly

national genres and pieces of music. It appears also that the actual musical details are most often less important than the mere need to deem a given musical style or genre national. In this respect, the nationalising tendencies in music attest to the pervasiveness of nationalism as an ideological formation, both in its explicit state-driven forms and the more subtle everyday and "banal" manifestations (see Billig 1995). Indeed, as a cultural, social and political unit the nation is an ambivalent one, particularly in relation to issues of ethnic differences and cultural raci(ali)sm (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p. 150–151). Furthermore, there is a need to remain alert to the institutional dimensions and interests involed, especially when it comes to education and commercial mass media, and their interrelations to the variety of musical practices at any given point of time. As David Hesmondhalgh (2013, p. 158–159) puts it, stories about genres such as jazz, blues and polka in the United States and tango and son in Argentina and Cuba, respectively, becoming "absorbed as symbols of national unity-in-diversity" are common yet problematic at least in two ways:

> First, they can distort our understanding of music in relation to nations by reproducing the state's own excessive focus on key genres, rather than looking at the complexity of the musical field as a whole. Second, they can set up a simple dualism where an oppositional music form is absorbed and pacified by the homogenizing, hegemonic nation-state. […T]he association of the original music with dominated ethnic groups and class fractions is no guarantee of political oppositionality; and incorporation by nation-states can be a complex matter too. (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p. 160.)

Indeed, as Hesmondhalgh (2013, p. 164) emphasises, to take this complexity into account has the benefit of avoiding the misleading dismissal of all relations between national identity and music as regressive. Instead, by concentrating on instances where music, even amidst of explicit nation-building projects, provides hints or reminders of more complicated aspects of belonging, one may discern "the utopian kernel in the idea of popular culture, where 'popular' might mean something like 'belonging to the people,' rather than 'commercialised homogenised mass.'" In Hesmondhalgh's (2013, p. 164) estimation, this has happened especially when music has prompted "listeners and participants to appreciate […] how poverty and lack of freedom can tear apart the supposedly collective enterprises of nationhood, and yet also how social suffering and marginalization produce a set of experiences that might be denied to the more priviliged."

Enriching Emotions, Exploiting Indigeneity

For Hesmondhalgh (2013, p. 164–165) the "utopian invocation of collectivity" that he detects in forms of popular music which derive from the creativity of deprived and marginalised segments of society, is fundamentally a

matter of making the world a better place, and the role and contribution of aesthetic experiences in this. In other words, he is interested in his "critical defence of music" in "music's constrained contributions to human flourishing [and] enrichment of people's individual lives" (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p. 6). What is more, and of particular relevance in terms of the notion of the sacred, is that in his "quest for ideal forms of communal existence" on the basis of "considerable evidence of rich music-related sociability", one of his key "routes" is based on "Durkheimian sociology concerning a primal need in humans for intense experiences of collectivity" (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p. 8–9). This entails acknowledging the possibility that music and dance might meet these primal needs "in modern societies in ways that are ultimately beneficial", and this is where Hesmondhalgh (2013, p. 118) also refers to the Durkheimian conceptualisation of the sacred as, "in essence, the intense social experience produced by collectivity."

Yet this is as far as Hesmondhalgh (2013) goes with the notion of the sacred explicitly. He does make occasional references to religious contexts, but does not dwell on the details; instead, he presents some unsubstantiated – or at least overly generalised – comments for instance about "the marked decline of church attendance" and how this signals that "religious singing has become less a part of people's lives" (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p. 105). Such remarks may of course be based on a rather conservative ways of thinking about the (Christian) church and religious singing, and when considered in relation to the proliferation of reformist Christian masses with metal and electronic dance music arrangements for example as well as to the emergence of Pentecostal music business, the people Hesmondhalgh (2013, p. 105) refers to might also deserve a closer specification. This notwithstanding, it is worth reiterating that the reliance on the Durkheimian ideas of the sacred provides possibilities for examining the multiple forms and manifestations involved (Lynch 2012b). Moreover, those scholars of religion who are inclined to "re-script the sacred" (Santana & Erickson 2008), as it were, will no doubt have no problems in connecting Hesmondhalgh's (2013) postulations about utopian dimensions, human flourishing and enrichment of lives to eschatological discourses of hope and redemption – even if he distances himself from "the redemptive hopes that post-Enlightenment thought invested in […a]esthetic experience" (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p. 171).

There is in addition an element of speculation or outright *belief* in the power of music in Hesmondhalgh's (2013) writing, for instance when he emphasises "music's seemingly special link to emotions and feelings" which "makes it an especially powerful site for the bringing together of private and public experience" by investing it with a "capacity to enrich our lives via the feelings and emotions it engenders" (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p. 2, 11). Likewise, when he asserts that music and dance, "more than any other kinds of communication, seem linked to sociality and community", one would expect to

encounter some evidence or at least a reference to relevant research in favour of such an assertion. This is not to say he would be misguided in his insistence on addressing questions about music's relations to sociality, solidarity, community and communality and hence to democratic politics that are based on the idea of the common good as a pivotal ethical principle, especially when faced with the "victories of neo-liberal forms of thought and policy [that] have surely strengthened the forces of competitive individualism." (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p. 84–85.) Nevertheless, to invest music and dance with somehow stronger links to sociality than is the case with other forms of art and communication risks mystifying the former with transcendental if not even sacred qualities. It is true that as non-verbal forms of communcation music and dance are useful for instance in collaborating with migrant groups – but so is also football, whose rules and forms of communication are in fact more universal than those of music and dance.

The limits of cross-cultural musical communication become clear in situations where debates and accusations over cultural appropriation arise. Such debates can become particularly heated when at issue is musical expression that is associated with a certain indigenous population. As a form of cultural categorisation, indigeneity in fact has pronounced significance in relation to both politics and religiosity. On one hand it refers etymologically to a native population in a country or a region (OED 2018), as distinguished from the population as a whole; on the other, a crucial aspect of this distinction is the presence of local belief systems and cosmologies that differ from the major world religions, Christianity in particular. What is more, the study of "indigenous religions" as opposed to world religions and new religious movements might be of aid in challenging the notion of religion to begin with. As Karen Ralls-MacLeod and Graham Harver (2000, p. 8–9) note in their introduction to *Indigenous Religious Musics*, discussion about "appropriate means of studying indigenous religions is worthwhile not only because they are the majority of the world's religions, but also precisely because they are diverse ways of being human and religious", forcibly revealing that "people do religion in particular places in particular, embodied ways." Indigenous religions also disclose a "considerably richer […] story of human creativity, agency, action and thought […] than a consideration of the dominant utopian (no-placed or dislocated) traditions of the world would suggest." Linking these issues explicitly to music, Ralls-MacLeod and Harver (2000, p. 10) refer furthermore to the non-existence of "music" as an abstract entity, separate from other social and cultural spheres, in many indigenous societies, as well as to ideas about the suitability of music as a communicative and expressive medium for religious experiences that often cannot be verbalised adequately.

The sacred politics of indigenous music acquire a more pronounced significance when considered in the context of ownership and intellectual prop-

erty rights. Regarding the interrelations between intellectual property and indigenous knowledge in general, Peter Drahos and Susy Frankel (2012, p. 2–7) point out how these two realms have had largely separate trajectories, largely due to European colonialism. As a consequence, while gradually becoming recognised within anthropology and the study of legal systems, indigenous or "folk" knowledge has been set against formalised scientific knowledge on one hand and codified systems of law on the other. With respect to the notion of intellectual property and the laws and rights associated with it, one may consider how forms of expression based on indigenous knowledge are often subject to "selective free riding" that aims at transforming them "into an innovation through some minimal intervention" (Drahos & Frankel 2012, p. 8). This is the case especially when cosmologically anchored ideas about ownership deviate from the Western intellectual property system:

> an owner of the indigenous knowledge may not be found because, for example, IP systems do not recognise an ancestor as a legal person or because the knowledge is regarded as having entered the public domain. There is, however, considerable evidence that the willingness of indigenous peoples to share their knowledge is not, from their perspective, the equivalent of placing it in the public domain. (Drahos & Frankel 2012, p. 9.)

Confusions over the public domain – or outright attempts to exploit it – become apparent for instance in musical situations where "indigenous" is taken as a synonym for "traditional", in the sense of a piece of music lacking an identifiable author. The Saami *joik* provides a case in point in this respect, as in terms of ownership, it is based on subject- rather than author-centred mode of thinking. That is, the author of a *joik* is not its owner, but it belongs to the person (or the event, or the natural phenomenon) depicted in it. A particularly perturbing example of irreverence towards and violation of Saami cultural ownership is constituted by the nonconsensual inclusion of *Normo Jovnna*, a *joik* to (and "owned" by) a deceased person, on the 1994 CD *Sacred Spirits – Chants and Dances from Native Americans*, affirming not only the pervasiveness of an Orientalist logic according to which all forms of indigenous culture are interchangable, but also through its multimillion sales figures the economic value of alternative spirituality based on indigenous cosmologies. In the estimation of ethnomusicologist Thomas Hilder (2015, p. 153), the *Sacred Spirits* incident suggests a persistence of "the configurations of power relations set in motion by imperialism" in the guise of "new-age" market where indigenous cultural traditions and spirituality have become exotic commodities and "experiences". Hilder (2015, p. 153) summarises the situation as follows:

> By symbolizing livelihoods, cosmologies, and traditions that somehow offer an escape from the excesses of capitalist modernity, indigenous cultures

have today ironically themselves become a profitable industry in a global market. However, voices from within indigenous communities have questioned these processes owing to fears of the lack of control source communities have over their cultural heritage, concerns over commercialization of sacred aspects of indigenous cultures, and anger at the economic gain of others. Such sentiments have ignited a wave of fierce critique within political, legal, cultural, and academic arenas, which assert that indigenous cultural appropriations are a form of "neo-imperialism." In these ways, indigenous cultural heritage has become politically charged field.

With respect to the possibility of multiple sacred forms, the aforementioned sacred aspects of indigenous cultures become, through a juxtaposition with heritage, commercialisation and economics, implicitly conceptualised as mainly religious in quality. Remembering Ralls-MacLeod's and Harvey's (2000, p. 7–9) remarks on the quandaries of defining "indigenous religion", the stress on the sacred instead of the religious may be taken as an indication of acknowledging the ontological and epistemological differences between "utopian" world religions and place-bound, located indigenous cosmologies. Elsewhere, Hilder (2015, p. 110–113) notes the interconnectedness of the sacred, place and environment in Saami culture and music, yet again treats the sacred as something that is associated with spirituality, shamanism, mythology, rituals, cosmology and, indeed, "indigenous religion". While the sacred remains in his treatment an undefined and largely a taken-for-granted appellation, he nevertheless points to the difficulties in separating the sacred from the secular in Saami music, as well as to the possibility to draw on the sacred "in a novel and special way" (Hilder 2015, p. 2, 111) – even if the latter assertion proves to be little more than a symptom of the researcher's own fascination with the topic.

Ecomusicology from the Underbelly of Neoliberalism

Be it as it may, the inextricability of indigenous cosmology from a particular physical, geographical location serves as an inkling of an ecological aspect of the sacred. Underlying this suggestion is the realisation that if "to be indigenous is to celebrate belonging to a place" (Ralls-MacLeod & Harvey 2000, p. 6), environmentalist issues of sustainability constitute key factors in determining the "absolute, normative realities that exert normative claims on social life", that is, the sacred in Lynch's (2012b, p. 6) formulation. This is not to insinuate that world religions would consider their physical surroundings irrelevant; as becomes blatantly manifest in the vicinity of any major cathedral, mosque, pagoda, synagogue or temple, there is a huge amount of both material and immaterial resources that have been spent on such edifices, as well as on the planning, building and maintenance of their elaborate musical contrivances in some cases. The crucial difference once again is that while the

structures and sounds of world religions reach to heavenly hights, the indigenous temples and shrines are often to be found in nature (and often exploited by tourism industry).

A related but somewhat reversed question concerns the extent to which nature is to be found in indigenous music, and how this might be linked to politics and to the sacred. Hilder (2015, p. 131–132), for one, marvels at the ways in which musical landscapes are "wonderfully brought to life" in contemporary Saami music through *joik* in particular:

> *Joik* performance, through evoking one's natural surroundings and communing with the spirits of nature, can establish an intimacy between people and their natural environment. […] These musical articulations of close relationship to nature can […] take on political resonances in light of disputes over land rights. Considering escalating concerns about ecological disasters, they can also be interpreted as articulating the politics of environmentalism.

Such environmentalist ruminations and interpretations of music have indeed become more common in scholarship in more general. Some have concentrated on the discourses and representations of landscape in a general manner (Mitchell 2015), while others have framed their investigations more explicitly in terms of environmentalism and "ecomusicology" (Dibben 2015; Allen 2011). In both strands, there are grounds for establishing a connection to the "extended" notion of the sacred (see Lynch 2012b, p. 18), either by emphasising the profanating tendencies in the possible musical exoticisation of indigenous or otherwise "remote" locations, or by stressing the ecocritical concerns over the role of music in securing the sustainability of fundamental living conditions. It has been pointed out that in the broader field of ecocritical art and fiction, there is a prominent apocalyptic orientation towards an immanent and irrefutable crisis, endowing the products with "political relevance [and] sublime terror" (Rehding 2011, p. 410).

The ecocritical music scholars further accentuate that the environmental crisis at hand is not only a scientific or political shortcoming but crucially also "a failure of culture" in the sense that it signals a breakdown of "holistic problem solving, interpersonal relations, ethics, imagination, and creativity" (Allen 2011, p. 414; see also Dibben 2015, p. 164). From a more detailed investigation into the ethical situations and arguments involved there is only a short step into the realms of politics and the sacred, inasmuch as all are linked to questions about the criteria and conditions of good life. Ecocritical studies of music bring an additional facet to this through a hightened awareness of the inherently activist qualities of all scholarship, and sometimes through explicit advocacy for, say, "sustainable forestry in the harvest of musical-instrument wood" (Allen 2011, p. 417). Instead of fiddling while the earth burns,

to paraphrase Aaron S. Allen (2011, p. 417–418; original emphasis), "eco-musicological approaches have the possibility to offer new *social critiques* about the intersections of music, culture, and nature – and, in general, about the world around us."

The ecomusicological concerns have a great deal in common with the study of musical paganism, especially if and when paganism is conceived as a form of ecological spirituality and a veneration of place (Weston 2013, p. 45). Once again, one is wise to remember the etymological root of "pagan" as arguably based on a reference originally to those who are "of the country, rustic", gradually developing within the context of early urban Christianity towards "heathen" (OED 2018). Alongside the political implications of eco-sensibilities involved in musical paganism (Weston 2013, p. 47), it may be argued that there are also connections to counter-cultural sentiments, especially as a continuation of resistance towards technocratic ideologies (Bennett 2013, p. 23). This is pronouncedly so in the case of so-called industrial paganism where the explicit aim was, during its rise in the UK in the 1980s, to bring about cultural and political change through "occultural esoterrorism" based on explorations of taboos, forbidden knowledge and all things grotesque, "in an attempt to create a free-thinking occult culture in which individuals were the resources with which they might be able to carve out their own future" (Partridge 2013, p. 206). Thus,

> Paganism, viewed through and "industrial" lens, becomes an approach to the world from below; it is a way of analysing society from its underbelly; an immersion in the dark side; the subversion of Christian hegemony, conservative politics and what nowadays might be described as neoliberalism. (Partridge 2013, p. 193.)

Hostile Gospels of Subcultural Sorts

As a bottom-up form of social critique, industrial paganism with its occultural and esoterrorist inclinations fulfils many, if not all, of the conventional criteria for a subcultural phenomenon: to the eyes and ears of the conservative mainstream, it bespeaks of aesthetic, moral and social deviance, corruption and degeneration. While such pathologising, labelling and stigmatising notions of subculture have given way to context-sensitive, interactionist, constructivist and intersectional approaches, elements of deviation, resistance and marginalisation have remained as core aspects of how to define a subculture. Yet as sociologist Ross Haenfler (2014, p. 15–16) notes in his dissection of "the basics" of the topic, instead of trying to identify concrete criteria for isolating "blocks" of people as subcultures, it is more useful to treat subcultural characteristics as continua that are based on an understanding of culture as "ever-changing symbolic blueprints that guide and give meaning to people's beliefs, values, behaviors, and material things." Thus, at issue are not

clearly demarcated subcultures but the "subcultureness" of given groupings. On the basis of this, according to Haenfler's (2014, p. 16; original emphasis) working definition, a subculture is a "*relatively diffuse* social network having a *shared identity, distinctive meanings* around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of *marginalization* from or *resistance* to a perceived 'conventional' society."

Issues of marginalisation and resistance are by definition implicated in social and societal power relations and hence politics, and with respect to the possible and probable intersections into the realms of the sacred, it is worth noting how Haenfler (2014, p. 17–20), for one, begins his elaboration on shared distinctive meanings by mentioning values, beliefs and rituals. Yet as his scrutiny proceeds, it becomes apparent that the conceptual fluidity of both politics and the sacred needs to be taken into account. Regarding politics, he distinguishes subcultures from social movements and countercultures on the basis of the "manifestly political" and oppositional character of the latter two. The sacred, in turn, emerges in its religious dimension when he likens new religious movements to subcultures due to similarities regarding norms, practices and marginalisation; yet he maintains that "NRMs are often somewhat more organized than subcultures, and […] their emphasis on the spiritual or supernatural make them distinctive enough to warrant their own concept" (Haenfler 2014, p. 21).

The legitimacy of the classificatory labels may well deserve further debate, but more pertinent for my purposes is the extent to which the similarity between subcultures and new religious movements provides a basis for a closer scrutiny into the multiplicity of sacred forms and their political implications. Here, one might also note the existence of explicitly music-based religious subcultures, such as Evangelical punk and hip hop, even if the political stances of subculturalists in question remain largely implicit at best (Abraham 2017, p. 5). It is nevertheless instructive to keep in mind that institutional churches may be described as "domesticated descendants of once radical movements", which in turn is not entirely dissimilar from the tensions between subcultures and the mainstream in music. Insights may be drawn also from sociological studies of countercultures as religious phenomena and theorisations of subcultural identity based on religious strength and resilience. (Abraham 2017, p. 17, 29–30.) In the case of Evangelical subcultures and their theorisation, though, there is an apparent tension between a marginalising resistance towards secular mainstream and a negotiation that is necessary to make one's evangelising understood. This mixture of cultural refusal and offering a cultural alternative may be conceived as a form of resistance in its own right, but usually as removed from the class-based forms of subversion and opposition more typically found in secular subcultures; as sociologist Ibrahim Abraham (2017, p. 33–34) puts it, the political approach in question,

"such that there is one, […] is less a policy platform than a subversive relational individualism evincing strong distrust of the normative social institutions and practices of secular modernity."

The ways in which politics and the sacred intertwine in subcultural musics may be further examined in relation indigeneity, ethnicity and racialisation. Again, different renditions of the *joik Normo Jovnna* prove to be instructive, as it has been recorded also by Áigi, a Saami metal band, thus giving grounds to contemplate over the amalgamations of subcultural transgression, indigenous cosmology and transcultural cosmopolitanism, and how such transformations and reinterpretations "might provide a model for alternative ways of reappropriating cultural heritage and resisting cultural dispossession" (Hilder 2015, p. 155). The overall importance of styles of metal music, beginning from the early "heavy" ones and culminating on the plethora of more recent "extreme" types, as evidence in favour of the inextricability of religious and subcultural susceptibilities should not be forgotten either. Stories and critiques abound about the blasphemous, immoral, violent and vulgar qualities and contents of metal music, and as a consequence, the genre as a whole has been surrounded by recurrent moral panics that have often been centred on accusations of Satanism. As there has been in addition a demonstrable fascination within metal styles with apocalypse, mythology, legend, occultism, esoterism and paganism, some are willing to claim that it is "no exaggeration to say that heavy metal's association with religion – whether emerging from within the genre itself, from the criticism of its detractors, or both – has developed into a defining characteristic of the genre as a whole" (Moberg 2015, p. 223). And, as one might expect, there are also metal subgenres that take their impetus from the major world religions, to the extent that one encounters such apparently self-contradictory labels as Muslim black metal. Moreover, whether explicitly religious metal styles are guilty of an "evangelical strategy of cultural infiltration" (Moberg 2015, p. 227) or not, the role of metal music – alongside other types of music – in the revolutionaly upheavals known as the Arab Spring has been recognised by scholars too. In the words of historian and scholar of Middle Eastern studies Mark Levine (2012, p. 795):

> The Arab Spring did not produce its own heavy metal anthem, but metal is an important strand of the DNA of the Arab uprisings. […] The foreign origins and do it yourself ethos of the metal scenes, the marginalization from the mainstream of Arab societies, the need to sustain small-group solidarity, the focus on noncommodified, internet-based networks for disseminating their art, and the inherently subversive messages of the genre (where themes of corruption, meaningless violence, and decay naturally called to mind the political realities of their societies)—all of these enabled metal scenes across the Arab world to function as incubators of political activism.

Levine (2012, p. 795) reports also about the centrality of certain rappers

in giving "voice to the despair and anger of a generation" in early 2010s, and in the reorientation of the broader "sonisphere" towards revolt instead of fear and obedience. Rap and hip hop as a cultural formation in more general have indeed received a great deal of attention in recent years as a prime site of sub-cultural politics; an indication of the peculiarity of rap and hip hop in this respect is that "hip hop studies" has emerged as a field of research and schol-arship in its own right, instead of considering such studies as a subcategory of subcultural studies. For comparison's sake, a quick search into the undis-criminated depths of the virtual world yields some 40 000 results for "hip hop studies", while the numbers for "punk studies", "metal music studies" and "reggae studies" are in the vicinity of 33 000, 16 000 and 13 000, respectively – and little shy of 60 000 for "chamber music studies", whether one considers the latter a subcultural phenomenon or not.

Within the broader field of hip hop studies, there has also been an increas-ing interest towards religious aspects of rap music. There are at least two ma-jor incentives for this. On one hand, as indicated by the Arab Spring events among other things, there is a realisation that the expressive techniques and styles of rap have been adopted practically world-wide and thus the genre exhibits also "non-Western" value systems and forms of spirituality. Of par-ticular interest for many in this respect has been Muslim rap, whether at issue has been its position in Islamic youth movements within conditions of (im)migration (e.g., Hafez 2017), its commingling with canonised forms of cultural heritage as well as conservative Islamic proselytism (e.g., Escobar Varela 2014), or "Blackamerican Muslim hip hop" that protests against white supremacy (Grewal 2013). On the other hand, it is precisely the racial societal and political system of the United States of America that has induced many to investigate the roles of and interrelations between hip hop and religion, and it may very well be argued that through the introduction of "race" into the equation, the politics of the sacred in music attain a dimension of a pro-found importance. The historical connections between Christianity, coloni-alism and racism aside, the everyday and structural forms of racism in the land of the free and the home of the brave have been examined in relation to hip hop and its religious aspects. Thus, Daniel White Hodge (2017, p. 24–25) for instance writes about "hip hop's hostile gospel" that derives from

> the nefarious social and living conditions of the urban context […] that breed frustration and hostility within the Hip Hop community such that […] Hip Hop creates a hostile form of theology which not only engages these issues, but also demands a voice at the theological table while it brings its frustration and hostility paired with a "good news" to get out of the current situation. […] The good news is not based on Christian values and theologies, but in a much broader view of social justice, social aware-ness, social consciousness, community mindedness, personal conscious-

ness, and a journey to a God who can help and will provide shelter. More-over, this gospel within the Hip Hop community is not always a sacred quest; the secular and profane are intertwined with weed, alcohol, sexuality, and 'living a good life/being successful.'

On the basis of such cogitation, it is very difficult if not outright impossible to make a meaningful distinction between the political and the religious angles involved. Similarly, when such circumstances are approached in terms of socio-spiritual urban geopolitics that rest on racial oppression and economic asymmetry, the separation of the political from the sacred makes little sense. In the words of sociologist Michael Eric Dyson (2015, p. 61), the "geopolitics of such urban misery begin to constitute a ground for urban theodicy" that accrues some of its most potent forms in rap music and hip hop culture in more general, as guidelines, explanations and evidence of overcoming societal destitution. Thus the commercial success of rappers may function for some as "a realized eschatology" (Dyson 2015, p. 62).

Conclusion

With such tensions and their sacred political implications in mind, I wish to conclude by stressing the importance of considering the sacred as an irrevocably political construction, as well as treating politics as a sphere of activity that is equally inescapably connected to the sacred, to that which "people collectively experience as absolute, non-contingent realities that exert unquestionable moral claims over the meaning and conduct of their lives" (Lynch 2012a, p. 32). Interestingly enough, in the treatises on religion in hip hop one may encounter a definition of religion that in many ways comes close to such a broader specification of the sacred. Anthony B. Pinn, a key figure in the research on hip hop and religion, and Monica R. Miller (2015, p. 3) for their part conceive religion not as a proxy for Christianity, Islam or any other world religion with their doctrines and institutions, but as "the manner in which the existential and metaphysical arrangements and rhetoric of meaning are developed, worked out, and (re)arranged." For them, this is tantamount to understanding religion as "a conceptual and taxonomical 'place holder' of sorts, a way by means of which human parse out and explore the social world, the self, and human experience, framework of meaning, or strategic acts of identification."

On the basis of such reconceptualisations, the conventional wisdom about the sacred as a transcendent entity beyond politics or mundane power-struggles, as the ultimate explanation and the eventual goal, when faced with the empirical reality constituted by an abundance of sacred forms, proves to be political to its core, as all public deliberation and action draws its final authority and justification from these ultimate sources. And, as suggested by

the diverse religious, ideological, legal, economic, national, ethnic, indige-nous, ecological and subcultural manifestations of the sacred, there certainly is more than one song to be written about all this.

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