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**Bakalářská práce**

**The Youth Culture Phenomenon: Transformation of  
the British Society in the 1960s and its Impact on  
Popular Culture**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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## **Poděkování**

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis aims to depict the role of popular culture, with the focus on popular music, in lives and identities of a young generation of Britons in the 1960s based on the examination of selected social phenomena of the Sixties society.

There is no doubt that the 1960s have become a worldwide phenomenon, nowadays often referred to as the '*Swinging Sixties*'. They have gone down in history as the years of youth, consumerism, sexuality, iconic music, fashion and rebellion; as the years of substantial social transformation. Often seen as a decade which shook the whole world, they still seem to attract more attention than any other period of the twentieth century.

Being a part of the larger international phenomenon, British society was experiencing a great transformation since World War II. The economic growth and prosperity which Britain was going through since the mid-Fifties carried along a social and cultural change and a new way of thinking, especially for the younger generation. Several factors, such as the immigration of people of different nationalities due to the expansion of the Commonwealth or globalising life supported by the development of mass media, have contributed to the creation of a multi-ethnic and intercultural Britain.

But how was it possible for such significant changes, which would ordinarily take tens of years to manifest, to happen basically over a decade? The following chapters will argue that this social transformation was greatly supported by the new-coming generation of young people and will try to support this argument using British popular music artefacts.

Due to the extent of this thesis, it is not possible to cover all aspects of the British Sixties, whether from the point of view of social change, popular culture or the Sixties as a phenomenon. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on aspects which may be considered crucial, which have contributed to reshaping of British society the most and the impact of which was substantial enough to leave marks in contemporary British culture, to a certain extent.

The field of popular culture this thesis is concerned with the most is British popular music. Commonly regarded as one of the most iconic aspects of British popular

culture, music has played an important role in expressing emotions of an individual, music bands, as well as capturing the general mood of the public throughout history. Last but not least, it has been a notable factor of political activism.

What needs to be mentioned is the attempt to discuss popular music not only as a compilation of texts and melodies but also as a series of interdependent mass activities in constant motion which interact with social, cultural and other transformations.

The research shall be conducted through a variety of primary and secondary sources using mainly methods of documentary analysis, affect and intertextuality while borrowing insight into popular culture and world politics by the eponymous book (2015).

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first three chapters provide a theoretical background for the following practical research. They discuss the economic and political situation in Great Britain in the 1960s, the newly emerged phenomenon of youth culture and give a brief suggestion about main influences popular culture has on society and politics worldwide. The practical research comprises four selected social phenomena developed in the 1960s and seeks to explore and describe the affect these aspects have left in the world of British popular music while also focusing on the position of British youth culture in these specific features.

## 2 Economic and political situation

### 2.1 Harold Macmillan and Sir Alec Douglas-Home (1957-1964)

After Anthony Eden's resignation in January 1957, many expected R. A. Butler to become the succeeding Prime Minister. Qualified in many respects and serving under five Prime Ministers in all, he was one of those who were responsible for the 1944 Educational Act (originally serving as President of the Board of Education and then Minister of Education). In addition, he had done his job as deputy in the absence of Eden with satisfactory efficiency. However, he was perhaps considered overly cautious and too moderate for his party. Although his realistic stance towards Suez and his loyalty to Eden should have helped, they eventually meant the very opposite. Had he become Prime Minister, it might have been interpreted as "*the final acknowledgement of guilt by the Suez Group and the Suez Inner Cabinet* (Childs 1992: 94)." Butler's rival candidate, Harold Macmillan, did not have so much experience. Serving as a soldier in the First World War and helping to make the policy in the Second World War, he was a wealthy businessman who was the preferred candidate of the Conservative Party. After being selected as the new Prime Minister in 1957, he proved himself as a proficient leader and won the election in October 1959 with a vast majority (Wasson 2010: 331). He was the right person the Conservatives needed to overcome one of the worst crisis in their history. The year Macmillan took over, the Party was facing an acute dissension and it was widely believed that the next election would mean a crushing defeat for the Conservatives, partly also as a consequence of the Suez affair. The effect of Suez was, however, not as damaging on public opinion as was expected, at least not in a short term. On a longer view, nevertheless, it may have done more harm to the party, since it had a substantial support among the economists, commentators, journalists and academics, whose influence on public opinion was very important and whose votes the Conservatives partially lost in the early 1960s. Given the upcoming election however, the public, in general, wanted to forget Suez and the affair played a little part (Blake 1985: 278-279).

On the other hand, the Conservatives were able to use the situation of full employment, rising consumerism and relative price stability to their benefit, achieving the very height of their post-war success and delivering the Labour Party its worst defeat since 1935. Admitting that they were beaten by prosperity, Labours argued that the extent of affluence has "*hardened middle-class opinion against Labour* (Donnelly 2005: 63)."



And it was indeed middle-class members who created the majority of the Conservative voters at the end of the Fifties. In case of Labour, however, the affluence itself was not the problem, although it has certainly made a cut into their conventional working-class base. It was more their reaction to it which failed to catch the attention of key groups of voters (Donnelly 2005: 63).

The period of the late 1950s was regarded as an idyllic age in which Britain was changing fundamentally thanks to almost full employment and unprecedented prosperity. The fact that the post-war rate of unemployment, which Labour managed to maintain at a minimal level, remained that way for the rest of the Fifties meant a dramatic change for many in the working-class. Moreover, earnings were increasing quicker than prices – wage rates rose by approximately 72 per cent and retail prices by almost 45 per cent between October 1951 and October 1963. With the lowering of purchase tax, there was a sharp rise in consumer goods ownership and ‘*home ownership*’ almost doubled under the Conservatives (Childs 1992: 105-106). A well-known remark by Macmillan (which is nearly impossible to miss when researching the economic situation in the Sixties) regarding this period of British affluence was made in July 1957: “*Let’s be frank about it; most of our people have never had it so good*” (e.g. Blake 1985: 281). He made this statement in a very optimistic speech talking about the country’s prospering economic situation. As Britain moved further into the Sixties, however, first warning signs of uncertainty were to come. With income tax being reduced, there was a question to be asked, whether the cuts in government expenditure (which naturally must have followed) are in the public’s or in the country’s long-term interest. Seen in a longer term, it raised the public’s expectations about sustainable economic growth to unrealistic levels. Although Britain’s economy, seen from the domestic point of view, seemed to be continually culminating, it was clear by the early 1960s that it was quite unimpressive, when compared to its international competitors (Childs 1992: 106, Donnelly 2005: 63-64). Taking the ‘full employment’ situation as an example, it may have rather been caused by the world economic conditions than by individual governments’ interventions or regional policies. In addition, although general unemployment levels at that time were at historically low levels in Britain, seen from the regional perspective they maintained practically the same pattern – Scotland, Wales and the North of England then being almost twice excessive than the South-east of England (Pope 1990: 163).

During Macmillan's reign the British economic situation was starting to deteriorate. There was a strong abroad pressure on sterling and the level of unemployment was rising, despite the fierce Tory attempts to prevent it. Furthermore, British exports were partially reduced due to the formation of the European Economic Community, which the United Kingdom was not a part of. Being the first Prime Minister associated with the idea of decolonisation, Macmillan was very interested in profits and losses Britain had from each of its colonies, realising that its future lies rather in Europe than the Commonwealth. It was his cabinet's attempt to gain membership in the European Economic Community for the United Kingdom which is often seen as the first step back from the colonial system and towards the countries of the Continent. Secondly, it is his successful tour through the African continent in 1960, comprising his famous speech known as "*The Wind of Change*" which he delivered to the South African Parliament in Cape Town (Blake 1985: 285).

By the end of 1963, there were several scandals and affairs connected with law and security which did not give a good account of the Conservatives. One of them, however, seemed to be crucial for Macmillan. The Profumo case, involving an affair of John Profumo – the Minister of War and Christine Keeler – a young woman also involved with a Russian diplomat, Captain Ivanov, meant a misconduct in the issues of moral and security. Though altogether it was a relatively trivial episode, it was significant in its symbolic meaning, showing the hypocrisy of the ruling class. The Prime Minister, even though he was not directly involved in the scandal, was criticised for not confronting it enough. His credibility suffered a blow and when health problems emerged, a speculation emerged about Macmillan's resignation (Donnelly 2005: 69, Morgan 1990: 225-226). From the varied range of possible successors the Conservatives had among their ranks, neither of them stood out. Finally, Macmillan made, for many an unbelievable, recommendation of the fourteenth earl of Home. Coming rather from the moderate branch of the Conservative Party, Home had abundant political experience. He disclaimed his peerage and as Sir Alec Douglas-Home entered the office in October 1963. Although he did not seem the man to modernise Britain, he could by no means be considered a liability. He found himself in a difficult situation facing many problems regarding international relations. His views on foreign policy as well as his uncompromising attitude towards nuclear disarmament were nevertheless greatly respected. He proved himself to be underestimated as a party leader when the

Conservatives lost to the Labour in the election held in 1964 lacking only less than one percentage point (Blake 1985: 293-294, Wasson 2010: 331).

## **2.2 Harold Wilson (1964-1970)**

During its time in opposition, Labour was struggling with internal disputes which divided the party into two sections, the first one of them being members with traditional views and the second one the so called “revisionists”. Traditionalists aimed for an extended programme of public ownership and were committed to the idea of a class-based society in which Labour worked as the working-class interests’ defender. Revisionists, on the other hand, believed that this idea was not relevant anymore in the ‘new’ affluent Britain and were convinced that a radical makeover of the party is necessary after the 1959 defeat. Claiming that the identity of the working-class was disrupted by the rise in living standards and structural changes in economy, the revisionists’ priorities were greater social equality, fairer education system, improved public services and extensions of personal freedom (Donnelly 2005: 71-72).

After winning general elections in 1964 with a margin of only four seats, Harold Wilson’s Labour government entered office with the hope of a fresh start. It offered a good deal of social policy commitments including equal access to secondary education, new housing opportunities or universal insurance benefit system. This new ‘classless’ style was related to overall modernization and entailed new attention to technology and science (Glennerster 1995: 95, Morgan 1990: 239). Although at the outset of Wilson’s first tenure it was rather a period of a great balance of payments crisis, where there was a £800 million deficit, the government decided that it would not devalue the pound. For many that would seem like an easy way to face the difficulties. Wilson, however, did not want his administration periods to carry this inheritance. *“He decided that devaluation of sterling was not going to be part of the new administration’s plan to deal with the deficit. It was felt this would have been politically damaging for the Labour government, reviving memories of the earlier devaluation under Clement Attlee (Childs 1992: 164).”*

Another election was held in 1966 in order to secure a larger majority in the House of Commons. The Labour Party had all odds in its favour in the election with the rising earnings and low unemployment levels. Labour promised further growth of incomes and made major efforts to improve education and medical services. In addition, Harold Wilson was a much more popular figure than the leader of the Opposition – Edward

Heath. The party obtained a majority of 96 seats over all other parties, however, the victory was claimed on the lowest polls since 1945. Labour gained support “*higher up the social scale*” especially among the poor and likewise among many young (Childs 1992: 175-176).

The optimism which followed the electoral success, nevertheless, did not last for very long. Soon the situation began to seem less promising for the Labour and its fall from favour became acute. The Selective Employment Tax was introduced, and it proved unpopular with trade unions as well as employers. The Conservatives regarded it as a matter that was likely to increase the cost of living. Moreover, there was soon an increase of income and other taxes and strikes became a highly noticeable issue. In May, the National Union of Seamen started an indefinite strike which caused a significant damage to British export trade and heavy pressure on the currency. Sterling soon got into trouble and though the pressure might not have been caused directly by the seamen strike, it certainly did not help the problematic situation. The Prime Minister, however, wanted to avoid devaluation of the pound for as long as possible and strived to maintain Britain’s international position at the same level (Childs 1992: 181-183, Morgan 1990: 253-254).

Another struggle that made this attempt more difficult for Wilson were the uneasy relations Britain had with the United States because of the Vietnam War. Seeing a way to gain support for his foreign policies, the president of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, aimed for British forces to be involved in Vietnam. The Prime Minister, however, refused to give his consent (Childs 1992: 169-170).

In May 1967, Britain made a second attempt to join the European Economic Community. It was clear that the Britain’s trade pattern had been changing during the first half of the Sixties. In the period of 1959-1966, exports to the EEC states increased by 9.5 per cent. In November 1967, however, the French President de Gaulle, who vetoed Britain’s first application, did so once again (Childs 1992: 190-191).

Labour were instrumental in implementation of important educational reforms. In the early post-war period, only ten per cent of working-class children attended grammar schools. In the 1960s and 1970s, both the English and Scottish Labour attempted to condemn selective secondary education and supported a method which united all children to one institution. By the late 1970s, 80 per cent of secondary education took place in a similar ‘comprehensive’ institution (Wasson 2010: 332).

### 3 The youth culture phenomenon

After the Second World War women were encouraged to return to households and take the roles of wives and mothers instead of working on fields or in factories as they would during the war. This situation contributed to a sharp rise in the birth rate in the late 1940s, nowadays commonly referred to as the post-war baby boom. Large families became popular and by the late Fifties and early Sixties, when these 'baby boomers' came of age, the average age of the British society dropped sharply. By the year 1959, there were over 4 million single people aged between 13 and 25 in Britain (Christopher 1999: 4). This new-coming young generation is often seen as one of the substantial international influences that shaped the whole decade of the Sixties. Before the mid-Fifties no such thing as the 'youth culture', within the meaning of a social group, existed. As it was not afflicted by difficulties of wartime as the previous ones were, this generation had the opportunity to create its own world, distant enough from the attitude of its parents. Since the 'babies' grew up in post-war economic prosperity with low unemployment, it was not very difficult for them to achieve financial independence even at an early age. Especially working-class youth were therefore tempted to abandon the studies and start working often not older than fifteen (Christopher 1999: 3-4, Shaw 1992: 20). Most of them, however, still lived in their parents' houses and it was not rare that they passed most of their earnings to them. Middle-class teenagers, on the other hand, were expected to focus on their further studies and get a high-quality education. Marwick states some figures regarding weekly earnings in the late 1950s and the 1960s:

*“Average weekly earnings for industrial workers rose 34 per cent between 1955 and 1960 and 130 per cent between 1955 and 1969; average earnings of middle-class salaried employees rose 127 per cent between 1955 and 1969 (1991: 69).”*

The economic growth together with low unemployment made everything more accessible not just to the younger generation but to all Britons. They could easily access better education, better housing and, due to the upswing of consumerism, various modern conveniences which were making their lives easier and more comfortable. It should be recognised that such prosperity did not concern Britain alone. Donnelly (2005: 24) writes that after the Korean War, the western economies boomed to the extent that it was

possible to use affluence as a sort of cultural weapon against communist states in the Cold War.

Nevertheless, it would be quite inaccurate to claim that the arrival of this separate young social group was caused exclusively by greater affluence. As Roy and Gwen Shaw (1992: 20) mention, the youth culture was characterised by the urge to establish its own identity. The British youth lived in a society in which it felt little valued. It suddenly became a separate category and with its manners, spending patterns, social deprivation and dissatisfaction with the lives the previous generations had been living, it has created a wider generation gap than the society has ever experienced. Many young Britons experienced the incapability of understanding the lifestyle of previous generations, because the one of their own was a good deal different. The perception of the intensification of cultural and social differences between the young and the elder soon raised discussions and social researches. It was certain that the young generation had been experiencing a great amount of estrangement.

These feelings soon reflected in popular culture and since music was a favourite and commonly used mean to self-expression, it would be only logical to search for such signs in popular songs. The opening lyrics of a song with a symptomatic title '*My Generation*' (1965) by a London-based band the Who serve as a great example:

*“People try to put us down [...]  
Just because we get around [...]  
Things they do look awful cold [...]  
I hope I die before I get old [...]”*

Being very energetic and, to a certain extent, aggressive, the song and its lyrics depict very well the troubles the young generation had understanding the previous ones.

There is no wonder that the youth soon began to search for further means to assume a definite attitude and manifested itself by its unique style which was accompanied by specific patterns of behaviour, fashion and music. Since having style often meant having a status, a problematical phenomenon of different subcultures soon appeared among the young generation. Comprising mainly male members, these groups showed signs of frustration and anti-authoritarian attitude. Their activities were often associated with rebellion and violence.

In the second half of the 1950s a prominent youth cult known as the Teddy boys began to catch the public's attention. With their bothersome and violent behaviour, 'Teds' (usually dressed in suits and suede shoes) could be easily imagined as an inspiration to Anthony Burgess's novel from 1962 *A Clockwork Orange* (although Burgess stated that the novel's theme is inspired by his wife's violent experience with a group of drunk Americans during the Second World War). Whereas they mostly committed minor delinquencies and fought among the local groups, they attracted more attention when one of them murdered a young man on Clapham Common in 1953. Since groups of them wrecked cinemas during the projection of the *Rock Around the Clock* film (1956), they often became subjects of newspaper headlines and the media built "*a full-scale moral panic around them* (Donnelly 2005: 37)."

In the early Sixties the Mods took the position of the Teddy boys as the most dominant British youth subculture. Being very fashion-conscious, dressed in mohair suits, narrow silk ties and green parkas, these mostly white-collar workers were influenced by Italian fashion, film and, last but not least, Italian and other immigrants. With their fondness of British bands influenced by American R'n'B, they seemed to work as a contrast to the working-class leather-wearing Rockers and their motorcycles. Gangs of these two social groups were known for their occasional fights at holiday resorts in Brighton (Donnelly 2005: 37, Shaw 1992: 21).

One of the most influential movements of the decade – the Hippie movement, which emerged in the United States in the early Sixties, left its marks on the British youth culture as well. Having its centre in San Francisco, it was well-known for its alternative lifestyle and folk music promoting messages of peace, love and freedom. The 'flower-power' movement was soon, perhaps more than any other movement in history, associated with drugs, sexual revolution and an anti-war attitude. It entered Britain in the second half of the decade and influenced plenty of British artists.

However, as Donnelly (2005: 36) writes, on no account were all young people in Britain part of a subculture and by no means did all of them see themselves as rebellious. In fact, contemporary surveys showed that many Sixties teenagers were still quite conservative at the core.

As was mentioned before, the great affluence did not concern Britain only. Therefore, it may seem obvious that the British youth was searching inspiration and role-

models abroad as well. As the greatest influence, at least in the field of music and cinema, can be considered the United States pop culture. In the Fifties, public service broadcasters and British film makers with their focus on war films or comedies could perhaps make a decent entertainment for their parents but were certainly not fulfilling enough for teenagers (Donnelly 2005: 26-27). The British youth therefore found their idols in American cinema, in characters such as Johnny Strabler – a rebellious leader of a motorcycling gang, portrayed by Marlon Brando (*The Wild One*, 1954), or Jim Stark – a troubled youth who lives out of keeping with the society, portrayed by James Dean (*Rebel Without a Cause*, 1955). In literature they sympathised with the 'Beat Generation', thus authors such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg or William Burroughs, or with a character of Holden Caulfield from J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). The 'Beat Generation' had also its counterparts in the British movement 'Angry Young Men', comprising novelists and playwrights including John Osborne or Kingsley Amis. According to Donnelly (2005: 26), however, the Angry Young Men lacked the "creative energy" that was noticeable from the works of the American beat generation. Considering the fact that most of the authors were in addition born in the 1920s, the Sixties teenagers might have reckoned them as "yesterday's angry men".

Another significant phenomenon which shaped the Sixties British youth culture is the attempt to abolish frontiers of social classes. Working-class youth was becoming more visible and assertive and the middle-class members often rejected standard English and adopted rough working-class accents, speech patterns and, moreover, manners (Marwick 1991: 69). The increase in salaries and wages (making the young workers more independent) together with dissatisfaction over the conventions and the ruling class contributed to the overall temper of the young generation. Nevertheless, the basic class system has not been changed and many authors concur in the opinion that the sense of classless Sixties youth society was only an illusion, despite the numerous attempts to achieve one.

While the working-class youth expressed their estrangement rather through "tribal allegiances" (Shaw 1992: 22), the longing for a social change, as it was presented in many contemporary rock lyrics, was in fact more a desire of the middle-class youth. Nonetheless, they all often took a rebellious stand on the conservative and bourgeois values. In addition, the rapidly expanding student population, which was created not only by the baby boom but also by the post-war educational policy, has produced a large



amount of demonstrations and concern over human rights issues. The British youth focused on the questions of the Vietnam War, South African apartheid laws or Rhodesian independence. In the late Sixties, however, as the society realised that certain economic difficulties are about to come, the majority of students decided to resume their studies and the era of student protests had passed. Later in the 70s and 80s, when the Sixties youth became parents, there could be no question of another vast generation gap, since after all the post-war babies had come through, there was very little the upcoming generation could do to shock them (Shaw 1992: 22).

## 4 How popular culture affects politics and society

Popular culture is often seen as a bond binding a diverse society together. Nowadays, many people seem to associate popular culture mainly with entertainment. However, there is a whole range of aspects for determining popular culture. Fred E. H. Schroeder (2006: 50) tries to define popular culture firstly by stating what popular culture is not. On one hand putting the “*elite, cultivated tradition of arts, thought, discourse and life styles.*” On the other one putting the folk traditions. He explains that the folk tradition, no matter how much it is a “*culture of the people*”, is in fact a local phenomenon and is merely governed by personal relationships, whereas contact with other cultures remains very restricted.

Describing the possible popular culture definitions, many regard mass production, mass distribution and mass consumption as the features distinguishing popular culture the most. “*Popular culture is a form of entertainment that is mass produced or is made available to large numbers of people [...] (Street 1997: 7).*” On the contrary, considering the previously mentioned edges of the cultural spectrum, high culture and the folk traditions are less accessible, both practically and socially. Some might, however, see a problem in these sorts of definitions, describing the mechanisms of mass production and consumption of popular culture, for they fail to say anything about the character of popular culture itself (Schroeder 2006: 50, Street 1997: 7).

From the historical perspective, there are differences to be realised between modern and older popular culture, with the invention of movable type printing in 1450 meaning a revolution in terms of the population’s literacy. There is, nevertheless, a common ground for popular culture before and after printing in the form of religion and mass-produced religious artefacts, even though this dimension of popular culture, together with many other dimensions, has yielded to the ‘entertainment popular culture’ (Schroeder 2006: 52).

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian philosopher and politician, suggested in his theory of ‘*cultural hegemony*’ that the way the ruling class dominates a culturally diverse society is not only by coercion with the use of military and political force, but also by consent. He claimed that power can be reinforced through cultural artefacts as much as through physical force. Intending to understand the way people respond to culture, Gramsci

prefigured many ideas about politics which, in fact, became very important in the post-war society (Great Lives - Tom Shakespeare on Gramsci: 2014).

When discussing popular culture in its relationship to politics, it is important to realise the significant power popular culture has to shape political identities and its ability to work as a distinctive identity marker. This relationship then rests on two crucial features: the first of them being the strong visual aspects of film and television and the second one the emotional reactions this visuality evokes. Popular culture is indeed, to a great extent, “*visual culture*” and many popular culture phenomena are based on strong emotionality, while being not only emotional in their origin but also deeply emotional in their impact (Bleiker/Duncombe 2015: 36-37, 42).

John Street (1997: 48) describes three different forms which the relationship between popular culture and politics, or more precisely politicians, takes. Firstly, it is the way politicians try to associate with popular culture and its icons, making themselves ‘available’ and by this mean hoping to transfer some of the popularity to themselves.

Secondly, it is the politicians’ capability of combining commercial and political interests. Many politicians recognise the commercial importance of popular culture and find it necessary to favour it.

The final form is showed in the way politicians often rely upon popular culture techniques and methods to pursue their political roles. Marketing themselves to attract their voters, politicians and political parties often seem to use the same means and processes advertisers usually use to promote consumer goods. What seems especially important is the fact that popular culture has such political power because it is very closely intertwined with consumerism (Bleiker/Duncombe 2015: 37, Street 1997: 45-46).

## 5 Rebellion and protest

Besides the significant social upheaval, the 1960s were also, to a great degree, defined by various protest movements and manifestations. Although not meaning any political revolution, it was a period of radical political demonstrations. Much of the dissatisfaction was expressed through popular songs, poetry reading or experimental theatre. Rock music in particular, with its aggressive melodies, was serving as a good means to manifest dissatisfaction and anger.

Never has there been an era in which no artists would criticise the society they live in. It would be, therefore, quite misleading to describe the late Fifties and the Sixties as a unique age in terms of an unprecedented social criticism. There were, however, certain international developments which offered enough impulses to create a new, unique form of protest culture. Apart from the Vietnam War, which was certainly one of the most discussed issues, there were events in Algeria, Central Africa or South America which offered enough incentives to get the voices raised. Furthermore, the society was becoming more aware of human rights issues; movements on behalf of women's liberation, homosexual liberation or black civil rights soon started to question and challenge existing conventions and authorities (Marwick 1996: 120, 2005: 780-782).

What was pervading popular music in the 1960s was ambiguity and taboo breaking. A style this was especially characteristic to was, the above mentioned, rock, often perceived as a youth music which embodied rebellion. With its anti-structural symbolism, it sought to invert musical conventions and displayed patterns in various political movements. Its ideology has been directed towards youth and rebellion; similarly, its lyrics expressed aggression, frustration, romance and sexuality (Cohen 1991: 175-176).

*“The ideology of rock music, as opposed to pop, has generally incorporated the belief that lyricists should write what they really [...] think as if to do so is to be natural and genuine and to do otherwise to be contrived or false [...] (Cohen 1991: 176).”*

In terms of social criticism, the Kinks are not to be omitted with their often caustic society commentaries, for example in ‘*Dead End Street*’ (1966) or later ‘*Apeman*’ (1970). Their songs served as a substantial influence and were often covered in the 1970s since they spoke openly about still relevant, timeless topics. ‘*Dead End Street*’ might even be considered a musical representative of the ‘*Kitchen Sink realism*’<sup>1</sup> since it depicts everyday struggles of a man of a working-class background.

To put it either in the words of an American rock and folk singer-songwriter Steve Earle – “*If a guitar is what you’ve got a guitar is what you fight with*” (Sounds Like a Revolution: undated). or in those of the Rolling Stones’ ‘*Street Fighting Man*’ – “*But what can a poor boy do except to sing for a Rock and Roll band.*”

### **5.1 The Vietnam War as a protest song catalyst**

The year 1968 was a year when all manifestations of protest culminated, and a wave of student protests spread through many European cities and US campuses. Many young people worldwide were immersed in the anti-war movement, perceiving the Vietnam War as imperialist and unjust. Naturally, the emerged conflicts did not occur without, often violent, police interventions. A significant part of them was provoked by police forces which acted in many cases as “*states within the states*” (Marwick 2005: 780-782). The leader of the British student anti-war movement, Tariq Ali, remembers Mick Jagger marching in London demonstrations against the war. According to him, the band which was the most radical, especially during 1968 and 1969, both in terms of their song-writing and the activities they engaged with, were the Rolling Stones. He describes their music as deeply war-reflecting in its hardness: “*Lots of kids being sent to fight in Vietnam [...] were listening to the Stones to get away from this horrible war but also because, in a way, the music reflected the war [...]*” (The Beatles vs the Rolling Stones: It's Not Only Rock 'n' Roll: 2016).” To mention one example, the Rolling Stones’ song ‘*Gimme Shelter*’ is a testimony of political and social unrest happening in the late 1960s. Released on *Let It Bleed* in November 1969, it seems as if the album’s opening track prefigured the events

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<sup>1</sup> ‘*Kitchen Sink realism*’ was a movement which emerged in the late 1950s in Britain. Introducing everyday problems and concerns of ordinary people, mainly of a working-class background, into the arts, it provided an idea of a more complete social experience (Christopher 1999: 63).

of the Altamont Free Concert of early December 1969 which became a night of horror and violence.

Discussing the issue of the London marches, Ali also recalls a conversation which he later had with John Lennon. Admitting that he had always regretted listening to him, Lennon stated that he and “*some of the others*” had wanted to come to the marches but the Beatles’ manager Brian Epstein warned them that if they went to the “*anti-American marches*”, The Beatles might never get a permission to tour the United States again and would lose a big amount of money (The Beatles vs the Rolling Stones: It's Not Only Rock 'n' Roll: 2016).

The Rolling Stones were certainly not the only British musicians who expressed their anti-war attitude. In 1965 folk-rock musician Donovan topped the charts with his cover of ‘*Universal Soldier*’, a song originally written by Canadian singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie and comprising lines such as “*He’s the one who gives his body as a weapon of the war [...]*” or “[...] *brothers can't you see, this is not the way we put the end to war.*” In 1967 Donovan released the *Universal Soldier* EP including another anti-war song with more naturalistic lyrics – ‘*The War Drags On*’ (originally written by Mick Softley).

A song commenting on political protests and student uprisings was released by the Beatles in 1968. Perceived as not as much radical as pacifist and idealistic, ‘*Revolution*’ was widely considered a song which message lies rather in its music which is more powerful than its words. While there is visible repression in the lyrics, the music shows freedom and movement. The song also influenced Lennon’s decision about his political responsibilities and about their expressing with his music (Wiener 1991: 61). Lennon was the first ‘Beatle’ to adopt a more critical and rebellious stance, he saw the decade as a period of new possibilities: “*The thing the Sixties did was to show us the possibility and the responsibility that we all had* (The U.S. vs. John Lennon: 2006).” Tariq Ali commented that it is necessary to have in mind that people were not aware of Lennon’s shift in thinking. He knew that due to the atmosphere in the society and due to the radicalization of culture, it is necessary for the Beatles to engage as well (The U.S. vs. John Lennon: 2006).

Just around the same time a new song by the Rolling Stones was released which spoke about similar issues as *'Revolution'* did. Often confronted with the Beatles' single, *'Street Fighting Man'* seemed to deliver a complete opposite message of an appeal. The contrasts between the songs' nature, temperament and sound; between "All I can tell you is brother you have to wait." and "Cause summer's here and the time is right for fighting in the street [...]" was not omitted by the media and the Beatles were often criticised for their stance on the current situation as expressed in the song.

Since it is not possible, and would be inaccurate, to see British pop music as an isolated unit which did not react to international influences, it is necessary to take its most substantial influence, the United States, into account. It is clear that artists of both sides of the Atlantic Ocean interacted, listened to each other and were influenced by the same root sources as is already noticeable from the fact that musicians from both countries competed in both US and UK charts.

In 1969 the Woodstock festival took place in the United States, featuring some of the British performers, such as The Who or Joe Cocker, as well. The festival functioned as a deep political and anti-war statement and many would claim that one could not go to Woodstock without expressing any political statement because Woodstock itself was a political statement. Often seen as the most powerful anti-war declaration ever made, Jimi Hendrix's performance of *'Star Spangled Banner'* changed the way guitar was played. Hendrix used his instrument to create bomb, bullet and peoples' screaming noises and distorted sound to demonstrate his protest stance.

In 1969, after their wedding ceremony, John Lennon and Yoko Ono travelled to the Hilton hotel in Amsterdam, where they staged a protest they called *'Bed-In for Peace'*. Each day from 25 March to 31 March, the couple invited the press to their hotel room and answered questions regarding this staged anti-Vietnam-War protest event (Archer: 2009).

During their second *'Bed-In'* in Montreal, Canada, Lennon performed a newly-written song titled *'Give Peace a Chance'*. Commonly regarded as the *'anthem'* of the anti-war movement, the song had been sung by thousands of demonstrators and the chorus "all we are saying is give peace a chance" has become one of its main symbols.

Lennon and Ono were later interviewed in London on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1969 by David Wigg about what they hoped to achieve from their activities. Wigg asked them about reactions and actions that resulted from their protest, while Lennon stated that apart from getting a film and an album, many people from all around the world wrote to them and expressed their support. When Wigg expressed an idea that it would be probably better if people actually went out and did something more, John responded:

*“So you go out and do it. If we inspired you to do something positive, we say we've done something positive. You know, you say, 'Well I can do better than that.' Do it. That's the point (Beatles Ultimate Experience: The Beatles Interviews Database: undated).”*

In the interview they also discussed the idea of everyone staying in bed for a week. Wigg stated that if many people would protest in bed for peace, the whole country would sink to a complete standstill. Lennon reacted:

*“Well, wouldn't it be better than producing arms and bombs. Imagine if the American army stayed in bed for a week and the Vietnamese army. Or Nixon... and chairman Mao. Imagine if the whole world stayed in bed. There'd be peace for a week and they might get to feel what it was like [...] (Beatles Ultimate Experience: The Beatles Interviews Database: undated).”*

Whether some consider Lennon and Ono's activism an ineffective work of protest which did not cause any significant change in the political situation, it has undoubtedly endured as a memorable event which dragged plenty of attention.

Vietnam showed people that the government was willing to sacrifice young lives for old fears and distant threats and that it was not reluctant to use war as a means of dispelling youth's sovereignty. The war, in a way, united many people from all around the world in one of the biggest protest movements ever experienced. The contrast between power and peril or joy and fear became the central tension that helped to define the late



Sixties youth culture. Since rock music reflected this tension in quite a substantial measure, it became one of the most relevant oppositions to the jeopardy (Gilmore: 1990).

## **6 Race and immigration**

Race and immigration policy was at the top of the political agenda in the decade of the Sixties and during the Wilson period in office it ranked among the most discussed issues the government was facing. The Sixties were bearing consequences of the post-war immigration policy and the United Kingdom was changing into a more multi-ethnic and, together with it, more multi-cultural country. Despite the late Sixties and the early Seventies development of a fairly favourable discrimination legislative, these developments did not reflect the public opinion. Although many dark-skinned immigrants were often the second or third generation living in Britain, they still struggled to get a job at forefront posts and were often discriminated in education and housing as well. The decade saw a widespread concern about further extensive immigration to Britain, while it was not a concern about a possible over-population, but rather about the widespread perception that the inflow of migrants would disrupt the “*long-held conceptions of white British national identity* (Donnelly 2005: 112).” Adapting to the reality of post-war and post-colonial migration was a very unpleasant feature for many Britons. Many were also concerned that if the situation was being disregarded it would lead to unsettling race riots. Members of the young generation were, however, not very prejudiced against the immigrants, in fact, they were often interested in social and cultural interaction. The generation of young immigrants soon began to make their mark through the arts, while black and Asian ethnic influences were one of the first to leave their marks in Sixties music (Donnelly 2005: 111-112, Shaw 1992: 43).

As one of the contributors, within the meaning of bringing the Caribbean music to mainstream, can be considered a folk band the Spinners, who were the first multiracial music group to have a significant success in the United Kingdom.

### **6.1 Ska and reggae**

New Commonwealth immigrants brought new sounds of Jamaican ska and reggae with them. Being a fusion of Jamaican and American R&B, ska reached its height during the first half of the Sixties in Jamaica and was consumed on a large scale by the first wave of young Jamaican immigrants in Britain. Reggae arrived in Jamaica rather in the late Sixties and was more inspired by traditional Jamaican music. Distributed by plenty of independent labels, early Sixties ska and reggae records later helped to transform teenage Britain in a substantial measure. Chris Blackwell, founder of the *Island records*,

commented on the era: “*We were just about the first people who decided to record Jamaican artists making popular music for Jamaican audience* (Reggae Britannia: 2011).” Even though Jamaican music spoke mainly to the West Indian community at first, it soon found support among the white working-class youth. After Chris Blackwell moved his record label from Jamaica to London in 1962, launching with Millie Small’s pop-ska song ‘*My Boy Lollipop*’, Jamaican music became more available for the UK audience (Lange 2002: 451-452). In the United Kingdom ska was being referred to as ‘*blue beat*’ and gained numbers of followers among young members of the Mod subculture. A track certainly ranking among the most popular with young Mod ska fans was ‘*Al Capone*’ by Prince Buster, released in 1965 (The Mod Generation: undated). Elements of Caribbean influence were also often visible in British Mods’ wardrobe. Reggae soon found sympathisers not just in the Britain’s Jamaica-born population but also among the newly emerged Skinhead sub-culture (Donnelly 2005: 46-47, Reggae Britannia: 2011). In the first half of the Sixties young British Mods were often meeting in the dance halls with members of another sub-culture originated in Jamaica – Rude Boys. Rude Boys were immigrants who brought their music, mainly ska, reggae and soul, with them to Britain. As certain aspects of these two sub-cultures blended together, they brought forth a new culture of Skinheads who became inevitably associated with the same music genres (Kmeny – Skinheads: 2015). Many of the Sixties ska records were instrumental but several of those which included lyrics created an important sub-group commonly called ‘rude songs’, for example ‘*Birth Control*’ by Lloydie and the Lowbites, which often had sexual subtext and helped to encourage the concept of the Rude boy sub-culture (Bottom 2002: 495). A very controversial song, which was in fact banned from several clubs and BBC, was Max Romeo’s ‘*Wet Dream*’. It became highly popular among Skinheads thanks to its rebel beat and risqué lyrics. Commenting on the song’s effect, Max Romeo said that there were plenty of anti-social feelings among these young and that they had no way to express them. When he emerged with his song, he was perceived as a rebel who enabled these people to express the anger they were withholding (Reggae Britannia: 2011).

The first reggae record to achieve number one in the UK charts was ‘*The Israelites*’ by Desmond Dekker. Reaching many of those who had never even heard the word ‘reggae’ before, the song is rooted in the ideas of the Rastafarian religion and is

still popular in Jamaica to the present day (Reggae Britannia: 2011). The lyrics depict the everyday struggle of a man who has to earn a living for his family:

*“Get up in the morning, slaving for bread, sir  
So that every mouth can be fed”*

Many of Jamaican musicians, such as Desmond Dekker or Jimmy Cliff, became popular performers for example in ‘*Flamingo Club*’ in Wardour Street or ‘*Ram Jam*’ in Brixton. The first ska record entering the UK charts was ‘*Kings of Kings*’ by Ezz Reco and the Launchers, released in 1964 (Donnelly 2005: 46-47, *The Mod Generation*: undated).

Taking inspiration from these Jamaican styles, several British artists have also made peripheral references to ska or reggae attempting to imitate similar rhythm or other aspects and using unusual instruments. The Beatles’ ‘*Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da*’ from the 1968 album *The Beatles* and ‘*I Call Your Name*’ (1964) serve as representative examples. Some of the later songs by Paul McCartney, such as ‘*Another Day*’ (1970), are also generally considered to be influenced by the reggae beat.

In the Seventies reggae became a global music genre and was often used by British black communities as a means to express their frustration with the white society and its culture of privilege (Donnelly 2005: 46-47).

## 7 Use of recreational drugs

Another term which especially the later Sixties bear is a ‘psychedelic era’ due to the initiated drug influence. As highly controversial can be regarded the question whether the use of drugs influenced the music and musicians’ popularity in a positive or in a negative manner. There are numerous songs with either a positive attitude or an anti-drug attitude.

Under the influence of music, many youths were encouraged to follow their idols and use hallucinogenic drugs such as cannabis or LSD when listening to psychedelic music, often in order to experience and understand the mood and feelings the musicians have during composing and playing. On the basis of the Wootton Report from December 1968, there were over 3,000 people in Britain convicted for possessing cannabis in 1968, with the vast majority being white youths under 25 (Donnelly 2005: 154).

In February 1967 British Sunday Tabloid, the *News of the World*, published a claim that the Rolling Stones’ singer Mick Jagger had taken LSD at a party in Roehampton. It then transpired that the reporters had only spoken to Brian Jones, the Rolling Stones guitarist, and that he only admitted taking hashish. The following weekend, nevertheless, the police took away a collection of recreational drugs from Keith Richards’s country house and charged Richards with “*knowingly allowing the drugs to be consumed at his house*” (Donnelly 2005: 153) and Jagger for possessing drugs. They received prison sentences of a year and three months respectively. Many considered the sentences way too severe and several Rolling Stones fans in Britain and the United States united to protest. The day after they had been driven to jail, Jagger and Richards were granted bail pending. Later that year Richard’s conviction was rescinded, and Jagger’s prison sentence was changed to a one-year conditional discharge. The then *Times* editor William Rees-Mogg wrote an article in which he argued that it was unacceptable for Jagger to be treated more strictly than any other British citizen simply on the grounds of his public image (Donnelly 2005: 152-153). Some of the others, however, did not see it in quite the same way as Rees-Mogg did. Lord Chief Justice Parker took a different stance on Jagger’s sentence:

*“You are, whether you like it or not, the idol of a large number of the young in this country. Being in that position, you have very grave responsibilities. If you do come to be punished, it is only*

*natural that those responsibilities should carry higher penalties*  
(cited in Donnelly 2005: 153).”

It was not just cannabis and LSD that was discussed in the musical sphere. The Rolling Stones had drawn attention to benzodiazepines and immortalised them in popular music as “mother’s little helper” in the eponymous song from their 1966 *Aftermath* album (Pemberton: 2014). The main protagonist of the song is a mother who, according to the lyrics, “*needs something today to calm her down*”, since she has been experiencing a hectic life of a housewife. The drug mentioned as “*a little yellow pill*” may refer to Valium (diazepam) which was often prescribed by doctors to help their patients free themselves from stress and anxiety from the 1960s onwards (Pemberton: 2014).

*“She goes running for the shelter of her mother's little helper  
And it helps her on her way, gets her through her busy day”  
[...]  
“Doctor, please, some more of these  
Outside the door, she took four more”*

As the lyrics suggest, the pills were highly popular among housewives and were dispensed in outrageous numbers during the Sixties and early Seventies. It was not until the 1980s that they were acknowledged to lead to serious levels of addiction and have numerous side-effects (Warner: 2012).

The Beatles’ monumental album from 1967, *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, was the first concept album ever made. Becoming the top selling UK album of all time, the eighth Beatles album was revolutionary and sounded like nothing before or since (It Was 40 Years Ago Today: 2007). It was highly experimental, not just in its music and lyrics but also in its cover design, which the *Rolling Stone* called “*the most enduring image of the psychedelic era*” (Rolling Stone: 2012), and was influenced by Indian mysticism and by the members’ drug experience.

The album has, nevertheless, raised certain feelings of controversy and the song ‘*A Day in the Life*’ was even banned from the BBC broadcast because the line which said: “*I’d love to turn you on*” was considered inappropriate. ‘*With a Little Help from My Friends*’, another track on the album, was also criticised because it referred to drug use with its lyrics “*I get high with a little help from my friends*” (Kurlansky 2007: 216-217).

McCartney commented on the song lyrics: “[...] *because it was the pot era, we had to slip in a little reference: ‘I get high!’* (The Beatles Bible: undated).”

A song which many describe as a ‘psychedelic masterpiece’ is ‘*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*’. This outstanding Beatles track is often regarded as a song talking about drugs because its title appears to spell ‘LSD’. Lennon himself, however, denied this connection for several times, claiming that the inspiration for the song had come from his son Julian who once drew a picture of a “*strange-looking woman flying around*” and called it ‘Lucy in the sky with diamonds’ (Runtagh: 2017). As Lennon once stated in an interview for the *Rolling Stone*:

“[...] *I swear to God, or swear to Mao, or to anybody you like, I had no idea [it] spelled L.S.D.* (Wenner: 1971).”

Since Lennon was known for being very outright about the role drugs played in his song-writing, it seems illogical that he would lie about the true inspiration for ‘*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*’, although lines such as “*a girl with kaleidoscope eyes*” or “*with plasticine porters with looking glass ties*” might suggest otherwise. He openly attributed songs such as ‘*She Said, She said*’ or ‘*Tomorrow Never Knows*’ from the Beatles’ 1966 album *Revolver* to his LSD experience. His 1969 song ‘*Cold Turkey*’ which he recorded with Plastic Ono Band was then described as a “*musical self-portrait written in the midst of his own excruciating heroin withdrawal*” by Lennon (Runtagh: 2017).

## **7.1 Psychedelic rock**

Emerging in the second half of the Sixties, psychedelic rock<sup>2</sup> is a genre commonly associated with drug-use-influenced music the most. Although it centred on the United States’ West Coast, featuring bands such as the Grateful Dead, the Doors or the Jefferson Airplane, it soon spread to the rest of the country and later to Europe where it became a major rock phenomenon. The American stage comprised more nihilistic rendition of psychedelic music, represented in bands as the Velvet Underground, as well as more psychotic versions characterised by droning guitar motives and amplified feedback, as presented by the 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators. Being much less aggressive, the British scene was

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<sup>2</sup> Also commonly called ‘acid rock’, as a reference to the most influential psychedelic drug of the decade – lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD).

rather based on surrealism and minimalism and often comprised elements and instruments of Eastern culture, such as the sitar (O'Brien: undated).

The British psychedelic scene was forming around regular performances of bands such as Tomorrow or the Crazy World of Arthur Brown, however, one of the British leading and most popular psychedelic bands was Pink Floyd. The influence of psychedelia in Pink Floyd's music became noticeable as their songs were becoming a fusion of "*lengthy explorations of feedback and echoed effects* (DeRogatis 2003: 125)." Tracks such as '*Astronomy Domine*' or '*Interstellar Overdrive*', both featured on the band's debut album *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn* (1967), are heavily experimental in both its instrumental and (in the case of the former) lyrical aspect. Creating the B-side of the '*Arnold Layne*' single (1967), '*Let's Roll Another One*' raised much controversy by censors who objected that the song's title and lyrics refer to marijuana and the song thus had to be retitled '*Candy and a Currant Bun*'. Being based on Syd Barrett's vocals and Richard Wright's organ, their later songs such as '*See Emily Play*' or '*Scarecrow*' were lyrically less provocative but no less melodically effective (DeRogatis 2003: 126).

Many of the formerly established British rock bands began to integrate psychedelic elements into their music (O'Brien: undated). The Beatles' music inspired film makers as well. George Dunning directed the 1968 *Yellow Submarine* cartoon featuring the Beatles as 'Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' on a psychedelic Pop-Art submarine voyage to save the undersea land of '*Pepperlandia*' (Blistein: 2018).

Speaking of the protest song as of music of 'message', the psychedelic song could then be described as music of 'mood'. It is therefore understandable that the psychedelic era meant transformations in both the lyrical part of songs and the sound. Being strongly influenced by blues, Cream's 1966 track '*I Feel Free*' is an example of a song which is not in a great measure based on the lyrics, but rather expresses its psychedelic mood through other means. The two verses, as well as the chorus, are based on the same harmonies as the opening riff. The whole concept of freedom and motion is emphasised by, firstly, the overlaying of the guitar riff against the vocals' rhythm and, secondly, by the electronic distancing of the voice. These features seem to induce similar feelings as of those who physically experience LSD (Whiteley 2003: 7-9). Commenting on their song, Cream emphasised the "*importance of absorbing different musical styles and then*



*coming up with original ideas* (Whiteley 2003: 9).” Just as the overall harmony, the lyrics suggest the mood of a drug experience:

*“Dance floor is like the sea*

*Ceiling is the sky*

*You're the sun and as you shine on me”*

## 8 Consumerism and materialist life-style

As Britain was heading to a new period of affluence, the coming and the growing importance of mass media and to them related advertising contributed to the growth of consumerism from the second half of the Fifties on. Britain seemed to have entered a state of high-spending consumer society. By 1957, there was an approximate £1004 million spend on durable goods by British consumers; only three years later, this figure had increased by 45 per cent (Marwick 1996: 110, Sandbrook 2006: 106). The emphasis suddenly shifted rather on the needs of an individual and often raised very unrealistic expectations of a life-style which could never be achieved by many. Nevertheless, this consumer life-style was welcomed by many from the working-class and especially its youth who usually found themselves with some spare money and therefore could enjoy material benefits of capitalism more than ever before. Young people were indeed the main target group of many sellers oriented on consumer goods (Donnelly 2005: 195, Shaw 1992: 17-18). Peter York remembers the Sixties as a young consumer:

*“My own sixties memories seem to be about things – having them and wanting them. Early on my parents acquire a washing machine [...] I am fascinated because of the allusion to computers. A bit later I get a gramophone (pre-stereo) called Bush, which has won a kind of award. It looks slick [...] (cited in Donnelly 2005: 29-30).”*

What is considered to be of particular significance are the paradoxes in which the youth culture seemed to be grounded. Even though many of the young criticised consumerism and material values, they were deeply involved in the material world and even more so when it regarded consumption of music. Their rejection of affluence did, ironically, not apply for example to buying records or record players (Shaw 1992: 17-20, 23). As Donnelly (2005: 28) writes: “[N]ever before had the critics of materialism been able to voice their objections from such a comfortable economic position.” Many youths expressed their countercultural feelings with extravagant fashion choices but changed their style nearly every week in order to maintain the pace with the latest fashion trends. As the lyrics of the Kinks’ 1966 song ‘*Dedicated Follower of Fashion*’ suggest: “*Eagerly pursuing all the latest fads and trends, [...] One week he’s in polka-dots, the next week he’s in stripes.*” These trends were, however, dictated to them by the commercial world

they were so fiercely trying to object to. Another line from the song describes the “*Carnabetian army*” which refers to Carnaby Street – often described as a heart of the ‘*Swinging London*’ and one of the popular fashion centres of the Sixties Britain (Deller 2012: 104).

*“The paradox of consumerism is that it offers a vision of personal freedom through economic means – the opportunity for individuals to take advantage of their own means for extravagant display – and yet maintains a dominant order that potentially constrains personal liberty (Miles 1998: 32).”*

As Marwick (1991: 93) mentions, pop music was, in many respects, an ideal paradigm of culture as commodity created by the modern market for it was firmly based in technology – in particular electric amplification of the guitar. For live performances and studio recordings, even more sophisticated electronics was needed. If the artists aimed to have a national, let alone an international, success, a successful record was essential. In addition, specialist press started to play its part as *New Musical Express* or *Melody Maker* were compiling hit-parades (Marwick 1991: 93, Mullen 2017: 3).

Since advertising was becoming supremely important in the world of mass-consumption, the world of popular music had to adapt to these conditions. If musicians wanted to become commercially successful they had to have an impressive advertising campaign. Given the modern consumer life-style of the young, the musicians’ commercial success was soon used to promote not only their records but several merchandising. When the Beatles, for example, successfully ended their first United States tour, their manager, Brian Epstein, sought to exploit their merchandising potential and launched over 150 products including t-shirts, badges, calendars, stickers or diaries featuring the band members’ faces (The Beatles vs the Rolling Stones: It’s Not Only Rock ‘n’ Roll: 2016). Furthermore, the Sixties started a phenomenon of using pop songs in advertising. Since it was presumably difficult to escape the “*commercial exploitation*” (Binkowski: 2016) in music business even for artists with more of anti-capitalist attitude, many of them soon began to record commercial jingles for different consumer goods. The Rolling Stones’ unmistakable sound featured a 1964 Rice Krispies cereal commercial for Kellogg’s Great Britain. Created by J. Walter Thompson advertising agency,

the commercial was aired only for a short period of time and was almost unseen by other than the UK audience (Binkowski: 2016, Meyer: 2016).

Since it was difficult to escape the material world in the decade of the Sixties, it is understandable that music discussing these materialistic objects people liked to surround themselves with was highly popular. There were plenty of songs either speaking in favour of material values, such as the Beatles' *'Money'*. On the other hand, there were several of those opposing the materialist life-style. An early Seventies song by George Harrison *'Living in the Material World'* from the eponymous album is clearly discussing the contrast between the material and the spiritual world and expresses the anxiety of a man who is, to quote the lyrics, "*caught up in the material world*".

A rock band The Who, whose *'My Generation'* has been mentioned before, were then known for smashing their instruments during performances. Explaining these acts as an attack on commodities which were perceived to block the way between audience, performers and the music, Pete Townshend, The Who's lead guitarist, once stated: "*If I stood on stage worrying about the price of a guitar then I'm not really playing music. I'm getting involved in material values*" (Cohen 1991: 175).

## 9 Conclusion

The thesis aimed to depict the role of popular culture, particularly popular music, in the lives and identities of a young generation of Britons in the 1960s based on the examination of selected social phenomena of the Sixties society.

As was mentioned several times before, British society was experiencing a great transformation which was apparent from the late nineteen-fifties onwards and was common to perhaps all countries of the western world. The new wave of economic growth and prosperity carried along a social and cultural change and a certain shift in thinking supported, to a great extent, by the newly emerged culture of the young. Different opportunities accompanied by changes in lifestyles and living standards and a larger cultural interchange than ever before had raised a revolution. A revolution, however, as Marwick points out, not based on a specific political or economic problem, but rather coming from the overall situation in the new, post-war society. As Britain was heading to a new period of economic growth and affluence, its youth sought to establish its own identity and deviated from the attitude of the previous generations. With its own specific patterns of behaviour and spending, the young became a significant social marker in various aspects of British popular culture.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The theoretical background comprises topics of the economic and political situation in Great Britain in the 1960s, the phenomenon of youth culture and outlines the main influences popular culture has on world society and politics. The following four chapters describe selected social phenomena as reflected in British popular music while also exploring the role of British youth culture in this respect.

Chapter 4 deals with the topic of rebellion and protest. The 1960s were, to a great extent, defined by a variety of demonstrations and protest movements with many different backgrounds. Whether dealing with the issues of race and gender discrimination, social criticism or anti-war matter, they all seemed to be united in the form of protest (particularly rock) music. Rock was often regarded an aggressive youth music which substantiates rebellion and the breaking of social conventions. Given this general impression, many would argue that rock music was only able to disrupt or criticize, however, the fact that it was capable of unifying a mass of young people aiming for the

same objectives is significant enough to remark that it would be incorrect determining rock music as trivial or unimportant.

Chapter 5 discusses issues of race and immigration and their impact on the British popular music scene. Policy of race and immigration was a highly discussed issue in the second half of the Sixties. The most significant immigration to have an impact on the British music scene was the one from Jamaica. Bringing the energetic sounds of ska and reggae with them, the Jamaican immigrants soon found a way to interact with young Britons and affected firstly the Mod sub-culture and then, in the later Sixties, contributed to the creation of the new Skinhead subculture.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the use of recreational drugs which the decade was inevitably associated with. The reasons why young people used drugs may have been many: the feelings of alienation they felt from the generation of their parents, seeing their peers dying in a war they never understood or approaching their musical idols and the music they played. It is highly probable that they were a combination of all these aspects together with the desire to experiment, not only with drugs but also with music or fashion. What seems certain is that drugs have reshaped popular music a great deal. Not only did they contribute to the creation of a new music genre, they also had a significant impact on already established British musicians.

The final chapter discusses the topic of consumer and materialist society. With the new coming period of economic growth and affluence when the earnings were increasing quicker than prices, the nation's youth suddenly discovered it has some spare money to spend and could therefore enjoy advantages of the material society more than ever before. Young people were indeed the main target group of many sellers oriented on consumer goods and created a huge spending power. With the expansion of mass media and globalisation of life the access to music became much easier – and just like nearly everything else in the Sixties, music was being consumed on a large scale.

It is ironic that British youth had on one hand a critique stance on the world of materialism and consumption, but on the other hand created a substantial part of it. Young people sought to express their criticism through clothes they wore and music they listened to, however, these aspects were still products of the material-oriented society they so stubbornly criticised.

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## **11 Abstract**

This thesis aims to depict the role of popular culture, particularly popular music, in the lives and identities of a young generation of Britons in the 1960s based on the examination of selected social phenomena of the Sixties society. The decade has gone down in history due to many different aspects; the often foremost emphasised being youth, rebellion, consumerism or iconic music and fashion. All these aspects have created a worldwide phenomenon which still seems to attract more attention than any other period of the twentieth century. The decade of the Sixties did not only recast British society but has also left indelible marks in the world of popular culture.

What followed the sharp rise in the birth rate in the post-war years was an appearance of a new generation of young people which is nowadays seen as one of the substantial international influences that shaped the whole decade. With the new coming period of economic growth and affluence, British youth sought to establish its own identity and deviated from the attitude of the previous generations. Having its own patterns of behaviour and spending, the young became a significant social marker in various aspects of British popular culture.

The research comprises four selected social phenomena – rebellion and protest, race and immigration issues, use of recreational drugs and consumerist life-style – developed in the 1960s and aims to explore and describe the way these aspects affected the world of British popular music while also focusing on the position of British youth culture in these specific features.

## 12 Resumé

Cílem práce je vystihnout úlohu populární kultury, především populární hudby, v životech mladé generace Britů v šedesátých letech dvacátého století. Tato úloha je založená na zkoumání vybraných společenských fenoménů šedesátých let. Šedesátá léta se zapsala do historie díky různým aspektům, z nichž bývají nejčastěji vyzdvihovány mládí, revolta, konzumní styl života nebo jedinečná hudba a móda. Všechny tyto aspekty vytvořily celosvětový fenomén, který stále přitahuje více pozornosti než kterákoli jiná dekáda dvacátého století. Nejen, že šedesátá léta přetvořily britskou společnost, ale také zanechaly nesmazatelné stopy ve světě populární kultury.

Prudký nárůst porodnosti v poválečných letech měl za následek vznik nové generace mladých lidí. Tato mladá generace je v dnešní době vnímána jako jeden z významných mezinárodních vlivů, který formoval celá šedesátá léta. S příchodem nové éry blahobytu a hospodářské prosperity začala britská mládež hledat způsob, jak si vytvořit vlastní identitu, a snažila se distancovat od postojů předchozích generací. Mladí lidé se stali se svými modely chování a peněžními výdaji významným společenským ukazatelem v různých aspektech britské populární kultury.

Výzkum zahrnuje čtyři vybrané společenské úkazy – revoltu a protesty, otázku rasy a imigrace, rekreační užívání drog a konzumní životní styl – které se vyvinuly v šedesátých letech, a zabývá se zkoumáním a popisem způsobů, jakými tyto úkazy ovlivnily britskou populární hudbu. Zároveň se soustřeďuje na roli, kterou v těchto fenoménech sehrála právě nová mladá generace.

## 13 Appendices

### 1. A group of Teddy Boys.



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### 2. Young members of the Mod sub-culture.



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### 3. Mick Jagger at a demonstration in Grosvenor Square in London.



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### 4. John Lennon and Yoko Ono surrounded by the press during their 'Bed-In for peace' protest.



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**5. Desmond Dekker performing with The Aces.**



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**6. A group of Skinheads walking past a group of Hippies in Piccadilly Circus.**



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**7. Cover of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, The Beatles' 1967 album.**



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**8. A group of young people in Carnaby Street, Soho, London.**



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**9. Pete Townshend, the Who's lead guitarist, smashing his guitar during a performance.**



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