Chapter 21
From Pride to Prejudice to Shame:
Multiple Facets of the Black Metal Scene within and without Online Environments

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an in-depth qualitative study of the inner workings of one niche extreme metal scene, namely black metal. Using data from the physical as well as virtual black metal scenes, the study explores how scene members manifest the tensions between their personal and communal identities, as well as how they negotiate the propagation of racism and xenophobia, both within and without online environments. The netnographic analyses presented draw on black metal scene members' interactions in online forums and blogs showing sustained activity over an extended period of time, some spanning well over a decade-and-a-half. The authors also draw on data from observations at several concerts and festivals in North America and Europe, as well as personal, written reflections from an extreme metal music journalist who has struggled to find a balance between his appreciation of black metal music and some of the overt racism and violence propagated in the scene. Additionally, they present analyses from a series of interviews conducted with 12 black metal artists and fans from all parts of the globe. The authors cautiously contend that online interactions between members of niche music scenes such as black metal, wherein individual and collective identities are partially informed by xenophobia and influenced by socio-political structures, when extended to the larger populace through the publicly available Internet, can potentially serve as paradigmatic cases of how otherwise self-contained racist chatter could influence the larger public exposed to these transgressions to consider adopting racist ideologies.

INTRODUCTION

The Roots of Heavy Metal

Got no religion, don't need no friends
Got all I want and I don't need to pretend
Don't try to reach me 'cause I'd tear up your mind
I've seen the future and I've left it behind. (From "Supernaut" by Black Sabbath from the album "Black Sabbath Vol. 4" (1972))

Heavy metal music has come a long way from its origins as an electric guitar-driven, blues-based art form influenced by classic rock, with its original fan-base firmly ensconced in the blue-collar working class of Europe and North America. Lyrics such as those from Black Sabbath's song "Supernaut" are typical of the beginnings of the genre with a focus on rejecting modern trappings, being proud and not self-conscious of being cut from a different cloth, an embracement and reveling in being different from the mainstream; this is a trait still seen in followers of heavy metal music. Heavy metal fans still split hairs as to how their preferred genre of music came into existence, perhaps only agreeing that its genesis was geographically located in the United Kingdom sometime in the late 1960s. Where they diverge is in pinpointing who invented the genre. For example, a small minority argue that the recorded inception of heavy metal was the moment when the Beatles played a dirgy, blues-inspired riff in a pentatonic minor scale, fourteen times over, as the coda to "I Want You (She's So Heavy)," the iconic side A-closing track to their 1969 album "Abbey Road." Others point to the body of output in the late 1960s, of the triumvirate known as Cream. Specifically, the furious, blues-based riffing of guitarist Eric Clapton, the oft-improvised jazz-influenced bass guitar-work of Jack Bruce, and aggressive double-bass drumming of Ginger Baker in Cream's live performances of the classic Robert Johnson blues song "Crossroads," or even the 1966 Cream recording of "Sweet Wine," have

been heralded as the founding pillars of heavy metal music. Few would argue, however, with the contention that Black Sabbath's self-titled first album, released in 1970, signaled the birth of a sinister-sounding, crawling tempo-driven, riff-laden, and occult-leaning musical expression media now known broadly as heavy metal, and often referred to simply as metal.

The broad genre of metal has gone through a number of transformations – of the musical, lyrical, and aesthetic variety – in its four plus decades of existence, and has branched out into related styles or sub-genres. Extreme metal, a lyrically and musically aggressive form of metal, which includes the sub-genres of death, black, speed, technical, and thrash amongst many others, has grown in global popularity since the 1980s. Many of the shifts in direction taken in extreme metal can be described from a musical standpoint by analyzing the form and structure of its different sub-genres; take, for example, the development of jazz-influenced technical and progressive metal styles of guitar or drum playing, as well as the creation and propagation of the guttural, growling death metal, and screeched black metal vocals as a counterpoint to the more melodic and operatic singing that dominates traditional heavy metal. The ubiquity of the black-coloured, heavy metal t-shirt with band logos, album covers, and lyrics of songs worn by thousands of fans, many of whom make annual pilgrimages to metal music festivals across the world has propelled the consumption of heavy metal culture to a global audience. In essence, a combination of economic growth in the developing world, technological advancements such as social media which have resulted in democratizing of the Internet, and socio-psychological factors related to communal identity development has expanded horizons for heavy and extreme metal fans' interactions, thereby drawing them from limited local scenes to broader, international, multilingual, and diversified socio-political as well as cultural networks of "metalheads" (Wallach, Berger, & Greene, 2011).

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