Titus Hjelm
Keith Kahn-Harris
Mark LeVine

Heavy metal as controversy and counterculture

Titus Hjelm is Lecturer in Finnish Society and Culture at UCL. His main areas of expertise are sociology of religion, social problems, social theory, media and popular culture. His recent publications include *Religion and Social Problems* (Routledge, 2011) and *Studying Religion and Society: Sociological Self-Portraits* (ed. with Phil Zuckerman, Routledge, 2012). In addition, he has published several books in Finnish and articles in journals such as *Social Compass* and *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. He is also a member of the internationally acclaimed metal band Thunderstone.

School of Slavonic and East European Studies
UCL
Gower Street
London WC1E 6BT, UK
t.hjelm@ucl.ac.uk

Keith Kahn-Harris is an Honorary Research Fellow and Sessional Lecturer at Birkbeck College, London. He is the author of *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Berg, 2006) and writes the blog Metal Jew (www.metaljew.org).

Birkbeck College
Malet Street, Bloomsbury
London WC1E 7HX, UK
kkahnharris@yahoo.co.uk

Mark LeVine is Professor of modern Middle Eastern history, culture and Islamic Studies at University of California Irvine and Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University, Sweden. He is author and editor of several books, including *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (Random House/Three Rivers Press, 2008), *Impossible Peace: Israel/Palestine Since 1989* (Zed Books, 2009) and the forthcoming *The Five Year Old Who Toppled a Pharaoh* (UC Press, 2012).

Department of History
University of California Irvine
220 Murray Krieger Hall
Irvine, CA 92697-3275, USA
mlevine@uci.edu

Abstract

Social scientific studies of metal music and culture have tended to focus on two distinct aspects of the phenomenon: Firstly, scholars have analysed the social reactions to metal music—especially in the 'moral panics' genre. Secondly, the creation and reproduction of different metal subcultures, or 'scenes', has been an increasingly popular approach. This article brings together

equinoxonline

these two aspects of scholarship by arguing that 'controversy' is an integral aspect of creating metal 'countercultures'. That is, the transgressive aspects of metal make it antagonistic in different social contexts—whether or not this is the intention of scene members themselves—and the metal scene is in turn shaped by these controversies. The first part of the article presents a theoretical approach to controversies and examines the meaning of metal as 'counterculture' in a globalizing world. The second part discusses how the other articles in this special issue each in their own way contribute to the understanding of metal as controversy and counterculture.

Keywords: heavy metal; metal culture; moral panic; transgression

Heavy metal is now over 40 years old. It emerged at the tail end of the 1960s in the work of bands including Iron Butterfly, Vanilla Fudge, Jimi Hendrix, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, and—most importantly—Black Sabbath. In the 1970s and early 1980s, heavy metal crystallized as a genre as bands such as Judas Priest and Iron Maiden removed most of the blues influence on the genre, codifying a set of basic metal characteristics that endure to this day: distorted guitars, aggressive vocals, denim, leather and spikes.

Although sometimes thought of as monolithic, heavy metal has always consisted of divergent styles. In the 1980s, the nascent differences within metal engendered new and widely divergent genres. On the one hand, 'lite' metal bands such as Poison and Def Leppard led metal to embrace pop and rock, with enormous success. On the other hand, thrash metal bands such as Metallica and Slayer inspired a series of 'extreme' metal genres including death, black, and doom metal, and grindcore. In the 1990s and 2000s, metal has followed increasingly diverse musical pathways, developing new sub-genres and hybrids that range from the commercially successful 'nu' metal of the mid to late-1990s, in which metal was fused with hip hop, to the experimental and avant-garde tendencies of 'post' metal bands such as Isis, Neurosis and Celeste.

In broad terms, wherever it is found and however it is played, metal tends to be dominated by a distinctive commitment to 'transgressive' themes and musicality. This collection looks at some of the consequences of heavy metal's transgressions. As we shall outline in this article, metal's transgression has caused it to be a frequently controversial music. Metal has variously embraced, rejected, played with and tried to ignore this controversy. At times, the controversy dies down and the previously transgressive becomes relatively harmless—as in the transformation of Ozzy Osbourne from public enemy to loveable dad. Still, metal remains irrevocably marked by its controversial, transgressive tendencies. Indeed, the various moral panics that metal has been subjected to are not only constitutive, at least in part, of metal scenes, but are encoded in metal's transgression itself. As with hiphop's 'ghetto' roots, metal's history of extreme sonic, lyrical and visual messages continue to give it credibility with new generations of fans today.

Although, as this article and many of the articles making up this special issue of *Popular Music History* demonstrate, controversy and what we call 'counterculture' are often inseparable, we have divided the articles into two sections based on whether the focus is more on the dynamics of controversy or the creation of metal cultures. Here we offer some synthesizing and theoretical thoughts on the chapters that follow.

Heavy metal as controversy

The controversial *image* of heavy metal is something that metal musicians, fans, and researchers often agree upon. The word 'image' is important, because when examined through the theoretical framework discussed below (and the principles of which appear in various forms in many of the articles here), controversies over heavy metal are seen as social reactions to *perceived* deviance, usually triggered by boundary-challenging events. The most common concept used in studying controversy is 'moral panic'. Although in many ways similar to moral panic theory (see Brown in this volume; Critcher 2003), the 'theory' of controversy presented here takes its cue primarily from the constructionist approach to the study of social problems (see Schneider 1985 for a dated but useful overview).

Controversies can be defined as the *activities of individuals or groups making public claims about conditions that are perceived as a threat to certain cherished values and/or material and status interests* (cf. Spector and Kitsuse 2001: 75; Fuller and Myers 1941: 320; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 124–27). This definition has four elements. First, controversies are *materialistic* in the sense that ideas as such do not create controversy; it is people that create controversies (Beckford 1985: 1). Second, controversies have a definitive *public* element. Parents' frustration over their offspring's new Dimmu Borgir record does not constitute a controversy. When this frustration becomes part of public discourse, through letters to the editor in national newspapers, interviews and stories in the media, politicians and religious leaders taking up their cause, and (more recently) blogging about the perceived threat posed by Dimmu Borgir's music, parental frustration takes on a new and more powerful dimension.

Third, controversies are *discursive-symbolic*, because raising public awareness is a process of claims-making (Spector and Kitsuse 2001: 76) and these claims are primarily discursive—that is, involving the intersection of claims to truth and circuits of power and knowledge. Yet they are discursive in a highly symbolic manner in that they are articulated first and foremost through aesthetic production, circulation and consumption. On the other hand, such aesthetic-discursive production can generate cultural discourses, which in response then penetrate into the larger public and political spheres. For example, images of concerned (Christian)

parents burning heavy metal records in the USA in the 1980s convey a powerful symbolic message—a claim—that these particular cultural products are inappropriate, even evil. Similarly, contemporary crackdowns on the metal community in Iran, for example, have targeted heavy metal on a symbolic level by confiscating 'Satanic' paraphernalia such as t-shirts, and forcing metalheads to cut their long hair—a central symbol of the metal culture (LeVine 2008, ch. 5).

Finally, controversies are *subjective* in the sense that it is the *perception* of a condition that provides the framework for claims-making rather than concrete evidence or facts. Perceptions of inappropriateness, deviance, and threat can be independent of the actual conditions, but they can also be influenced by particular 'trigger moments' (see below) which create concern. Thus, controversy is seen as the product of a claims-making process, one in which various elements of the hegemonic culture respond to the aesthetic-political claims of the music by raising awareness of the 'problem' or 'threat' to the wider public, media and political leaders, specifically in a manner that objectifies and reifies it far beyond the original boundaries and meanings of the practices that originally generated the controversy.

Controversy is an integral part of heavy metal culture—almost to the point where it is in the 'nature' of heavy metal to be controversial. This view, however, needs to be qualified by putting heavy metal into a historical context. It could be argued that in the 1980s—the heyday of metal's popularity—it was the *content* of heavy metal (primarily lyrics) *in itself* that was perceived as offensive and dangerous, to youth in particular. The culmination of this concern was the congressional committee hearing in 1985, instigated by Tipper Gore, the wife of Senator Al Gore and spokeswoman of the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC). The hearing, which received wide coverage in the national news media, targeted heavy metal as one of the threatening genres (Walser 1993: 138–45; McDonald 1988; Wright 2000: 373–74; see many of the articles below). Because of the sheer popularity of the genre, the controversy became a battle over wider values in society and about the boundaries of 'appropriate' (youth) popular culture (cf. Springhall 1998). While at the time the PMRC managed to gain favourable media attention for its views, the movement against metal withered alongside the mainstream popularity of its nemesis.

In contrast, very few death or black metal bands (for example) have made headlines despite their explicitly Satanic and/or pornographic imagery or lyrics *per se*. The breaking down of most of the remaining public sexual taboos since the 1980s, along with the 'celebritification' of ageing metal stars such as Black Sabbath's Ozzy Osbourne, Mötley Crüe's Tommy Lee and Poison's Bret Michaels have made it much harder to excite the broader public about the dangers of

heavy metal, making it in turn much harder for claims about the content of metal to become a full controversy in post-1980s Western culture (see Brown's article below). Instead, it is in situations where the genre is dislocated from its perceived place in culture when controversies arise. In other words, in order for heavy metal to become a topic of public discussion there must be some *external* reason, or 'trigger moment', that produces a serious cultural dislocation so that the content of various—usually extreme—subgenres becomes a topic of controversy.

The black metal culture in early 1990s Norway offers a good example of this dynamic. Beginning as a small and marginal subculture, black metal eventually became a national—and to an extent, international—concern because of its violent imagery and themes. However, as Norwegian scholar of religion Asbjørn Dyrendal notes:

> What made Black Metal interesting news was not ideas as such, but an escalation in internal competition for transgressive, subcultural capital that ended in two murders, multiple church arsons and episodes of assault. This, combined with a militant, anti-Christian, anti-social attitude, made Black Metal an ideal example of the Satanism that the Evangelicals had warned about (Hjelm *et al.* 2009; see Kahn-Harris 2007).

This observation has two points that are relevant for the current argument. First, it was the deviant *actions* of the members of the black metal subculture that caused controversy, not the perceived deviance of black metal as such, which did not inspire that much public controversy until they were coupled with actual violent criminal activity. Church burnings and murder triggered the controversy and, by moving black metal from the arena of musical subcultures into the arena of crime, focused attention on a small group that most likely would have remained marginal without these events. Second, although black metal might not have been considered controversial as such before these actions, the trigger moments gave voice to an interest group (Evangelical Christians) which held fixed beliefs about the evilness of heavy metal in a wider, absolute sense. The content of black metal did become a topic of controversy, but only after certain trigger moments (see Dyrendal and Lap 2008).

However, the idea of cultural dislocation is not exclusively about moving from the margins back to the mainstream. Arguing this would simplify the differences both between the subgenres of metal and between national contexts. For example, when the 'monster metal' group Lordi was voted to represent Finland in the 2006 Eurovision song contest, it was not the band's music or image as such that caused controversy. The band had sold double platinum with their first album in the domestic market, being thus very much in the mainstream. However, when the band moved to a cultural arena conventionally constituted as 'light pop', con-

troversy arose. More importantly, it was widely considered inappropriate for a 'monster metal' band to represent Finland as a nation in an international contest. Thus, the question of content became controversial only after the band moved from the arena of commercial popular culture into the arena of national image and identity. However, because viewers in the Finnish qualifying rounds democratically voted the band, there was a discrepancy between the media accounts of the issue and popular sentiment. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the tone of the media discourse took a full turn after the band returned victorious from the contest. National shame changed into national pride (see Nestingen 2008: 17–20; Häyhtiö and Rinne 2007).

The above said, it is important to acknowledge that controversy is not merely something ascribed to metal from outside. From its earliest days, when groups like Black Sabbath and Alice Cooper used occult themes and violent imagery and lyrics for clearly commercial purposes, metal has used controversy as a tool not merely of identity, but also of marketing. In this context, the deliberately offensive sonic landscapes, lyrical content, and physical imagery of some genres of metal are generated from within, not without; 'controversiality' is often also an intentional aspect of heavy metal bands. However, in order to grow into a controversy in the sense outlined above, trigger moments such as the above are required in the current Western cultural climate.

This does not mean that the cultural framework is fixed and irreversible. We still might see large-scale controversies such as the PMRC controversy in the 1980s, even if it looks unlikely at the moment. What is apparent is that as a consequence of the globalization of metal, situations analogous to the 1980s controversies over the content of metal have surfaced and will surface in contexts where the music, lyrics and imagery are in stark contrast to local cultural values, as in the contemporary campaigns against metalheads in Islamic countries (LeVine 2008).

Today it is the Muslim world where heavy metal faces the most persistent censorship, political repression and societal stigmatization. Metal arrived in the Middle East and North Africa in the late 1980s with satellite dishes and the movement of workers and other forms of migrants back and forth from the region to the West. However, it wasn't hair, glam or other 'lite' and commercial forms of metal that became popular; rather it has been classic groups such as Black Sabbath and Deep Purple, and more extreme subgenres such as death, thrash and various forms of black metal, that have inspired thriving scenes across the region. Not surprisingly, as the scenes became more popular, and in so doing, more public, they began to attract the attention of governments and conservative religious forces, who saw them as vehicles for the penetration of foreign, Western and even Satanic cultures that threatened the very fabric of their societies.

The situation became bad enough so that by the late 1990s the region witnessed 'Satanic metal' scares in countries including Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon and Iran, in which scores of metal fans and musicians were arrested, jailed, convicted of crimes against their religion, and even threatened with death by the highest religious authorities in their countries (LeVine 2008). In Southest Asia, countries like Malaysia and Indonesia have become home to innovative and increasingly popular scenes despite various attempts to rein them in or clamp down on the music.

Put simply, extreme metal has become popular across much of the Muslim majority world precisely because of its brutal vocals, intense, dissonant and powerful music, and violence-laden lyrics dealing with themes of corruption, war and oppression. These constitute a powerful vehicle for fans and musicians to critique the politics and social dynamics more broadly across their societies (hiphop, and particularly political rap, has similarly become popular in the Muslim world and globally precisely for this reason. It too has done so at the same moment that, like metal, it lost its political edge in the US and Europe [see LeVine 2008, 2011]).

At the same time, the DIY ethic and close-knit solidarities of metal scenes globally, and in the region, have also encouraged them to become sites of subcultural and even countercultural production. Metal in the Middle East is the very antithesis of the far more popular, hyper-commercialized and corporatized Arab pop or the largely depoliticized and musically unchallenging religious pop that have attracted the attention of scholars in recent years. Not surprisingly, it is precisely these qualities that have led metal in the Muslim world to catch the attention of governments and religious forces, who until recently found convenient common cause in railing against and repressing the scenes.

Indeed, in countries across the region, and especially in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, metalheads have gone on to become major activists in pro-democracy movements as they've grown into adulthood, playing important roles in the revolutionary protests in Tunisia and Egypt. Alaa Abdel Fatah, one of Egypt's main first-generation metalheads, was arrested (and later released) by the post-Mubarak military junta because of his political activities. It is clear that the experience of being part of a marginalized but sophisticated subculture, in which merely going out in public looking like a metalhead would attract the opprobrium of other members of society, was a foundational experience that naturally led to more direct political action later on.

Yet, it's also worth noting that in recent years both governments and more mainstream Islamist movements have begun to adopt a more laissez vivre attitude towards metal, hiphop and other youth cultural scenes, as both sides have come to understand the importance of not alienating the 'new generation'. The

growing acceptance of metal by mainstream society and governments in coun-
tries like Morocco, Egypt, and even Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries reflects
the broader, if still incipient, process of cultural liberalization they are presently
experiencing. Yet the political activism of many members of scenes in countries
now in the midst of often jarring transitions away from authoritarian and towards
democratic cultures reminds us that these scenes remain, at their core, subversive
of existing political orders.

Going back to the birthplace of metal, Europe and the USA, the first section—
on metal as controversy—opens with Andy Brown's discussion of two 'moral
panics' over heavy metal. Brown asks: how were the 'emo class of 2008' able to
contest their media demonization, whereas the headbangers, burnouts or 'chil-
dren of ZoSo' generation were not? He argues that compared to the PMRC panics
of the 1980s (mentioned above), the British newspaper-induced panic over 'emo'
culture was a 'failed moral panic'. Where the 1980s panics targeted working-class
male youth who didn't have a voice in the media, the emos—mostly middle-class
girls—were able to resist the labelling through the use of social media.

Brad Klypchak continues the theme of moral panics in his article. His focus is on
'reversioning', that is, how some of the most controversial metal acts of the 1970s
and 1980s—Ozzy Osbourne, Alice Cooper and KISS—have become mainstream
TV celebrities and heralds of corporate capitalism instead of rebellion. As sug-
gested above and as Klypchak argues, despite the fact that modern extreme metal
makes the above 'trinity' look tame in comparison, it was their dominance of the
music market in the 1980s that made Ozzy, Alice and KISS a good target for the
PMRC and others—something that fringe subgenres of today are only rarely able
to accomplish on the merit of their sound, message or look alone. Klypchak argues
that in their contemporary domesticated forms, the 'granddaddies of metal' seem
to be saying 'I told you so' to mainstream audiences: They have become the posi-
tive role models of the very same corporate America they were seen to be threat-
ening in their younger days.

One common perception—among fans especially—is that since its inception,
metal has been dismissed as 'anti-taste' in the mainstream music press. Using
Bourdieu as a guide, Hélène Laurin argues that this is not the whole story. She
traces instances of 'valorization' of metal in the rock press and shows how during
recent years previous 'stupid-rock' has become regarded as 'artful' and 'serious' in
the press. At the same time as the bands berated as lowbrow since the 1970s have
entered the mainstream, and in the process lost much of their controversiality, the
rock press has started to treat metal as a legitimate form of expression.

Moving from mainstream metal to the definite underground, Lee Barron
examines how 'porngrind', a particular subgenre of extreme metal, has appro-

priated the feminist critique of pornography exemplified by Andrea Dworkin's influential book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981), turning the feminist nightmare vision of pornography into a virtue. Porngrind is an example of how metal culture keeps pushing the boundaries of controversy and does so, as Barron argues, not necessarily because of an anti-feminist ideology, but rather in order to conform to the expectations of the extreme metal genre.

In his article, Marcus Moberg discusses the 'double controversy' of Christian metal, another scene on the margins of metal culture, and often literally positioned between two worlds. On the one hand metal's (real and imagined) connections with occultism and Satanism make the music suspect in the evangelical milieu from which many of the bands in the scene emerge. On the other hand, Christian metal has had a hard time breaking into the secular metal market. Thus, appropriate religious expression on the one hand and notions about authenticity and ideology on the other have made Christian metal doubly controversial. But, as Moberg explains in this issue, 'Christian metal has not only suffered from its double controversy; it has internalized it and managed to thrive on it as well'.

In the final article of section one, Gérôme Guibert and Jedediah Sklower show that although evangelical Christians have lost much of their status as 'experts' of metal music (and its dangers), in local contexts religious sensibilities still play a part in constructing metal as controversial. Their article is an account of how one metal festival—the Hellfest organized in western France—struggled with legitimacy under pressure of condemnation from representatives of the Catholic Church, but managed to win the hearts of the local community despite initial reservations. The authors use the case to discuss how the 'controversiality' of metal is dependent on the social and cultural context and the interpretations that that context allows and enables.

Heavy metal as counterculture

Metal is not only a collection of musical sounds; it is inseparably connected to particular sets of cultural practices. As metal developed in the 1970s and 1980s a highly distinctive 'scene' emerged through which metal was disseminated, produced and discussed (Kahn-Harris 2007). Initially based around metal's male blue-collar Anglo-American core constituency, the metal scene became more diverse over time. Metal became one of the most commercially successful forms of rock music in the 1970s and 1980s, and metal bands were at the forefront of opening new touring circuits to 'western' bands, such as South America and Eastern Europe. Metal has come to be one of the most profoundly globalized musics, with vibrant scenes in most parts of the world (with the partial exception of sub-Saharan black Africa) (Wallach *et al.* 2012).

Central to the globalization of metal has been the development of a complex set of comparatively egalitarian institutions and practices with a high degree of autonomy from the mainstream music industry. In the 1980s, 'the underground' emerged as a decentralized, global scene that was interconnected by a dense network of letter writing, tape trading and small record labels (Kahn-Harris 2007). The underground was the principal space within which extreme metal developed as small groups of fans and musicians compensated for the lack of popularity of the music by connecting up with fellow scene members worldwide.

Crucially, the underground's egalitarianism ensured that bands from then marginal locations in the music industry, such as Brazil's Sepultura, were able to interact within the global scene on relatively equal terms (Harris 2000). In the 1990s and 2000s underground institutions such as tape trading were largely superseded by the internet, but extreme metal remains largely confined to the descendants of underground institutions and it is still the source of much of metal's innovations. Amongst these innovations has been the development of folk metal, in which bands create new hybrid metal styles through an encounter with 'local' musics.

While metal scenes are much more diverse than is often appreciated by outsiders, there remain imbalances of power and hierarchies. Some scenes, particularly in the US and Scandinavia, dominate metal globally. Racist attitudes exist, particular on black metal's right-wing fringe. Women remain under-represented and 'out' homosexuals are rare. Metal is also a space of musical disagreement and there are fierce debates over the legitimacy of some metal genres such as nu metal and metalcore.

What binds metal together though is a relatively stable canon of artists—Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, Black Sabbath and Slayer being particularly revered—and a core of themes and preoccupations that are pursued across metal sub-genres. As mentioned above, metal tends to be dominated by a distinctive commitment to 'transgressive' themes. By transgression we mean the practice of boundary crossing, symbolically and/or practically, the practice of questioning and breaking taboos, the practice of questioning established values. This is particularly evident in extreme metal, as Kahn-Harris (2007) has shown: extreme metal bands transgress the boundaries of acceptable music, of acceptable discourses, of acceptable practice. Extreme metal provides the 'vanguard', the most systematic examples, of metal's commitment to transgression.

Metal bands explore themes such as sexual excess, the occult, death, violence and mutilation. They revel in myths that explore humanity's darker side, and in stories of human evil and degradation. Metal music has tested the boundaries of music, volume and sound itself. Metal fans and bands have thrown themselves into excess of all kinds and, on occasions (as in Norway in the early 1990s), extreme

violence (Moynihan and Søderlind 1998). Such transgressive themes are present to varying degrees in metal music and culture and indeed they coexist, as Kahn-Harris points out, alongside an equally strong commitment to mundane community. But they can always be found somewhere, whether weakly or strongly, in metal music and culture.

It is to highlight this transgressive aspect of metal that we use the term 'counterculture' in the title of this article. Counterculture is a relatively unpopular term in social scientific research outside of specific times and places where the term has become ubiquitous, such as 1960s radicalism (e.g. Braunstein and Doyle 2001).[1] Social scientists who have looked at popular culture, popular music and metal have tended to prefer terms such as subculture and scene (for an overview, see Gelder 2005; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). Without going into the debates over such conceptual frameworks, we prefer counterculture in the particular context of this collection as a way of highlighting metal's antagonistic side. By this we do not mean simply active attempts to shock and provoke (although there have been plenty of those) but also those occasions when metal, by its very presence, is shocking. A genre that incessantly explores the dark side of humanity will always already be provocative to some sections of society, particularly in more conservative religious cultures. Whether scene members like it or not, metal will frequently become positioned as counterculture simply by existing.

In their article that draws on ethnographic work on metal scenes in Jakarta, Indonesia and Toledo, Ohio, Jeremy Wallach and Alexandra Levine outline a theory of metal scene formation. They argue that despite the very different contexts within which the scenes they describe operate, there are strong similarities between them and by extension with metal scenes elsewhere. While metal scenes have much in common with other global music scenes, they have unique features as well which recur repeatedly in a diversity of contexts. Broadly defining scenes as 'loosely bounded functional units containing a finite number of participants at any one time', they argue that metal scenes provide four 'critical functions' and outline seven generalizations about them. Their argument for the cross-cultural similarity of metal scenes is grounded in their argument that the materiality of the musical sounds of metal limit the parameters of musical meaning. Wallach and Levine therefore suggest that it is no accident that metal is controversial and countercultural in a variety of locations.

Benjamin Olson's contribution on National Socialist black metal (NSBM) demonstrates how certain forms of metal can be controversial and counter-cultural within the wider metal scene itself. In discursive terms, NSBM may fit in well with

---

1.   For an application of counterculture in a contemporary context see St John (2009).

the pagan, Satanic and nationalist concerns of black metal; but as Olson argues, 'the majority of black metalers are unwilling to cross the threshold of the radical-right'. This is not necessarily because of any principled objection to racism, more because of a discomfort with the literalism and narrowness that would focus black metal's misanthropy onto any one sub-set of humanity. NSBM's political connotations also threaten black metal's cherished sense of independence and individualism. Olson argues that, even if black metal's symbolism will continue to be appropriated by the extreme right, NSBM is likely to remain a marginal phenomenon.

Michelle Phillipov's article begins by noting that many of the early scholars of metal concentrated on disavowing simplistic connections between metal and violence. Exploring the history of the early 1990s Norwegian black metal scene, she offers a subtle and cautious exploration of the connection between metal and violence. Although the church burning and violence of the early 1990s was not and is not the norm within black metal, it has a continued importance in defining what black metal is. More sophisticated black metal scene members, such as the band Emperor who Phillipov discusses, achieve success in part through their 'simultaneous promotion and disavowal of their involvement in violent crime'. This subtlety produces what Kahn-Harris (2007) argues is a 'balance' between the logics of mundanity and transgression that reproduce metal scenes.

Nicola Allett examines what it means to be a member of an extreme metal scene through a discussion of interviews with UK extreme metal scene members. She argues that in recent years extremity has been 'democratized' through the popular culture mainstream and that this 'threatens to disenfranchise Extreme Metal's extremity, because extremity does not have the cultural impact it once had'. In part as a response to this development, extreme metal fans emphasize their 'connoisseurship', their seriousness and their ability to make complex distinctions, in ways that recall the 'high' versus 'low' culture distinction—within a 'low' cultural form. The counter-cultural element of extreme metal is therefore maintained through scene members' projects of the self that affirm 'permanence, identification and status' against the hyper-individualism and fragmentation of late modernity.

For all of metal's globalization, metal is frequently associated with white, working-class men. Kevin Fellezs focuses attention on the African-American minority within US metal scenes, drawing on a case study of the all-black thrash metal band Stone Vengeance, who 'while enjoying a primarily white male audience, formed their aesthetic in recognition, even celebration, of their blackness'. The band face a predicament in how far to resist or to play with stereotypical constructions as blackness—embodied in the description of the band as 'lords of heavy metal soul'.

Interviews with Stone Vengeance frontman Mike Coffey show how he both situates heavy metal within a tradition of black music and at the same time desires to locate himself simply as a heavy metal musician. This tension between individual empowerment and a commitment to the collective runs through the wider field of heavy metal.

Rosemary Overell confronts the construction of gender within metal, particularly the violent misogyny that can be found in some types of death metal and grindcore. Drawing on a case study of grindcore music in Melbourne, Australia, Overell explores the nature of 'brutality' that is identified by scene members as the essence of its affect. Grindcore offers an affective 'intensity' that partially transcends representations of gender, opening up possibilities for female scene members. While misogynistic rhetoric and representation may suffuse metal scenes, it is undermined and ironized in various ways.

Finally, Niall Scott's article focuses on the relationship of heavy metal to the political. The political is often rejected in heavy metal scenes in favour of a desired apolitical autonomy. At the same time, as Scott shows, there are also more political strains in metal, as in Napalm Death's anti-fascist stance for example. Drawing on the work of Herbert Marcuse, Scott affirms the potency and subversion inherent in metal's apolitical stance. Metal provides a 'liberated environment' in which the rejection of politics creates a space for community and art.

Conclusion

As third-generation metalheads begin to approach adulthood, first-generation metal scholarship has emerged. In some ways this could be taken as one more sign of the domestication of metal—metalheads turning an analytical and critical gaze on their own scene (almost all of the current scholars in the field are metalheads themselves). We believe, however, that as the remarks above and the articles that follow below demonstrate, metal has retained a controversial edge precisely because controversy has been so deeply ingrained in the genre itself. As globalization deepens, metal enters new arenas of contestation, as has happened in the Middle East. But cultural pluralization also raises new questions about identities and the politics of identity in the traditional heartlands of metal. Metal is here to stay—whether you like it or not.

References

Beckford, James A. 1985. *Cult Controversies: The Societal Response to the New Religious Movements*. London: Tavistock.
Braunstein, Peter, and Michael William Doyle, eds. 2001. *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s*. London: Routledge.

Critcher, Chas. 2003. *Moral Panics and the Media*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Dworkin, Andrea. 1981. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. London: The Women's Press.

Dyrendal, Asbjørn, and Amina Olander Lap. 2008. 'Satanism as a News Item in Denmark and Norway'. In *The Encyclopedic Sourcebook of Satanism*, ed. James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen, 327–60. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Fuller, Richard C., and Richard R. Myers. 1941. 'The Natural History of a Social Problem'. *American Sociological Review* 6(3): 320–28. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2086189

Gelder, Ken, ed. 2005. *The Subcultures Reader*. London: Routledge.

Goode, Erich, and Nachman Ben-Yehuda. 1994. *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Harris, Keith. 2000. '"Roots"?: The Relationship between the Global and the Local within the Global Extreme Metal Scene'. *Popular Music* 19(1): 13–30. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0261143000000052

Häyhtiö, Tapio, and Jarmo Rinne. 2007. 'Hard Rock Hallelujah! Empowering Reflexive Political Action on the Internet'. *Journal for Cultural Research* 11(4): 337–58.

Hjelm, Titus, Henrik Bogdan, Asbjørn Dyrendal and Jesper Petersen. 2009. 'Nordic Satanism and Satanism Scares: The Dark Side of the Secular Welfare State'. *Social Compass* 56(4): 515–29. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0037768609345972

Kahn-Harris, Keith. 2007. *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*. Oxford: Berg.

LeVine, Mark. 2008. *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam*. New York: Random House/Three Rivers Press.

—2011. 'The New Hybridities of Arab Musical Intifadas'. *Jadaliyya* (29 October). http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3008/the-new-hybridities-of-arab-musical-intifadas

McDonald, James R. 1988. 'Censoring Rock Lyrics: A Historical Analysis of the Debate'. *Youth and Society* 19(3): 294–313. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0044118X88019003004

Moynihan, Michael, and Didrik Søderlind. 1998. *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*. Venice, CA: Feral House.

Muggleton, David, and Rupert Weinzierl, eds. 2003. *The Post-Subcultures Reader*. Oxford: Berg.

Nestingen, Andrew. 2008. *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia: Fiction, Film, and Social Change*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Schneider, Joseph W. 1985. 'Social Problems Theory: The Constructionist Perspective'. *Annual Review of Sociology* 11: 209–29. http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.11.080185.001233

Spector, Malcolm, and John I. Kitsuse. 2001 [1977]. *Constructing Social Problems*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Springhall, John. 1998. *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gansta-Rap, 1830–1996*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

St John, Graham. 2009. *Technomad: Global Raving Countercultures*. London: Equinox.

Wallach, Jeremy, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene, eds. 2012. *Metal Rules the Globe*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Walser, Robert. 1993. *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.

Wright, Robert. 2000. '"I'd Sell You Suicide": Pop Music and Moral Panic in the Age of Marilyn Manson'. *Popular Music* 19(3): 365–85. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0261143000000222