
Book Section:
Keegan-Phipps, S. orcid.org/0000-0002-3873-9455 and Winter, T. (2017) Albion Voice: The Englishness of Bishi. In: Brooks, L., Donnelly, M. and Mills, R., (eds.) Mad Dogs and Englishness: Popular Music and English Identities. Bloomsbury , London , pp. 193-210. ISBN 9781501311253

---

11. Albion Voice: The Englishness of Bishi

Simon Keegan-Phipps and Trish Winter

The spirit is ether no bottle can hold

The world I have wandered in search of a home

The burnt summer fields, the villages green,

The mills and the spires of old England's dream

Bewildering world with no end or start

I am Indian in skin but English of heart.

Bewildering world despair and rejoice

Indian skin, Albion voice.

The opening lyrics of the title song of Bishi's *Albion Voice* (2012) leave the listener in little doubt as to the album's explicit focus on themes of Englishness and belonging in a world that has 'no end or start'. In this chapter we examine Bishi's creative re-articulations of English identity, made in a particular time - the early twenty-first century - and from the particular perspective of a second generation Londoner of Bengali heritage. We analyse the precise character of this articulation of English identity, considering how the significance of *Albion Voice* might be understood through the lens of cosmopolitanism.

Bishi

Bishi emerged from London's club and music scene in the early 2000s when, as an 18-year-old DJ, she became 'the face' of London club *Kash Point* (Liverani 2010). She has since released two albums, *Nights at the Circus* (2007) and *Albion Voice* (2012). Her profile has

extended across cultural fields such as the club scene, fashion, film, art and performance as well as music. Reviews and published descriptions of Bishi's work usually make reference to her second generation English biography. A press kit, for example, describes her as London born to Bengali parents, and with polycultural musical interests within and beyond those of the England of her birth and the India of her parents:

> Singer, multi instrumentalist & DJ, Bishi was born in Earls Court to a Bengali musical family; her mother is an EMI signed artist to this day. She has studied Sitar at The Ravi Shankar School for Music and has a passion for English & East European folk, progressive pop & electronica. (Sonicbids 2008)

Likening herself to the 'half-caste hybrid' protagonist of Angela Carter's novel *Nights at the Circus,* after which her first album is named, she is quoted as saying 'I have based the album on being an outsider. The space between two cultures can be confusing, but it can also be very energetic' (Liverani 2010). In explicitly framing her work as coming from what she terms 'the space between two cultures', Bishi echoes the concept of a 'third space' (Bhabha 1994). A key element of her musical and visual image has been its overt play with visual and audible iconographies of nation and nationhood. Although Englishness and Britishness are sometimes conflated or juxtaposed here, references to Englishness intensify around her second album *Albion Voice*, released in 2012 on St George's Day, and described as 'an ode to an ever changing England' (BFI 2013).

In interview Bishi describes the motivation for *Albion Voice* as a response to Michael Bracewell's book *England is Mine: Pop Life in Albion from Wilde to Goldie* (1997). 'In this cultural analysis of all things British, I realised there were very few women and hardly any Asians included in the book. I thought I'd add something to this debate with a lot of love'

(BFI 2013). Her claiming of an 'Albion voice' is thus framed as an intervention into a vision of English popular music culture from which English Asian and female voices are largely absent. Reviews of Bishi's work often highlight its re-casting of Englishness, one blogger describing the single 'Albion Voice', as 'a brilliantly articulate reframing of Englishness within a global cultural remit' (Gray 2012). The singer refers to her own work as 'orchestral, folk-inspired, postcolonial pop' (Choudhury 2015). Self-described, then, in terms of a postcolonial identity that emerges from a space between cultures and, at the same time, asserting its place within the frame of Englishness, Bishi's work explicitly configures and comments on imaginations of Englishness in the early twenty-first century. Before beginning our examination of the specificities of Bishi's construction of Englishness, it will be useful to sketch a brief outline of the particulars of her context, identifying the key cultural fields in relation to which this work circulates and is framed.

Firstly, there is the London club and fashion scene. Bishi's biographies usually start by marking her association with the club scene of the early 2000s, from which she emerged as an 18-year-old DJ and 'the face' of the club *Kash Point*. Described variously as 'an outlet for music experimentation, genre contamination, for fashion and individual art-expressions' (Liverani 2010), and as 'a polysexual mish mash of invention and experimentation' (Wikibin 2008), *Kash Point*'s ethos celebrated ideas of hybridity, difference and individual expression and had close links with the fashion world. Many of the people associated with the club featured in international fashion magazines such as *i-D*, *Dazed and Confused,* and *International Vogue,* including Bishi (Liverani 2010). Bishi continues to DJ,[1] and her markedly individual personal style also aligns her with this cultural field, as does her ongoing creative partnership with some of its inhabitants, such as Matthew Hardern and Matthew Glammore. Secondly, her live performance work has often taken place in the spaces of, and been commissioned by, key national cultural institutions within the capital city: such as the

British Film Institute; the Southbank Centre (the Yoko Ono-curated Meltdown Festival 2003; Alchemy Festival 2015); and the Barbican Art Gallery (2008), often placing her within contexts celebrating institutionally sanctioned imaginations of national identity. Thirdly, Bishi's work inhabits the realm of publicly subsidized and independent arts across fine art, film and music: including commissioned sound installations,[2] fine art and AV installations, and film soundtracks.[3] Finally, it should be noted that Bishi's two albums have been released on her own label, Gryphon Records, rather than being produced or distributed by a major record label; this very much frames her as an independent artist.

Albion Voice itself reaches across these different cultural fields. The album is described as forming the nucleus of 'a wider conceptual work: AV performance, online broadcast, gallery installation and the creation of a body of artefacts' (The Nest Collective 2016). The Audio Visual live work has been performed as, for example, part of Sonic Cinema at the British Film Institute (2015), at the Southbank Centre (2015) and in art galleries such as KOKO (2014), often combined with DJ sets, as well as being featured in film (*London: The Modern Babylon* 2012). Art works connected to the *Albion Voice* project, such as photographs, appear in galleries such as the exhibition embassyHACK (2016) at the Government Art Collection.

Cosmopolitanism

A significant feature of Bishi's work is the extent to which the multiple hybridities (explored in more detail in subsequent sections) are presented as resulting from a creative backdrop unhindered by distinct cultural boundaries - as articulated by the 'Albion Voice' lyrics ('Bewildering world, with no end or start') quoted at the beginning of this chapter . Academic work on cosmopolitanism has proliferated over the last two decades across academic disciplines including philosophy, political science, anthropology and social sciences, to the extent of 'cosmopolitanism studies' being proposed as an interdisciplinary or

post disciplinary field in its own right (Delanty 2012). We do not have space here to outline this substantial field, or the many and often contested meanings of cosmopolitanism, but we will draw out some key features and debates that help us to understand the place of Bishi's work in articulating shifting conceptions of English identities.[4] In its broadest sense, and going back to its roots in ancient Greek thought, cosmopolitanism implies an openness to social and cultural difference, 'the extension of moral and political horizons of people, societies, organizations and institutions' (Delanty 2012: 22). This has sometimes taken the form of a universalistic vision with implications for the nation-state; a vision of, as Cheah and Robbins put it, 'thinking and feeling beyond the nation' (1998). In common usage, cosmopolitanism is sometimes thought of as an attribute or disposition, and people or places might be spoken of as more or less 'cosmopolitan'. As Binnie et al. observe: 'Cosmopolites reject the confines of bounded communities and their own cultural backgrounds. Instead they are seen to embrace a global outlook.' A cosmopolitan disposition thus involves particular skills in 'navigating and negotiating difference' (2006: 7).

Tendencies towards a celebration of cosmopolitanism have been much criticized on the basis that they can underplay the relations of power that underpin the process, the ways that cosmopolitanism is, for example, implicitly gendered (Nava 2002), classed (Werbner 1999), or can be construed as a disposition of a mobile global elite, and as a concept with a distinctively Western genealogy. In scholarship of recent years there has also been an emphasis on cosmopolitanism as 'rooted' (see, for example, Appiah (1997) on cosmopolitan patriotism), and a recognition of the different forms of cultural displacement and movement experienced by people such as transnational migrants, refugees or asylum seekers - what Clifford influentially termed 'discrepant cosmopolitanism', wherein 'cultures of displacement and transplantation are inseparable from specific, often violent, histories of economic, political, and cultural interaction' (1997: 36). There has also been an analytical focus on how

cosmopolitanisms are lived in particular places and times as can be seen, for example, in ethnomusicological literature.

Where cosmopolitanism is invoked as a cultural or social feature in ethnomusicology, the term is very often a concept of largely assumed meaning, generally signaling the world-wide inclination towards musical hybridity. This literature commonly frames such tendencies in a way that provides cultural and individual detail, drawing the discussion away from the relatively bleak portrayal of a capital-driven, automated system of globalisation. Turino's (2000) seminal ethnography of Zimbabwean popular musicians through the twentieth century explores in detail the interconnections of cosmopolitanism, nationalism and colonialism; Stokes draws from the work the satisfyingly paradoxical conclusion that '[it] takes a musical cosmopolitanism ... to develop a musical nationalism, to successfully assert its authenticity in a sea of competing nationalisms and authenticities' (2007: 6). Stokes also suggests, more generally, that the discursive 'shift [from "globalization" to "cosmopolitanism"] restores human agencies and creativities to the scene of analysis, and allows us to think of music as a process in the making of "worlds", rather than a passive reaction to global "systems"' (ibid). This restoration of human agency can more recently be seen exemplified in Feld's close ethnographic account of the outlooks and approaches of his collaborators in *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Acraa* (2012). Through this ethnography Feld's work aims to 'disaggregate ... multiple and proliferating vernacular cosmopolitanisms from elite multiculturalisms' (ibid., 7), thus continuing the presiding impulses of his discipline to explore and reveal the lived musical experiences of disadvantaged or 'grass-roots' musicians in their field. In these literary contexts, the concept is most commonly represented as one element in dialogue with some locally-facing expression of cultural specificity - what Regev (2007) has termed 'cultural uniqueness'. For example, in Bilby's (1999) exploration of Surinamese popular music, cosmopolitanism is shown to exist alongside processes of

indigenization; Magaldi (2009) posits cosmopolitanism as an aesthetic force combined with - but nonetheless distinct from - the self-exoticism at the heart of early-1900s Brazilian music. While these and similar ethnographies of musical cosmopolitanism routinely cite as a focus the 'discrepant cosmopolitanism' identified by Clifford (1997: 36), such a narrative is predominantly explored in terms of the experiences and perspectives of non-Western actors within postcolonial contexts.

As we will demonstrate through close musical and textual analysis of her album *Albion Voice* and its attending discursive and visual artefacts, Bishi's work represents a 'rooted' (Cohen 1992; Werbner 2008) yet significantly self-aware and explicit combination of 'worldy' and local sensibilities such as those often unearthed within the musical ethnographies mentioned above. Moreover, the precise nature of the local identity at hand - a post-imperial and inherently multicultural Englishness - represents a particular form of cultural uniqueness distinct from those commonly explored in music-oriented literature on cosmopolitanism.

Ancient Englishness

Notably, in light of the album's reception as a celebration of a contemporary multiculturalism, Bishi's work draws on images of a pre-modern, if not always pre-industrial, England, invoking an 'indigenous', implicitly white, Englishness. The album starts with Bishi speaking Middle English, as she recites the opening sixteen lines of the prologue to Chaucer's fourteenth-century text *The Canterbury Tales*, over a background soundscape that incorporates the sounds of horses, birdsong and church bells. This is followed by the sounds of a selection of medieval European instruments: hurdy gurdy; wooden recorder; lute; Jews harp;[5] and later, a militaristic snare drum. English literary quotation appears again in the form of lyrics drawn from John Milton's 1667 poem *Paradise Lost*, in the song 'Di Ti Maria'. As

with the pastoral soundtrack to the opening of the 'Prologue', the musical setting of Milton's poetry similarly reinforces a sense of antiquity: the monodic section in the third quarter of 'Di Ti Maria', in which Milton's words are foregrounded ('The more I see pleasures about me / So much more I feel torment within'), is reminiscent of an early English polyphonic madrigal or catch, with antiphonic imitation, repetition of a small amount of two lines as a stanza (in an ABAB AAAB structure), a diatonic melody (in the form AABA), and fleeting modulations between the home minor and relative major. The latter section of the track 'Di Ti Maria' includes booming bass notes that are - it eventually transpires - emitting from the 32-foot bourdon pipes of a church organ. Such a sound invokes associations not only with a historical England, but with the surviving cultural institutions of that place.

As signaled by its lyrical references to 'The burnt summer fields, the villages green / The mills and the spires of old England's dream', 'Albion Voice' also calls up the imagination of England as a timeless rural idyll, an image that has often come to stand for England itself (Williams 1973) and which has been central to the English folk arts (Winter and Keegan-Phipps 2013). This is referenced in the video accompanying 'Albion Voice', where Bishi appears in rural scenes including a churchyard, a meadow and, at one point, perched in a tree. Associations with the English folk music scene also run more widely through Bishi's image. She was, for example, one of the featured artists on a concert tour showcasing female English folk singers, *Daughters of Albion* (2008), where she performed alongside well-established icons of the genre such as June Tabor and Norma Waterson. These evocations of an ancient England are both highlighted and, as we will see later, disrupted by Bishi's treatment of them.

Rearticulations of Imperial Englishness

Other references to historical Englishness within *Albion Voice* speak of a more recent past, and draw the listener's focus to the British Empire as an original contributing force behind contemporary multiculturalism in England. For example, the Victorian era is evoked in the closing track of the album, 'Ship of Fools', which takes the form of a rollocking, folk-style waltz. As with the 'prologue', an atmospheric, natural soundscape is invoked, but this time that soundscape is maritime, with a background of seagull cries and softly breaking waves. Here, instruments include the English folk staples of accordion and concertina, but also an instrument referred to in the CD booklet as 'Mr Tickle (the cabinet pipe organ from Worthing)'. The organ is clearly audible throughout the track, but its impact is also as a symbolic reference not so much to the British seaside town of Worthing in particular, but to the Victorian and early-twentieth-century British vernacular seaside experience - with its fairgrounds, piers and barrel/pipe organs - in general.

Direct references to Empire are explicitly made in the iconography surrounding *Albion Voice.* One of the most striking aspects of Bishi's performances of Englishness can be found in the photographic and video images that accompany the album on CD sleeve, online publicity materials and reviews, and video footage. Here, Bishi appears in a number of historical roles including those of two iconic British queens, Britannia and Queen Elizabeth II. Adopting the trappings of Britannia the warrior queen, in the seated pose with armour, shield and trident that featured on British coins until 2008, Bishi inhabits an image that has stood as a female personification of the nation and, historically, the empire.[6] She speaks – or rather sings - from this perspective; in the video of the album's title track, the still, posed image of Bishi-as-Britannia is suddenly animated as she voices the line 'Mysterious children of faraway lands'. The Royal Bengal tiger, national animal of India, sits in place of the English lion at her feet. In this way, she rewrites the racialized and othered 'mysterious child' of empire as the symbol of nation itself. In a similar move, the photograph of Bishi entitled

‘Indian Queen’ places her in the position of the monarch, and refigures this national imagery using elements of Indian symbolism. The iconography of the portrait is most redolent of Dorothy Wilding’s studio portraits of Queen Elizabeth II that were used as the source for the queen’s image on stamps, coins and banknotes as well as for the official portrait hung in British Embassies across the world (Royal Collection Trust 2016). This is not just any image of the queen, but signals some of the most official, standardized and globally distributed images. Bishi’s ‘Indian Queen’ appears in a formal white gown with blue sash, her dark hair arranged after the style adopted by Elizabeth II, together with sparkling crown, necklace, earrings and medal, but with the significant addition of Indian bridal jewellery. The appropriation and refiguring of this national imagery goes further, as the photographic image is also reproduced on commemorative china complete with royal heraldry and again incorporating the Bengal Tiger.

Unsurprisingly, given Bishi’s heritage, a Bengali perspective on imperial history is also evoked in the album. The song ‘Gram Chara’ is one of the *Rabindra Sangeet* repertory - that is, a composition by the celebrated Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Sometimes referred to as the ‘bard of Bengal’, Tagore has been hailed as a key historical figure in the development of Bengali - and specifically Bangladeshi - cultural works, and subsequently a recurring figure in the (re)negotiations of Bangladeshi identity over the last century (Alam 2015). The presence of a Tagore song is not, however, simply symbolic of high-status Bengali repertory: Tagore is a significant figure for personifying early ‘East-meets-West’ cultural encounters. He is well known for his travels from Bangladesh to Britain, where he was schooled, and his journeys across Europe and Asia. His music is widely accepted to have been consciously influenced by Anglo-European musical culture and aesthetics. Tagore’s songs are also significant because they are considered a ‘traditional’ canon, whilst being straightforwardly attributable to an educated, elite artisan. In other words,

they come from a culture where the differentiation of 'folk/pop/art' are diffuse and complicated, in what is perhaps an interesting parallel with Bishi's own genre-crossing activities.

Cosmopolitan Englishness

The instrumentation and compositional techniques employed throughout the album, including those discussed above, combine to form meaningful and contrasting musical soundscapes and symbologies indicative of a wide-ranging, cosmopolitan aesthetic. Among numerous others, the Bengali 'component' of Bishi's multicultural Englishness plays a central role in the album's aesthetic palette. The Indian Englishness performed through the imagery of the singer's visual artwork and costume is echoed in the manifestations of distinctively Indian musical sounds that can be heard throughout the album. The sitar - that most recognisably Indian of instruments for Western audiences - appears in a number of places on the album, but is foregrounded most conspicuously in the title track and, most visibly, in the video of that track. The sitar is one of a number of features (including octave and unison glissando strings) that are instrumental in evoking raga-like melodies and modalities throughout the album, and such evocations are often structural, signalling new sections in a number of tracks ('Albion Voice'; 'Rade La Muri Rade'; 'The Last of England'). The thoroughly Euro-American aesthetics of 'The Last of England', for example - driven by a gentle diatonic ostinato figure on piano - are suddenly disrupted when the last moments of a (now familiar) vocal phrase are altered to include a flattened (rather than natural) super-tonic, creating a subtle, fleeting, and markedly 'exotic' semitone dissonance with an inner vocal part.[7]

The significance of the pitches liberally evoked by the final third of the track (pitches of the *mayamalavagowla* raga in Carnatic music, or *bhairav* in the Hindustani tradition) lies in the fact that it is (in Western terms) akin to a double harmonic mode (that is, it contains the

pitches of a major scale, but with flattened second and sixth degrees), and carries strong associations with a number of non-Western music cultures (also including, for example, Klezmer). Thus, the musical structure of the work offers to Western listeners a decidedly - but generically - Eastern soundscape. The 'exotic other' is also audible in the presence of the duduk - an Armenian woodwind instrument - in this track. This instrument, with its soft, distinctive tone, has been a touchstone of the 'world music' genre since its regular appearances on, for example, Peter Gabriel's early RealWorld Records albums, and its semiotic impact here is as an icon of a generically non-Western soundscape.

Aside from the linguistic and repertorical signification of Bishi's Bengali descent, alternative 'others' also make an appearance in the voices she adopts through the album. Specifically, Bishi evokes Eastern Europe through her performance of the traditional Bulgarian love song 'Rade Le Muri Rade' (in its original language), while Biblical Greek is placed alongside Milton's poetry in 'Di Ti Maria'. Her vocal performances on the album also invoke 'others' that are held up in contradistinction to conventionally white English voices. Ornamentation characteristic of Indian classical vocal performance can be heard in Bishi's singing throughout the album; the Bulgarian theme is introduced early on, with a multi-tracked vocal accompaniment to Chaucer's lines that is *a cappella*, employing open fifths, homophonic movement, and glottal articulations that imitate closely the sounds of the Bulgarian State Television Female Vocal Choir, who found fame in the West through the success of the popular 1975 album *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* (The Mystery Of The Bulgarian Voices).

The album brings together such musical others with elements more associated with a Western art music canon; most notably it features no fewer than three string quartets, two of which (the Kronos Quartet and the Ligeti Quartet) also demonstrate cosmopolitan tendencies in that they are international in their scope, and make a feature of musical 'openness',

regularly working with artists outside the classical music world and often presenting new music at the avant-garde end of the classical repertory.

The statement of a cosmopolitan Englishness is made visual by one of the striking costumes to be worn by Bishi in the videos and live performances of the album: a corseted gown made from a patchwork of three flags. The union jack predominates, accompanied by the English cross of St George, and the saffron and green of the Indian flag. We might compare this with an earlier appearance of the flag in a multicultural popular musical context; the T-shirt worn by another Asian English artist, Sonya Aurora Madan of Echobelly in the 1990s. Madan's customized T-shirt scrawled 'my home too' under a union jack entitled 'England'. This was presented later in interview as an angry political statement: 'This T-shirt is a reaction to the BNP [British National Party]. I wanted to make it clear that I won't be put into a victim role. Nobody's going to kick me out of the country' (unpublished Music magazine poster, 1990s).

In comparison, Bishi's claiming of an Englishness where the British, English and Indian flags combine in a glamorous ball gown reads more as a harmonious celebration of a meeting place for those symbols of nation. The endorsement of a harmonious postcolonial relationship between the UK and the Indian Subcontinent is also the underpinning value of the Southbank Alchemy Festival, at which Bishi was a performer in 2015: 'The Festival celebrates the rich cultural relationship between the UK and the Indian Subcontinent, and explores the creative influences generated by our shared history' (Southbank Centre 2015a).

The disruptive voices and images of Bishi

While it might be reasonable to assume that the *Albion Voice* referred to in Bishi's title is primarily a reference to her expression of a complexly English subjectivity, it is important to consider the specific nature of Bishi's vocal contributions on the album, since they are

analogous to the complexity of the English identity she asserts. Significantly, her many voices, along with the imagery that accompanies her on the album artwork and in the staging of her performances, articulate a number of cross-cutting disruptions to key loci of discourse around English identity.

Most apparent is the disruption of an Englishness narrative built around conventional constructions of ethno-nationhood. The particular role of Bishi's voice in this process is marked. For instance, the multiple - and disparate - languages in which Bishi sings on the album: 'English, Bengali, Bulgarian and Biblical Greek' (Southbank Centre 2015b), are indicative of the wide cultural reach Bishi claims for her Englishness. Given that the dual aspect of Bishi's vocal performance - and identity as an artist - is so explicitly underpinned by the juxtaposition of Englishness with the Bengali 'other' of her family's nativity in the refrain 'I am Indian in skin, but English of heart', it is notable that the Bengali language itself appears on just one track on the album - the Tagore song 'Gram Chara'. Bishi's intimacy with this language and genre is nonetheless emphasized by the way in which the song is performed - as a duet with her mother.

Elsewhere, Bishi's adoption of multiple voices is made more direct and instantaneous: much of the album involves exploration of choral performance, although this is most commonly in the form of a synthetic choir, constructed via the sampling and multi-tracking of Bishi's voice to create dense textures and harmonies. The Bulgarian reference in the 'Prologue' is just one example of this: Laurie Anderson-style electronic manipulations of her multi-tracked voice also appear in the tracks 'Di Ti Maria' and 'Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep'. In the latter of these instances, Bishi's multiplied voice takes on an instrumental accompaniment role, reciting vocables and closed-mouth humming beneath a lead vocal line, but only after the multi-tracking technique has been foregrounded in a lead-in of more than 30 seconds. Such a dialogue between solo and multiplied versions of Bishi's voice is

mirrored by the integral role that solo and multiplied images of Bishi play in her performance and wider profile. For example, as already discussed, the *Albion Voice* album is accompanied by photographic artwork comprising posed portraits of Bishi playing different historical roles. The audio visual stage show of *Albion Voice* features several extravagant changes of costume, and kaleidoscopic multiple identical images of Bishi are projected behind and across her body as she performs live. Through these musical and creative devices, then, Bishi moves - audibly and visually - in and out of multiple personae, which has the effect of reinforcing her centrality as author of the work (emphasized by playful evocation of the 'diva' figure), while simultaneously disrupting the singularity of her subjective position.

Her multilingual and multi-vocal characteristics notwithstanding, Bishi spends the majority of the album singing in the English language, with an unmistakably English accent. The particular variety of English accent is significant for this discussion: unlike the English voices commonly associated with British popular music, Bishi's is not a regional or working class accent, but one characterized by Received Pronunciation (RP).[8] Her vowels are rounded and elongated; her consonants are precisely articulated; overall, her diction is clear, verging on theatrically self-conscious. Bishi's voice is essentially the voice of the affluent and educated classes of Middle-England, and far from the vernaculars more widely heard (and associated with national identities such as Britpop) within popular music. And we argue here that there is a deep level of significance to Bishi's performance of the 'Queen's English'. This is mirrored in the visual imagery of the 'Indian Queen' in the CD's artwork, described earlier.

Accents are widely understood as powerful symbols of class and political status, but pronunciation is held by linguists to be particularly significant in British society. Cruttenden suggests that the British demonstrate an 'extreme sensitivity' to the pronunciation of the English language, 'not paralleled in [...] other parts of the English speaking world' (1994:

76). In the case of English RP, Upton acknowledges that 'a commonly-held view persists that RP is a very narrow [upper-]class-based and region-based variety of English pronunciation' (2008: 238). Specifically, RP's strong associations with aristocracy and the bourgeois, 'public-schooled' (read 'privately educated') ruling classes of the South East have meant that the accent's presence in creative performances is usually indexically linked to 'establishment'-oriented or elite-sponsored activities (see e.g. Hughes, Trudgill and Watt 2013: 11). Regardless of a performer's natural speaking voice, the conscious use of received pronunciation is considered best practice for the performance of most high-status English-language choral repertory in Britain, such as that found in churches and 'high-art' concert venues.

Bishi's RP here, then, represents disruptions of multiple narratives. On the one hand, it plays a very personal and humanising role in the momentary suspension of generic boundaries; that is to say, her voice contrasts starkly with the popular cultural memes of the album, the singer-songwriter, the guitar-strut (although in the case of Bishi's shows, it's very strikingly a sitar that is being played from a stood position, with a shoulder strap), and so forth. Similarly, her fluency with Chaucer and Milton speaks of a particular kind of elite cultural capital. In these ways, Bishi's voice combines with her performance modes and contexts to articulate - literally - a liminal space between the resilient vernacular/elite dualisms enshrined in the resilient taxonomic principles of staged performance in England.

Beyond this, however, there is a more subtle - but arguably more significant - disruption of hierarchies of class and race. Taken together with the photographic works discussed above, this recalls the creative subversion of the white-elite conflation that can be found in the art work of Yinka Shonibare, and claimed by Bishi as one of the inspirations for *Albion Voice*. For example, in the photographic exhibition *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* the

British-Nigerian artist is pictured as a Victorian aristocrat in a series of nineteenth-century stately-home settings (Yinka Shonibare MBE 2010).

Finally, the prominence of Bishi's RP is significant in the context of her exploration and articulation of a strongly individualized Englishness. Literature concerned with the mediated voice in popular culture generally holds to the assumption that an identifiably regional (and, implicitly, working class) accent bestows upon the performer a claim of authenticity, denoting legitimate authority to speak on real-world experiences, knowledge and values (e.g. Beal 2009: 2). Coupland discusses how:

> Vernacularity of speech generally implies localness and embedding in a social milieu, sometimes with the implication that the milieu in question is where a speaker was first socialized. But vernaculars are also taken to be 'nonstandard' ways of speaking (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998), echoing early use of the term vernacular to distinguish a local, everyday, 'on-the-ground' language from a superposed, high-prestige 'standard' ... As a result, vernacular ways of speaking have readily taken on value-laden connotations of authentic cultural being and belonging, at least for some sociolinguists. (2009: 284)

By contrast, then, Bishi's RP represents a thoroughly standardized English voice, which not only disrupts common perceptions of vocal authenticity (as inalienable from the local, regional, working class voice) but also throws into sharp relief the extensive heterophony of other sounds and images from which the album is created.

Cosmopolitanism, national identity and the Englishness of Bishi

Bishi's *Albion Voice* is an active and purposeful artistic renegotiation and articulation of the singer's Englishness and, by extension, an open exploration of the possibilities of national identity in a contemporary, multicultural England. References to England are found not only in the album's title and title track, but throughout the track titles and lyrics, and in the imagery surrounding the recording and performances. That said, hers is by no means the only creative exploration of a hybridized Englishness: the English folk-based project 'Imagined Village' represents another recent, and well-scrutinized musical exploration of a contemporary English identity that is presented as inherently - albeit problematically - multicultural (see Lucas 2013; Winter and Keegan-Phipps 2013: 146-52). *Albion Voice*, however, holds some significant implications for the construction and expression of such an identity, resulting from the unique intersection of the artist's personal subjectivities, performance modes and contexts. First of these is the unusual extent to which Bishi has framed her work - and her Englishness - as so explicitly cosmopolitan. Beyond the specific and vastly disparate soundscapes and literatures invoked over the course of the album, the context in which Bishi's work has been presented also frames it in terms of both aesthetic and social cosmopolitanism. For example, in 2012 music from the album was included in the soundtrack to Julien Temple's documentary film *London: The Modern Babylon*. The explication of an apparently utopian cosmopolis as the imagined context for this music draws us away from the conception of cosmopolitanism as a conditional response - by which creative artists might be equipped and moved to deploy the cultural resources made available through transnational, cultural globalisation - and towards a celebration of both the politics and poetics of those conditions. To some extent, then, Bishi performs cosmopolitanism not as an alignment with a transnational genre (e.g. Feld 2012), or as a purely mobilising structure for the performance of local politics (e.g. Turino 2000; Webster-Kogen 2014), but rather as an aesthetic in itself. When Bishi sings 'bewildering world' (in the chorus and outro of

'Albion Voice'), the word 'bewildering' is accented, elongated and ornamented: the performance, however, is one of an artist in secure control of the multiple contradictions and tropes she calls up. She seems to be embracing the potentially 'bewildering' multiplicity of identities, just as they are embraced in her work though her multiple costume changes, many impersonations of iconic historical English and British national icons, and the multiple Bishis of her kaleidoscopic image projections.

Secondly, Bishi is a rare example of an individual - and, in particular, a woman - presented as author of such musical cosmopolitanism. To a significant extent, Bishi's claim to nationhood through *Albion Voice* is made diffuse by the fact that hers is a very personal claim, rather than seeking to articulate the communally derived consensus of a group (contrasting with e.g. the work of the 'Imagined Village', Winter and Keegan-Phipps 2013: 146-52), or a part of a unified performer-audience movement (as seen in Turino 2000; Feld 2012). There is no indication that she overtly seeks to connect with an audience with specifically shared - or even similar - heritage or experiences, but rather, perhaps, an audience with shared values (inclined towards the celebration of a diverse, inclusive and destabilized view of nationhood) and a shared - cosmopolitanist - aesthetic. Collectivity is nonetheless present, but articulated through the performer's own multiplied voices and images, within the recorded album and during live/video performances respectively, which effect a significant disruption of the simplistic individual-collective dualism that might commonly be invoked to narrate the formulation or experience of national (or any other) identity.

It is notable, however, that the album finishes with a track ('Ship of Fools') in which collective voices are also achieved naturally, through the employment of two discrete choirs of singers: here, the closing section features a stark juxtaposition between the homophonic chordal accompaniment from a choral group (named in the sleeve notes as Acapella Rising),

and the closing refrain, sung in unison by a 'rougher', more vernacular sounding chorus - referred to in the CD's inlay as a 'pub choir'. This final moment of collective voicing points to a third significant element of Bishi's cosmopolitanism: the fact that the hybridities incorporated in the album operate across and between the conventionally opposing constructs of 'elite' cosmopolitanisms - wherein eclecticism is the celebrated luxury of the privileged cultural 'traveller' - and the 'rooted' or vernacular cosmopolitanisms sought by the ethnographers of lived multicultural experience (e.g. Turino, Feld, et al.). The work is, in this way, remarkable for problematising (if not dissolving) the class-based dualisms that dominate literature on these themes.

Beyond the artistic impact of a standardized voice in the context of a work which celebrates hybridity, discussed above, the foregrounding of RP may seem paradoxical in a work primarily focused on the destabilisation of any homogenous narrative of national identity. An interesting answer to this conundrum, however, may lie in the fact that RP's normative impact has long been felt beyond England's shores, and can also be understood as an index of modernist-capitalist globalisation, particularly within colonial contexts: Karpf points to the requirement for workers in Indian call centres to master the RP accent (2006: 193). In this way, the voice contributes to a transnational cosmopolitanism. Simultaneously, the album is a more potent exploration of Englishness precisely because the author is not audibly tied (i.e. by a distinctly local accent) to any one region of it.

Bishi's renegotiation of Englishness through this album is also significant since it expands the transnational narrative of cosmopolitan aesthetic borrowing, to evoke not only 'other' places and cultures, but also other (historical) times. Bishi's invocation of 'ancient' - including folk and traditional - cultural materials from England, India and Europe, suggests an inclusive aesthetic that forges *post hoc* connections and resonances, and disturbs those essentialising discourses that commonly articulate cultural uniqueness via the citation of

distinct histories. More specifically, however, the interpolation of her own image into a reimagined iconography of the British Empire represents her complete and inalienable immersion in England's present (and future) through a discursive mastery of England's past. In other words, Bishi's work includes explication of the historicity which is now commonly recognized as integral to the oft-cited theoretical framing of Clifford's 'discrepant cosmopolitanism' (1997: 36) but which is rarely evoked so candidly in cosmopolitan cultural outputs themselves.

In the opening section of our discussion we noted that *Albion Voice* is framed by Bishi as an intervention into a vision of popular musical English identity from which, she observes, women and Asians are largely absent. *Albion Voice*, then, can be understood as a reactive exploration of a more cosmopolitan vision of English identity, characterising the artist's own Englishness as an identity with multiple connections and attachments that are both outward looking and, at the same time, rooted and invested in a sense of national belonging. This chapter demonstrates the scholarly contribution of a detailed textual and contextual analysis in revealing the complexities of such a project: it demonstrates a nexus of artistic mechanisms and semiotic devices, whereby a range of discursive disruptions have effected the (re)framing of cosmopolitanism as simultaneously - and emphatically - personal identity, political message and cultural aesthetic.

References

Appiah, K. A. (1997), 'Cosmopolitan Patriots', *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (3): 617-39.

Beal, J. C. (2009), '"You're Not from New York City, You're from Rotherham": Dialect and Identity in British Indie Music', *Journal of English Linguistics,* 37 (3): 223-40.

Bhabha, H.K. (1994), *The Location of Culture,* London: Routledge.

Bilby, K. (1999), '"Roots Explosion": Indigenization and Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Surinamese Popular Music', *Ethnomusicology,* 43 (2): 256–96.

Binnie, J., J. Holloway, S. Millington and C. Young (eds) (2006), *Cosmopolitan Urbanism*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Bishi (2012), *Bishiworld,* 4 January. Available online: *http://bishiworld.blogspot.co.uk/2012_04_01_archive.html*. (accessed 28 July 2016).

Bishi Electronic Press Kit (2008), [Website]. Available online: www.sonicbids.com (accessed 23 June 2013).

Bracewell, M. (1997), *England is Mine: Pop Life in Albion from Wilde to Goldie,* London: HarperCollins.

Cheah, P. and B. Robbins (1998), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Choudhury, I. (2015), 'Connecting the Circle: Musician Bishi talks about her sound', *Eastern Eye*, 1 May. Available online: https://www.easterneye.eu/entertainment/detail/connecting-the-circle-musician-bishi-talks-about-her-sound (accessed 22 May 2015).

Clifford, J. (1997), *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cohen, M. (1992), 'Rooted Cosmopolitanism: Thoughts on the left, nationalism and multiculturalism', *Dissent*, Autumn: 478-83.

Coupland, N. (2009), 'The Mediated Performance of Vernaculars', *Journal of English Linguistics,* 37 (3): 284-300.

Cruttenden, A. (1994), *Gimson's Pronunciation of English*, 5th edn. London: Arnold.

Delanty, G., ed., (2012), *The Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Feld, S. (2012), *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Acraa: Five Musical Years in Ghana*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Gray, A. (2012), 'Putting The Black in the Union Jack', *Louise Gray*, 23 April. Available online: https://louisegray.net/2012/04/23/putting-the-black-in-the-union-jack/ (accessed 23 May 2013).

Hughes, A., P. Trudgill and D. Watt (2013), *English Accents and Dialects.* 5th edn. London: Routledge.

Karpf, A. (2006), *The Human Voice: The Story of a Remarkable Talent,* London: Bloomsbury.

Liverani, M. (2010), *Vogue,* 30 September. Available online: http://www.vogue.it/en/vogue-curvy/glam-and-curvy/2010/09/bishi (accessed 23 May 2013).

London: The Modern Babylon (2012), [Film] Dir. Julien Temple, London: BBC Films; The BFI; Nitrate.

Lucas, C. (2013), 'The Imagined Folk of England: Whiteness, Folk Music and Fascism'. *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies,* 9 (1): 1–19.

Magaldi, C. (2009), 'Cosmopolitanism and World Music in Rio de Janeiro at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', *The Musical Quarterly,* 92 (3–4): 329–64.

Manuel, P. (1989), 'Modal Harmony in Andalusian, Eastern European, and Turkish Syncretic Musics', *Yearbook for Traditional Music,* 21: 70–94.

Martínez, J. L. (2001), *Semiosis in Hindustani Music*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Moore, S. (2014), *The Other Leading Note: A Comparative Study of the Flat Second Pitch Degree in North Indian Classical, Ottoman or Arabian Influenced, Western, Heavy Metal and Film Musics*. PhD thesis, University of Sheffield.

Moy, R. (2007), *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Nava, M. (2002), 'Cosmopolitan modernity: everyday imaginaries and the register of difference', *Theory, Culture and Society,* 19: 81-99.

Regev, M. (2007), 'Cultural Uniqueness and Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism', *European Journal of Social Theory,* 10 (1): 123-38.

Royal Collection Trust (2016), 'Dorothy Wilding', *Royal Collection Trust.* Available online: https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/exhibitions/the-queen-portraits-of-a-monarch/dorothy-wilding (accessed 28 July 2016).

Royster, F. T. (2012), *Sounding Like a No-no: queer sounds and eccentric acts in the post-soul era*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Southbank Centre (2015a), 'Alchemy', *Southbank Centre.* Available online: http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whatson/festivals-series/alchemy-2015 (accessed 28 July 2016).

Southbank Centre (2015b), 'Bishi', *Southbank Centre.* Available online: http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whatson/bishi-91435 (accessed: 28 July 2016).

Stokes, M. (2007), 'On Musical Cosmopolitanism', *The Macalester International Roundtable 2007*. Available online: http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/intlrdtable/3 (accessed 1 July 2016).

The Nest Collective (2016), 'Bishi', *The Nest Collective,* Available online: http://thenestcollective.co.uk/artist/bishi/ (accessed 28 May 2016).

Turino, T. (2000), *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Upton, C. (2008), 'Received Pronunciation.' in Bernd Kortmann and Clive Upton (eds) *Varieties of English: The British Isles*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Webster-Kogen, I. (2014), 'Song Style as Strategy: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Citizenship in The Idan Raichel Project's Ethiopian-influenced Songs', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 23 (1): 27-48.

Werbner, P. (1999), 'Global Pathways. Working class cosmopolitans and the creation of transnational ethnic worlds', *Social Anthropology*, 7: 17-35.

Wikibin (2008), 'Kashpoint', *Wikibin*. Available online: http://wikibin.org/articles/kashpoint.html (accessed 28 July 2016).

Williams, R. (1973), *The Country and the City,* Chatto and Windus Ltd. Reprint, St Albans: Paladin [1975].

Winter, T. and S. Keegan-Phipps (2013), *Performing Englishness: Identity and Politics in a Contemporary Folk Resurgence*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Yinka Shonibare MBE (2010), [Website], *Diary of a Victorian Dandy,* Available online: https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/shonibare/**dandy**.html (accessed 31 July 2016).

Discography

Bishi (2007) *Nights at the Circus*, UK: Gryphon [Album]

Bishi (2012) *Albion Voice* , UK: Gryphon, [Album]

Marcel Cellier [compiler] (1975) *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* , Switzerland: Disques Cellier, [Album]

[1] For example, as Dyadphonic with Martin Green

[2] 'In Sleep' (2014), collaboration with composer Neil Kaczor, commissioned by Science Gallery London.

[3] Such as for the silent film *Salome* (1923), commissioned by the British Film Institute.

[4] For an overview of the study of cosmopolitanism see Delanty (ed.), 2012.

[5] It should be acknowledged that a number of varieties of Jews harp are also found in Indian musical traditions, but these are not so iconic of that part of the world as, for instance, the sitar, and are more readily associated by Western listeners with the musical arcana of the Anglophone world.

[6] Britannia's indexical relationship with empire is routinely reiterated in the lyrics of the euphoric anthem *Rule Britannia*, which speaks in no uncertain terms of her military dominance upon the high seas (and, therefore, across the maritime globe).

[7] The interval of a flattened second is regularly acknowledged in world and popular music scholarship as mobilising clear associations with 'the East'. The flattened second degree has been explored, for example, as a signifier of 'Mediterranean tonality' by Manuel (1989: 75), and as a significant feature of Indian classical music by Martinez (2001). More recently, the meanings - including orientalist connotations - of the 'flat 2 [two with a hat… can't render here!]' have been more comprehensively reviewed by Moore (2014).

[8] Moy (2007) makes the common claim that 'Almost every English singer in popular music sounds, if not actually North American, then at least 'transatlantic' (53). It is true that American pronunciation is still rife in English popular music but we cannot, however, ignore the enormous upsurge of artists during the first decade of the twenty-first century who have

made prominent use of their ‘local’ accents - specifically the Estuary English of Lily Allen, Kate Nash and Dizzee Rascal.