

Hanan Hadžajlić

Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia

Heavy Metal and Globalization

Abstract: Heavy Metal is a specific, alternative music genre that exists on the fringe of popular music, where it is classified by its own culture: musical style, fashion, philosophy, symbolic language and political activism. For over five decades of the existence of heavy metal, its fans have developed various communication systems through different types of transnational networks, which significantly influenced the development of all aspects of metal culture, which relates both to divisions within the genre itself and to various philosophical and political aspects of heavy metal activism – of a global heavy metal society. Going through the processes of globalization, and so glocalization, heavy metal is today a significant part of popular culture in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia; while in some societies it represents the cultural practice of a long tradition with elements of cultural tourism, in some countries where conservative, religious policies are dominant, it represents subversive practices and encounters extreme criticism as well as penalties. Globalization in the context of the musical material itself is based on the movement from idiomatic, cultural and intercultural music patterns to trans-cultural – where heavy metal confronts the notion of one's own genre. Post-metal, the definition of a genre that goes beyond the aesthetic concepts of heavy metal, contains the potential of overcoming the genre itself.

Keywords: heavy metal, globalization, glocalization, metal community, post-metal

Heavy metal

The term *heavy metal* was first used in the mid-seventies as a disdainful label of an extreme musical genre known as hard rock.¹ According to the *Oxford Dictionary of New Words*, heavy metal is defined as a style of loud energetic rock music, characterized by the use of heavily amplified instruments (mostly guitars, bass guitars and drums), intense and fast beats (which refers to active, intense, fast rhythm and pulse), often energetic and spectacular performance and a generally rough and aggressive music style; as a later stage of the development of hard rock.² Often, just referred to by the phrase 'metal', it represents a musical subgenre of rock and roll and an explicit subculture of fans ('metalheads') with its own rules, rituals, conflicting sets of

¹ Julia Elliot ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 350.

² Ibid.

ideologies and fashion.³ With the ascendancy of Christianity and Christian culture in the Western world over the past two millennia, music has always been a problematic area for both religious and secular authority.⁴ Moreover, when it comes to heavy metal, a bunch of “satanic noise“, which critic Robert Duncan described as “pimpily, prole, putrid, unchic, unsophisticated, anti-intellectual (but impossibly pretentious), dismal, abysmal, terrible, horrible, and stupid [...]”;⁵ made by “slack-jawed, alpaca-haired, bulbous-inseamed imbeciles in jackboots and leather and chrome *for* slack-jawed, alpaca-haired, downy-mustachioed imbeciles in cheap, too-large T-shirts with pictures of comic-book Armageddon ironed on the front”;⁶ self-proclaimed moral authorities continue to frown upon the ecstasies of revelry and lusty songs, attempting to room them out.⁷

Heavy metal music is a controversial subject that stimulates visceral rather than intellectual reactions in both its partisans and its detractors. Many people hold that heavy metal music along with drugs and promiscuous sex, proves that some parts of youth culture have gone beyond acceptable limits. To many of its detractors heavy metal embodies a shameless attack on the central values of Western civilization. But to its fans it is the greatest music ever made.⁸

The term *heavy metal* was used by William Burroughs in 1964, in his science-fiction novel *The Soft Machine* (part of the *The Nova Trilogy*, along with the *Nova Express* and *The Ticket That Exploded*, the theme of which is control a novel depicted by machines that control people), which represents culture as the largest control machine. His character Uranian Willy is described as the “Heavy Metal Kid”⁹

Uranian Willy The Heavy Metal Kid. Also known as Willy The Rat. He wised up the marks. His metal face moved in a slow smile as he heard the twittering supersonic threats through antennae embedded in his translucent skull.¹⁰

³ William Phillips and Brian Cogan, *Encyclopedia of Heavy Metal Music* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2009), 28.

⁴ Michael Moynihan, Didrik Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2003), 9.

⁵ Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2009), 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 9.

⁸ Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music And Its Culture*, 6.

⁹ William S. Burroughs, *Nova Express* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *heavy metal* has been used for several centuries as a term for murder and toxic compounds; as a technical term in chemistry, metallurgy and discussions on the topic of pollution.¹¹

“Heavy metal poisoning” is a diagnosis that has long had greater cultural currency than Burroughs’s book has had, and the scientific and medical uses of the term “heavy metal” are even cognate, since they infuse the music with values of danger and weight, desirable characteristics in the eyes of late 1960s rock musicians.¹²

For many rock historians, heavy metal began with white, mostly British musicians who had copied African American blues music. Groups such as the Yardbirds, Cream and The Jeff Beck Group combined the rock and roll style of Chuck Berry with early blues of Muddy Waters and Howlin Wolf.¹³ The popularization of white guitarists such as Eric Clapton or Jimmy Page meant the oblivion of the black American musicians that Clapton and Page had imitated. According to Walser, in such a way the goal was to push Jimmy Hendrix, the greatest virtuoso of rock guitar in the sixties, to the edge of musical history.¹⁴ According to Michael Moynihan and Didrik Söderlind, heavy metal exists on the periphery of pop music, as an exaggerated picture and ventilation of masculine lust.¹⁵ Culturally speaking, rock and roll music stood squarely on the race and class-marginalized shoulders of rhythm and blues (but it was mostly made by middle-class white males in partnership with companies run by white males).¹⁶

History and subgenres of heavy metal

According to Walser, heavy metal began in Birmingham, England, an industrial city whose working class formed bands such as Black Sabbath and Judas Priest in the late 1960s to early 1970s.¹⁷ These heavy metal groups operated in abandoned industrial spaces, especially suitable for music that flourished during the American industrialization period. As the work of industrial production was invisible in mass media representations, the music work that was held and reinvested popular music actually took place at marginalized locations.¹⁸ Bands such as Led Zeppelin, Deep

¹¹ Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 8.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 9.

¹⁶ Gerd Bayer ed., *Heavy Metal Music in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2016), 30.

¹⁷ Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Purple and Black Sabbath are often classified in the first generation of heavy metal groups (late sixties), while the second generation of heavy metal groups (which were active during the seventies) is represented with bands such as Kiss, AC/DC, Aerosmith, Judas Priest, Ted Nugent, Rush, Rainbow, and Blue Oyster Cult. Scorpions, originally from Germany, became the first successful band in the history of metal from a non-English-speaking country.¹⁹ The late seventies and early eighties in the United Kingdom were marked by the new movement, the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM), which spawned bands such as Iron Maiden, Def Leppard, Haze, Motorhead, Avenger, Saxon, Raven, Angel Witch. In the early 1980s, influenced by speed metal pioneers Motorhead, who incorporated elements of punk rock and heavy metal, a style called thrash metal started to develop in America, led by groups such as Slayer, Megadeth, Testament, Exodus, Possessed, Metallica, and Anthrax. The most famous representatives of the first wave of black metal are Venom (U.K.), Bathory (Sweden) and Celtic Frost (Switzerland). In the far north of the European continent, the seasons dominated by darkness and cold, provided a nurturing environment for black metal,²⁰ the ideology of which incorporates traces of toxic rhetoric including Satanism and fascism.²¹

Troubled working-class white youth that felt the need to compensate personal failures and social inadequacy with violence and aggressive behavior became a new audience for Hitler cults and notions of Aryan identity. Over time, these movements became militant and aggressively advertised through developed networks of media, which led to a large number of supporters throughout Europe.²²

While globalization represents a virtually boundless process, which has capacity to represent the changing possibilities of social autonomy and individual self expression²³ related to constitution of global, nation-transcending, transcultural identity and way of life; glocalization signifies adaptation of values and hybridization of globalization and localization. It is not only a new term, but also a new concept,²⁴ which occurs when media texts are being appropriated, adopted and localized by media audiences.

Another wave of black metal, known as *Norwegian Black Metal*, was led by bands like Mayhem, Burzum, Darkthrone, Immortal, Emperor, Satyricon, Dimmu Borgir, Carpathian Forest, and Gorgoroth. At the same time, black metal bands active

¹⁹ Ibid, 10.

²⁰ Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 7.

²¹ Ibid, 6.

²² Bojana Radovanović, "Ideologies and Discourses: Extreme Narratives in Extreme Metal Music," *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies* 10 (2016): 51–58.

²³ Ronald Niezen, *A World Beyond Difference: Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 35.

²⁴ Victor Roudometof, *Glocalization: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 3.

in America included Judas Iscariot, Black Funeral, Grand Belial's Key. In Britain, the leading group was Cradle of Filth which developed an authentic black/gothic metal style. In Sweden, the main representatives were Marduk, Dissection, Bestial Mockery, Gates of Ishtar. Belgium black metal bands included Enthroned and Ancient Rites. In Finland, these were Behexen, Impaled Nazarene, Archgoat. French bands included Mutilation, Blut Aus Nord. In Germany, the most dominant bands were Absurd, Dark Fortress, Nargaroth. Polish black metal bands included Behemoth, Infernum, Graveland. In Russia, Forest Strea and Tvangeste; in Japan, Bellzlleb, Sigh and Sabbat. Death metal started in the U.S., in Florida, and the concept of this subgenre, as well as the death metal school, is institutionalized by the term *Florida death metal* and by the work of bands Obituary, Morbid Angel, Deicide, Death, Malevolent Creation. Across America there are groups such as Possessed, Immolation, Cannibal Corpse, Post Mortem, Suffocation, Necrophagia, Deeds Of Flesh. In Britain, the leading band is Napalm Death (which synthesizes elements of grind core, crust punk and death metal), as well as Carcass and Bolt Thrower. In Sweden, there are Unleashed, Disember, Entombed, Carnage, and later, Swedish melodic death metal is developed, led by groups such as In Flames, At The Gates, Dark Tranquility.

Can a genre truly exist until it is named? Some movements are named during their time period and other musical genres are named after they are gone. In the academic study of music, the terms “proto” and “post” are used as devices that situate a particular movement in time. An example of this would be calling Blue Cheer a “proto-metal band”, because they existed and played a musical form similar to metal in a time period before most critics used the term heavy metal, or calling a band like Messuggah or Om “Post-metal”, because they play music that has clearly evolved beyond the parameters of heavy metal.²⁵

From the first form of heavy metal, which most often refers to traditional heavy metal or classical metal, many subgenres have developed with their internal divisions; thrash metal, death metal, black metal, power metal, jazz metal, gothic metal, folk metal, party or pop metal, glam metal, metal-core, gore metal, punk metal, doom metal, progressive metal, industrial metal, grind-core, nu metal, post-metal.²⁶ Also, there are subgenres such as deathcore and mathcore, which are actually a hybrid of aesthetic characteristics of hardcore/ punk music and technical/progressive death metal.

²⁵ Phillips and Brian, *Encyclopedia of Heavy Metal Music*, 29.

²⁶ Marita Mirabella, *Heavy Metal and Globalization* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2017), 11.

Cults and globalization

Heavy metal themes and lyrics draw from a wide array of sources, including but not limited to occultism, mythology, history, religions, philosophy, politics, science fiction, as well as conceptions of sexuality, pornography, murder, torture, dissection, rape, necrophilia, and cannibalism. The music is based primarily on high volume and repetitive rhythmic patterns and simple harmonic structures with the emphasis of the flatted fifth (devil's interval); make up and costumes synthesize elements of pagan tradition with the specific style or ideology of a particular group; and performances that incorporate the elements of sacrifice – are in fact elements that are partly or even completely adopted by many of the groups that formed the history of heavy metal.

The devil has always treasured music. What better arena to inspire, cultivate, and propagate his will into the affairs of man? Music serves as both balm and excitant, soothing the savage of awakening dormant passions. In spiritual terms music is magical operation, a vehicle for man to communicate with the gods. Depending on whom the celebrants invoke, this can mean soaring to heaven on the voices of angels or raising beasts from the pits of hell.²⁷

The band becomes a mediator between the audience and the center of power – of a particular ideology, most often based on anti-authoritarianism in the context of the ruling government policies, as well as religions – through the establishment of a new cult, of authority. Walser defines heavy metal more as a system of social labeling than an autonomous set of styles.²⁸ It uses access to music analysis that interprets music details as significant gestural and syntactic units, which organizes narration and other formal conventions and also constitutes a system for social production of meaning – discourse.²⁹ Ideologies such as neo-paganism, Satanism, neo-Nazism, new primitivism, cult of death and psychological illness, anarchism, techno utopianism, futurism, etc. all became the *branches* of the ideology of heavy metal that in the 1980s, in parallel to the development of new subgenres, became the territory of various discourses. In the 1990s, it already established the concepts of individual subgenres and their hybrids, which relate exclusively to music and to all extra-musical idioms; ideologies and performance models.

Walser talks about rebellion and escapism as a movement from something, to another. He defines rebellion as a critique;³⁰ therefore, as political act – or policy. Rejection, alienation, nihilism and misanthropy are, in fact, the starting point of the cultural practice of heavy metal; and according to Walser, they are usually seen as

²⁷ Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 9.

²⁸ Walser, *Running with the Devil*, xiv.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

an attempt to create an alternative identity based on the vision or real experience of an alternative community. In this way, Walser rejects the notion of deviance that for many years represented the heavy metal label in society, due to the lack of convincing arguments.³¹ In addition to creating lyrical concerns and distribution networks, the cause of heavy metal becoming significant to millions of people points to the social climate of the United States during the 1970s and 1980s; the period of economic crises, the discovery of corrupted political leadership, the erosion of public confidence in government and corporate philanthropy, the cruel reduction of social programs, the policy of favoring the richer segments of the population, and the instability of formations such as family and gender roles.³²

In 1986, MTV significantly increased the amount of heavy metal it programmed, initiating a special program called “Headbangers’ Ball”, which became MTV’s most popular show, with 1.3 million viewers each week.³³ In the 1980s and early 1990s, during which metal’s spectacular live shows made it more natural for television (where its important visual dimension could be exploited and presented virtually unchanged)³⁴ fans and musicians initially developed connections across vast distances through transnational networks of photocopied fanzines, paper correspondence, audio cassette trading and concert tours, while peer-sharing has been way to approach heavy metal in many different countries, in different times.³⁵ Commercialization of the new technologies gradually changed sharing practice tools over time, which formed deployed music culture; today, metal fans use e-mail, websites, blogs, YouTube, and MP3s to further these connections.³⁶

In the mid-’90s Asian MTV gave heavy airplay to Tang Dynasty, a mainland Chinese heavy-metal band. Young men in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore started their own musical careers. Modar, a death-metal band, comes from one of Malaysia’s most conservative areas. In 1993, the Malaysian government banned live performances and airplay of heavy metal. A journalist reported that the genre “has a strong following in Malaysia and indicated that conservative Islamic parties were responsible for the ban.”³⁷

The culture had never been hegemonic, but for the media, political and social authorities, it had symbolized the solidarity of youth,³⁸ which metal culture denies,

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, xvii.

³³ Ibid, 12.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mirabella, *Heavy Metal and Globalization*, 13.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, 146.

³⁸ Ibid, 11.

through its fandom activism: a viable cultural and affective alternative for disempowered youths.³⁹ Heavy metal culture in its basic idea represents an antithesis to class divisiveness, consumerism, political authorities and traditional norms of behavior; political behavior, domination of religious institutions, which often results in the incorporation of the heavy metal anarchism into political/heavy metal ideologies as a new media for political activism, because it passes the processes of globalization and also, glocalization. Black metal bands such as Graveland from Poland, Seges Findere from Brazil, Black Command from Netherlands or As Sahar from Malaysia, marked as NSBM bands (National Socialist Black Metal) were influenced by early Norwegian Black Metal scene, whose the most important figure, Varg Vikernes from Burzum, popularized integration of black metal music and neo-Nazism, through cooperation with an organization called Zorn 88 (later the National Socialist Movement of Norway). On the other side, many metal bands not associated with locally oriented political activism, incorporated folklore/traditional instruments and elements into their music; such as qin and zheng zithers and East Asian pentatonicism in the Chinese metal of Tang Dynasty, Balinese gamelan in the death metal of Eternal Madness and the Arab oud in the Israeli metal of Orphaned Land.⁴⁰

Heavy metal subculture becomes a home, a refuge for those dislocated in urban migration, caught between stereotypical racial politics and often fluid urban space divisions brought on by rapacious property development. [...] this internationalized language of stock rebellion and theatrical posturing clearly resonates for youth in Indonesia, Malaysia or Singapore, and offers comfort and identity to those still ambivalent about buying into the post-feudal/colonial capitalist environment that's being rapidly constructed around them.⁴¹

Global

However, the activism of heavy metal, directed towards the global, in the context of explicitly musical elements, exceeds the musical material inherent in a particular subgenre or in general, heavy metal as a category of popular music; it refers to the process of musical thinking that has a primary role in music, especially of bands such as Meshuggah from Sweden, Necromorph from Germany, or Gojira from France. By developing the theory of rhythm through the long-standing practice of extreme technical metal music, innovations related to sound and production; in the context of the genre and culture of heavy metal, these groups go beyond the concepts of style and aesthetics, so their potential can be marked as a path to concepts of post-style and post-aesthetic;

³⁹ Mirabella, *Heavy Metal and Globalization*, 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Harris M. Berger and Paul D. Greene, *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 55.

trans-metal, post-metal, global. While pre-global refers to context of globalized production and consumption⁴², global (or even post-global), in the context of post metal, suggests or initiates the concept of post-production and post-consumption or simply post-industrial, which can be seen as overload of supply in the market. Pre-global represents the production – the process, while global represents the intention.

References

- Bayer, Gerd, ed. *Heavy Metal Music in Britain*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Berger, Harris M., and Paul D. Greene. *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Burroughs, William S. *Nova Express*. New York: Grove Press, 1964.
- Durrani, Shiraz. *Information and Liberation: Writings on the Politics of Information and Librarianship*. Sacramento: Library Juice Press, LLC, 2008.
- Elliot, Julia, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Levina, Marina and Kien Grant. *Post-global Network and Everyday Life*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2010.
- Mirabella, Marita. *Heavy Metal and Globalization*. Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2017.
- Moynihan, Michael, and Didrik Söderlind. *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*. Port Townsend: Feral House, 2003.
- Niezen, Ronald. *A World Beyond Difference: Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2008.
- Phillips, William, and Brian Cogan. *Encyclopedia of Heavy Metal Music*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2009.
- Radovanović, Bojana. "Ideologies and Discourses: Extreme Narratives in Extreme Metal Music." *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies* 10 (2016): 55–58.
- Roudometof, Victor. *Glocalization: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Walser, Robert. *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1993.
- Weinstein, Deena. *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2009.

Article received: March 30, 2018

Article accepted: May 10, 2018

Preliminary report – Short Communications

⁴² Marina Levina, Grant Kien, *Post-global Network and Everyday Life* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 177.