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**PROOF**

## **Part I**

### **Resilience**

## 1

## Heavy Metal as Resistance

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In this chapter I aim to show that heavy metal music and its culture is in a good position to develop as a form of popular culture capable of offering political and moral resistance. In considering heavy metal as a form of resistance, we have to first delineate what it is standing in resistance to, or what it has the possibility to resist. These questions arise as challenges in the work of Theodor Adorno but are refined when considering Stuart Hall's views on popular culture. I wish to argue that heavy metal has much promise politically speaking in its resistance in the political sphere, its resistance to certain features of popular culture, which it is also simultaneously embedded in as a form of popular culture, and also the possibility of resistance to itself. In doing so I will draw on Stuart Hall's definition of popular culture, which is firmly embedded in a socialist political framework, treating popular culture as a site where resistance to hegemonies and power hierarchies of dominant cultural ideology is played out. I will draw on a range of examples to illustrate this point, but also recognize the complexity of heavy metal's situation in a market-driven popular culture context.

To start with, then, it is worth reminding ourselves of another cultural theorist, whose interaction with popular music culture in a different era presents us with a continuing challenge. Theodor Adorno's criticism of jazz in the 1930s and 1940s (Adorno, 1989) may offer important questions regarding the state of heavy metal today, with an eye on what the metal genre and subculture has to offer. However we can treat heavy metal with perhaps more optimism than Adorno had for the evolution of jazz. Adorno's view of jazz is one of initial hope for a genuine shift in musical style and evolution, which for him was eventually saturated with disappointment and failure. He holds: 'The aim of Jazz is the mechanical reproduction of a regressive moment...' (Adorno,

1989, p. 207). Instead of seeing jazz develop musically into avant-garde directions, he thought it moved ever closer to the processes of standardization and pseudo-individualization of the popular music industry (Strinati, 2001, p. 65). Adorno paired this with a scathing criticism of popular music and those who consume it. Although supporting an elitist separation of popular culture and high culture, Adorno's view does provide heavy metal with some probing questions. He thought that popular music generated standardization in its structure that was in direct opposition to the ideals of individuality in liberal society (Strinati, 2001, p. 66), but the music also had a superficial effect of novelty in each separate musical product, giving rise to an illusion of individuality in each piece. Heavy metal needs to find a way of avoiding becoming infected with sameness, avoiding standardization, as Adorno would say, in order to retain its resistant and transgressive qualities. One can easily criticize Adorno's elitist taste and misguided expectations regarding jazz music, yet still take much of value from his work. Adorno's work provides an ever-present warning concerning the damage that can be done to creativity and art's political edge in succumbing to the domination of market forces, reproduction and repetition. In this piece I will explore the possibility that heavy metal oscillates between the opportunity to be not just a space for musical innovation but also holds promise in maintaining a critical and resistant stance as a form of popular culture.

### **Heavy metal as resistance in the sphere of politics**

To identify the spheres of resistance in a political sense in the subculture of heavy metal is not an impossible task, but the diversity of positions expressed in the metal movement do make it impossible to draw any general conclusions. One would be tempted to immediately pose the question, resistant to what, politically speaking? It is certainly the case that in all corners of popular music we see the articulation and driving forward of political perspectives that are subversive and challenge power structures and dominant ideologies, for example the oppressive features of capitalism. This is brought to the fore strongly when one considers the attempts to censor musical expression by government and regulatory bodies. John Street (2003) makes the claim that 'music has long been a site of resistance. From the folk songs of rural England to the work songs of slaves, from antiwar protest songs to illegal raves, music has given voice to resistance and opposition' (p. 120). The imputation of resistance to popular music, Street claims, is also a familiar theme in liberal society, where he asserts that the consumption of popular music is

linked to 'acts of defiance or "rituals of resistance" [sic]' (p. 121). The field of cultural studies has shown, he claims, that popular music culture is a space where 'acts of resistance could be articulated' and 'forge counter-hegemonic accounts' of the world of popular music fans in subcultures (Street, 2003, p. 121). Research in cultural studies as well as political science, specifically in the case of black music and the civil rights movement, Street (2003) writes, have 'revealed the extent to which political interests and movements were intimately linked to the development of musical form but also how the music developed and shaped the politics' (p. 122). Hjelm et al. (2011) in *Heavy Metal as Controversy and Counterculture* point out the way in which heavy metal retains an antagonistic stance in a range of social contexts by being transgressive.

Heavy metal culture keeps its position of political resistance by maintaining a momentum of controversy wherever it rears its head. The direction of this resistance is broad, ranging from extreme left wing to the extreme right wing areas of the political spectrum. Contrast for example the left wing leanings of many grindcore bands, such as Napalm Death, Extreme Noise Terror, Carcass and Terrorizer to the other side of the spectrum where we find National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) such as Absurd, Burzum or Graveland and American hatecore, as described in Sharon Hochhauser's 2011 essay, *The Marketing of Anglo-Identity in the North American Hatecore Metal Industry*. Heavy metal expresses views that are liberal and conservative, politically active, inactive and apolitical. Indeed it is metal's position as apolitical that seems in many contexts to be given the strongest voice. Scott Wilson (2011) links the apolitical in metal to its sound, referring to metal also a form of *amusic* and that this is at the heart of its creative force and its rebellious form. I have argued elsewhere that the apolitical aspect of heavy metal culture actually presents its strongest political threat to mass and popular culture in what I have termed 'Heavy Metal's great refusal' (Scott, 2011, p. 238), adopting Herbert Marcuse's phrase from *One Dimensional Man* (Marcuse, 1991, p. 63). Marcuse adopts this phrase to describe art's capacity for 'the rationality of negation' (Marcuse, p. 63). Here I have argued that metal is politically apolitical, in that it promotes the apolitical as a value and is capable in this vein to 'protest against that which is' (p. 63). However, as I shall repeat below, in metal the music tends to take precedence over and above any other discussion.

Heavy metal faces a continuous challenge, met by some and ignored by others, of using its posturing as an antagonist and rebellious resistant movement for social, moral and political change. Some readers may immediately disagree and reject any argument that wishes to place a

normative requirement on metal; after all that's not what the music and scene is about. This ignores many positions taken up by artists, scholars, journalists and fans in the scene, as will be seen clearly in Machine Head's Rob Flynn's stance against racism detailed below. That the success of turning heavy metal's transgressive stance into definitive social change or at least its capacity to be effective beyond its own front door has been particularly questioned by Keith Kahn-Harris's early (2004) work on black metal. He concludes that although it has failed to generate a racist practice, which is a good thing, it fails in turning its 'transgressive aesthetics and underground structures toward a thoroughgoing critique of large scale structures of domination' (Kahn-Harris, 2004, p. 109). This point will be further relevant when considering the third area of resistance – metal being resistant to itself.

The diversity in metal as mentioned above makes it difficult to near impossible to identify a single area of resistance. Where resistance is articulated as a defining feature of popular culture, this generally concerns opposition to hegemonic and dominant power structures. On the whole metal culture does not represent an oppressed group, yet it does suffer oppression in certain geographical locations and within the metal scene there are pockets of oppression. The latter needs to be resolved from within metal culture itself; the former concerns metal as a popular culture form that is combatting power, oppression and discrimination imposed upon it from outside. Problematic issues within the metal scene such as racism and sexism can and are being dealt with through public rebuke by fans and musicians taking a vocal stand against such problems. Rob Flynn who will be mentioned again shortly, for example, took a stand against racism expressed at some of his gigs in an open letter disseminated in the metal media. He had been criticized for supporting the posting of flyers in San Francisco proclaiming 'Black Lives Matter' in response to the deaths of black men at the hands of the police in several places across the USA, including Ferguson, Missouri. He asserted:

Apparently metal musicians aren't supposed to have opinions on the issues of the day. We're just supposed to 'rock and party bro.' And while we still do that with the best of 'em, all of my favourite bands had some kind of moral consciousness.' He continues pleading: 'Where are the god damn protest songs? Where are the 'War, What Is It Good For's'? Where are the 'Fight The Power's'? Where are the white metal bands protesting about Ferguson and Staten Island? Why don't metal bands stand for anything anymore?

(Pasbani, 2015)



But where metal succeeds in resisting oppression in all contexts it sends a message to popular culture at large. It has the capacity to be a beacon demonstrating Hall's view of popular culture, which will be expanded on in detail in the next section, as a site where the 'struggle against the powerful is engaged' and is an example of an 'arena of consent and resistance' (Hall, 2009 [1981], p. 518).

Examples of this struggle come from very different places in the globe. I will discuss examples from the United States, Israel/Palestine and Malaysia/Singapore, although there are many more. The first is from Flint, Michigan cited by Al Jazeera news as one of the most dangerous places to live in the USA because of the combination of poverty and violence (Gliha, 2013). It is a small post-industrial city that has seen huge declines in its social stability and wealth as its population contracts. It is also a scene for heavy metal resistance. The hardcore band King 810 have taken their predicament of growing up in Flint and expressed the suffering and violence with critical creativity, both echoing a countercultural sentiment and challenging what heavy metal can achieve in poetic recognition of their struggle.<sup>1</sup> They voice a desire to stay in Flint, rather than relocating to another city, due to the success of their debut album *Memoirs of a Murder* (Lawson, 2014). Dom Lawson describes their release as a work of art in a world where the metal scene is dogged by vacuity. In an interview with King 810 in Flint on this very topic, Lawson quotes the band's lead singer David Gunn:

A lot of people who live through this shit just let it eat 'em' David nods. 'A lot of people I know and have known, people that are gone, it definitely affects 'em in a different way, and they end up dead. This life is just a hamster wheel, and you're just in it and you do it until you die. When you have a purpose and you understand that there is something beyond yourself that's happening, there's a fork in the road where you choose what's important. (p. 56)

Such a choice encompasses a critically resistant stance to domination and the bands lived experience vocalized in the song War Outside:

I hear all these critics talk but I listen to none/Cuz none of them have ever been where music comes from/And none of them have ever stepped foot inside a slum/And none of them have ever wrapped their hands around a gun/And squeezed till its empty and it locks up and it's done/And feel the man on the other sides last breath leap out

his lungs/I've been doing this here since I was young/ So next time  
you speak about me just cut out your fucking tongue.

(Gunn, 2014)

The impact of how the market damages identity is explored in the song  
'State of Nature':

Remember when a man was a man not a product or a title or a  
brand/Now everything's changing these people aren't real and we  
have no heroes/They're pink in the middle/They don't say what  
they mean they don't do what they say they won't stand here and  
die for it.

(Gunn, 2014)

Moving to a different kind of violence entirely, the Israeli band  
Orphaned Land set an example of resistance to war and injustice in their  
homeland. Orphaned Land's collaboration with the Palestinian band  
Khalas (meaning 'enough!') and their very vocal stand against political  
violence in the Middle East and the plight of children and innocent  
victims of the war in Syria is at the heart of the 2013 album, *All Is One*.  
When Orphaned Land were awarded a Golden Gods at the Metal Ham-  
mer ceremonies in June of the year it was released, singer Khobi Fhari,  
insisted on sharing the award with Khalas's singer, Abed Hathut, in a  
public show of unity (Metal Gaia, 2014).

From a different corner of resistance, Liew and Fu (2006) have doc-  
umented moral panics and social disdain targeted at the metal scene  
in Malaysia and Singapore. The metal music culture is treated as 'sub-  
verting the conservative socio-political ethos in both Malaysia and  
Singapore' (p. 103). Consistent resistance to power structures are per-  
petuated in the stability of a youth culture that stimulates fear and  
anxiety in the establishment, especially of the decadence of encroaching  
Western values (ibid.). They chart a history of fears of political subver-  
sion generated by metal music that go back to the 1970s and 1980s,  
as well as the perceived hippie culture and long hair worn by men  
and those that mirror the moral panics surrounding metal music in the  
USA and UK. In more recent times they notice a difference in attitudes  
toward metal music between Singapore and Malaysia, where the resur-  
gence of Islamic conservatism in Malaysia, most particularly concerning  
black metal led to a police clamp down on the youth culture involved in  
the extreme music scene, expressing itself through heavy metal, whilst  
in Singapore a greater degree of tolerance started showing itself, due in

part, Liew and Fu report, to the sheer physical volume of imported music sales going up. The authors speak of youths in 2001 finding themselves as targets of social surveillance both by the state law enforcement agencies as well as religious authorities. '... police raids were conducted on shopping centres and schools with an estimated 700 youths detained or questioned for alleged criminal activity relating to religious desecration, devil worship, drug use and promiscuous behaviour' (p. 116). A more recent example of heavy metal's agitative stance and resistance to state power can be seen in Iran, where in 2013 it was reported that 200 fans were arrested at a Dawn of Rage concert in Tehran, despite the event being sanctioned by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (Freemuse, August 2013).

Although the context and background to these examples are radically different, one cannot compare Tehran, Malaysia, Singapore, Israel/Palestine and Flint Michigan, there are countless more examples across the globe where metal music is dynamically engaged in many forms of resistance to power structures and ideologies, sometimes at a high cost to the musician and fan.

### Heavy metal as resistant to popular culture

Heavy metal has the capacity to be resistant in the sphere of popular culture. Stuart Hall in his 1981 essay, Notes on deconstructing 'the popular,' identifies three possible ways of defining popular culture coming from a socialist political perspective. The first, which he is critical of, concerns those things that are popular simply because large numbers of people participate in them and what the masses consume. Hall rejects this as, although it presents a fact of consumer behavior, it also treats the masses as uncritical, passive 'cultural dopes' (p. 512). The alternative popular culture in this first definition concerns popular culture embodying the authentic things that working classes are involved in, do, and have done. This is dismissed by Hall as well, as it is too all encompassing and provides no critical weight. In this he furthermore rejects popular culture defined as a heroic authentic alternative working class that is not 'taken in by the commercial substitutes' (p. 512).

Hall's second definition concerns treating popular culture as 'those things that "the people" do or have done' (p. 513) and is thus descriptive. The trouble with this is that it can encompass anything that 'the people' happen to do. More importantly though he rejects this definition because it fails to draw out the very distinction that matters in popular culture – its existence as wholly other than dominant culture or



elite culture. It thus fails to address structural differences and processes that usefully distinguish the popular from other categories.

It is a third definition that he views as most relevant and one that I think is of value in heavy metal's capacity for resistance. This definition is one in which popular culture is positioned as a flexible, changing dialogical arena where trends and ideas shift (pp. 514–515). In other words, today's news is tomorrow's fish and chip wrapper. It maintains the descriptive features of popular culture but sees them as in an antagonistic relationship to the dominant culture at any given time. The key opposition Hall maintains is between popular culture and the power bloc it opposes. This can be envisaged as being present within a subculture as well as in popular culture in general, and opposition to power blocs arguably outside popular culture. Popular culture thus exemplifies itself in movements of resistance and conformity. Hall speaks of this in terms of shifting dominant and subordinate formations.

Heavy metal, in its complexity and diversity, is a culture that has its own power blocs and resistances to them. For example heavy metal has seen shifts in the increased participation of women, challenging the masculine power blocs that existed as characteristic of metal's identity in the past, as explored in Sonia Vasan's 2011 work on women in death metal, Rosemary Overell's 2014 study of the grindcore scenes in Australia and Japan and Gabby Riches forthcoming work on grindcore noting its increasing female fan base. Another example which can be found throughout popular music is the embracing of crowdfunding initiatives, building a relationship directly between the artist and fan base, initially undermining the traditional status of the record company and promoter. This is still an explorative space not without its problems; it may not be as utopian as it seems (Beaumont–Thomas, 2014). Nonetheless it is an area where dominant and subordinate forces are involved in a process of redefining their field, indeed challenging and rethinking market hegemonies in the music industry. Yet another example could be grunge music's overhaul of the commercial heavy metal of the 1980s. More such examples will be discussed below. If we are to accept Hall's view of popular culture, the call then for metal is to be ever prepared to maintain its position as resistance, as opposition to dominant power blocs external to metal but also those that exist within metal. Resistance is secured, Martinez (1997) points out, where 'subcultures transform their parent culture creating a highly variable repertoire of responses to hegemony' (p. 270). Thus heavy metal is in a position to be part, if not at the forefront, of a struggle which Hall argues, explicit in his socialist aims, is a site where the 'struggle for and

against the powerful is engaged' (Hall, 2009 [1981], p. 518). The processes and changing dynamics in this understanding of popular culture admit that popular culture arises in a certain context. In the case of music, that context includes market forces and the music industry, not just a romanticized ideal, a pure relationship between the fan and the artist.

The difficulty in this is that heavy metal is part of popular culture and in a sense it has two or more parent cultures; one could cite blues music and classical music for example, but also pop music in general. Treating metal music and its culture as a part of popular culture admits the status of metal as a form of popular culture in the sense that it emerges from the popular. This is in line with Stuart Hall's third definition of popular culture as a music form that emerges under certain material and social conditions, where Hall defines the popular in terms of an antagonism, relationship with, and in an influential tension to, the dominant culture. It includes a relationship of change where things are not fixed.

In the same manner heavy metal can be seen as moving through periods of transgression, which in time can become rather mundane or lose their efficacy in a contemporary context, being relegated to historical narrative. The shock generated by the activities of one generation can lose their effect in the next generation. The perceived threat to the Christian Conservative Right from 'satanic heavy metal' is not as threatening now as it was in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Klypchak points out that Alice Cooper, Black Sabbath and KISS, all of whom were targets of scorn and moral panic, have 'become ubiquitous in mainstream popular culture' (Klypchak, 2013, p. 36). The significance of moral panics with regard to heavy metal may have receded in some places but, as Hjelm, Kahn Harris and Levine maintain, because of metal's global reach they now surface in different cultural contexts, such 'as in the contemporary campaigns against metalheads in Islamic countries' (Hjelm et al., 2011, p. 5)

However, a greater challenge for metal to rise to is to develop a capacity to resist popular culture as a form of popular culture itself. This of course stirs up normative questions (what metal ought to do), rather than descriptive ones. I am not particularly interested in what *is* the case, rather in what *ought* to be the case, in other words I am interested in pursuing what heavy metal can do not just at a practical level, but at a normative level. As seen from the examples above and in the following section, heavy metal can promote values in opposition to dominant power structures and damaging hegemonies such as oppression, restricting freedoms of expression, racism and sexism and

thus also address political issues raised in the previous section. Can metal have a normative force where it *ought* to pursue an opportunity to resist popular culture? Does it have the capacity to continue to express cultural struggle as it certainly did in its working-class/blue-collar origins? I think that it can and does. I have argued elsewhere (Scott, 2013) that the political aspect of heavy metal culture actually presents its strongest political threat to mass and popular culture. However, the unreflective position will think that heavy metal is simply yet another popular culture expression that conforms to the demands of the market. Complementary to this, one may think that heavy metal most clearly exemplifies Herbert Marcuse's insight of the damage that the market does to any possibility of moral or political value poking its head above the parapet of consumer power. Marcuse (1991) writes: 'In the realm of culture, the new totalitarianism manifests itself precisely in a harmonizing pluralism where the most contradictory works and truths peacefully coexist in indifference' (p. 61). The damning effect of this point is that even when any politically resistant stance is expressed, it will always be subsumed under the power of market forces and commodification. But when considered with Stuart Hall's view on popular culture as a dynamic and contested space, we have cause for optimism concerning heavy metal's capacity to maintain its transgressive resistant stance. Hall quotes Gramsci: 'What matters is the criticism to which such an ideological complex is subjected. [...] The old collective will dissolves [*sic*] into its contradictory elements since the subordinate ones develop socially.' Then he holds that: 'Popular culture and tradition is a battlefield' (Hall, 2009, p. 516). Part of being able to accept some of the messages articulated by voices of performers in metal culture has to do with knowing the individual who articulates, knowing whether something is expressed with integrity or for the sake of image production. Rob Flynn of Machine Head delivered an impassioned speech at the 2012 Bloodstock festival, highlighting their success, thanking their fans despite never having been on the radio or MTV. Flynn continues to speak up in favor of the power of music over and against monotonous, electronic syncopated background music ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpakWSgQ\\_AI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpakWSgQ_AI)).

Behind this point of view lies the general criticism of inauthenticity against the damaging effects on creativity mass/pop music culture brought about by unskilled use of computer programming technology in musical composition, as well as an attack on the contemporary wave of talent shows delivering instant success, such as the X Factor, demeaning the process of musical growth, sometimes through hardship, but



definitely requiring life experience and time. This criticism needs to be tempered though with the recognition of the role of technology in metal music, both in its production and composition challenging the narrow idea of authenticity as purity. Mark Mynett et al have explored the production of heaviness in studio mixing of modern heavy metal, questioning a superficial understanding of the meaning of authenticity in metal (Mynett et al., 2010). Instead, though, I think these utterances on authenticity are awkward expressions of a different point. That is, there is an intuitive difference between music generated from a lived experience and music manufactured as superficial affective entertainment. Such a view is further expressed regarding the Japanese pop metal phenomenon of Babymetal, criticized for being a manufactured product and not reflecting the 'lived' nature of metal music (Hudson, 2014). The expression of the 'lived' nature of metal has strong resonances with heavy metal's and rock music's hard work and touring ethic – contrast Babymetal's constructed product with King 810 and the differences are all too clear.

#### **Heavy metal as resistance to itself: Self-reflective resistance**

Heavy metal's resistance to popular culture exposes areas where it can be resistant to itself, a self-reflexive resistance, dealing with edifices of power and domination that the subculture has built up over time. This recognizes the possibility that metal descends and ascends; it has its own bourgeoisie that shifts and changes depending on the conditions under which the particular form of metal emerges. This can range from a sonic response to an image response, for example the drone reaction to speed and thrash involves a slowing down of the music through the removal of virtuosic guitar solos and fast drumming. The Los Angeles thrash metal scene emerged as a response to glam and hair metal, not just a change in sound, but a change in image away from makeup and hairspray back to denim, dirt and leather. Metal has seen the move from 'prog' complexity to blues simplicity and back. Things that used to stand as resistance may no longer be so; the working class heritage of the fandom/following of metal arguably is no longer relevant, but of course that depends on what kinds of struggles/resistance metal represents. Above, we saw clear examples of areas of resistance that still persist and represent the normative question: what ought metal to stand for? In addition to metal being worth listening to simply for its own sake, this question has its place where metal (as well as other music and art forms) has the opportunity to communicate messages of political resistance, for example injustices,

inequality and oppression. In this vein, Hall argues for the popular as exhibiting 'the people against the power bloc' – but he adds an important reminder: those blocs can exist internal to the things that that people adhere to. The power-bloc management, commodification and so on can be part of the identity of metal itself.

Heavy metal has the capacity to be resistant to excesses of corporate greed. When Ghost and Gojira played a UK tour in 2013, tickets were being sold at five pounds, with sponsorship from Jägermeister (Hicks, 2013). Gojira is a metal band that openly promotes environmentalist thought in their lyrics and in interviews (Anderson, 2009). So collaboration with a promoter whose main concern is to sell its product and thus sponsors a tour, reducing ticket prices to boost consumption of its product, seems to be ideologically opposed to Gojira's political credentials. One may look at this as downright contradictory, or else see it a useful collaboration allowing a band to reach out to more of its fans and even a new audience. In a remark made to me by a friend in the industry it was pointed out that as a marketing ploy this may be seen as cynical and then he followed with the somewhat rhetorical question 'but who loses?' At a more considered level one can point out worker exploitation, fans being lured in with cheap tickets, who then spend their hard-earned cash on merchandise, drink and so on; Jägermeister's brand certainly wins no matter what. Yet another industry contact explained that the Jägermeister tour promoter genuinely wanted to give fans the opportunity to see bands that they might not normally see or could not afford to see. One can question whether this is a genuine example of resistance or the opportunity presented by Jägermeister sponsorship. I think it is a problem open for debate; on the one hand it gives an example of how corporate interest can work better in the music's interest and goals and provide a platform for a band such as Gojira to turn more people on to their message. On the other hand, it is nothing other than a clever marketing strategy. To tease out where power (bloc) and exploitation lie can be a difficult task especially where mutual benefits and exchanges are experienced by those engaged in an event or the scene in general. This mutual collaboration can for example be illustrative of Marcuse's claim above of the peaceful manifestation of a contradictory indifferent harmonizing pluralism where the corporate market values and interests of the sponsor and promoter (Jägermeister) share a space with a band (Gojira) who are expressly opposed to such values.

When one looks at heavy metal culture, one is easily confronted with a scene that is intelligently reflective, despite Keith Kahn-Harris' identification of intentional unreflexivity in some areas and individuals



involved in metal. Even this is entertained as a knowing position; it is a dynamic music culture, confronted with opportunities for development. This is of course not unique to metal, but can be found in other forms of popular music culture. Scholarship that looks critically at heavy metal's more problematic issues, such as sexism, racism and conservative insularity mirror arguments and challenges that emerge from within heavy metal's core. Amit Sharma's interview with Opeth's frontman Michael Arkerfeldt delivered a similar claim, where Arkerfeldt insisted that: 'metal should be rebellious, even within its own genre' (Sharma, 2014, p. 39). This claim is not just about exploring different avenues in musical experimentation and composition, but also heavy metal's reflection on its own state of affairs and definitions. For heavy metal, music is the primary object of interest in its culture; it is both the essence and expression of its culture (Scott, 2014). Where metal shows an internal resistance to itself, this may well be good for its own creative musical evolution, but it can also be criticized for being too self-obsessed when metal has the opportunity to resist oppressing power structures. In this respect the metal community certainly has its work cut out, as I would insist that it is in turn resistant to normative pressure, be it political or moral. But musical creativity and expression is very much part of that articulating voice of resistance. Scholarship and journalism certainly have a role to play here in foregrounding that resistance, and examples such as Laina Dawes' (2012) excellent work combatting racism and sexism in the scene in her *What are you doing here? A Black Woman's Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal* thunders a serious demand that the metal world wake up to moral and political problems within its ranks. She points out in her chapter 'The lingering stench of racism in metal' (p. 133) that she was drawn to certain grindcore bands precisely because of the social commentary provided in their work. However, she also draws attention to the resistance to normative change in the metal community where one of her interview subjects, Jason Netherton, bassist of Misery Index claims that fans prioritize the music over lyrical content: 'When artists promote social and political messages, the responses are mixed, to say the least' (Dawes, p. 148). Fans like the music, the energy and the anger, and definitely the lyrics come second if not last for a lot of people, notes Netherton. 'It's unfortunate, but I don't think that people would appreciate more socially conscious lyrics or lyrics that are critical of racism or homophobia. I tend to find that the more blatant you are with your message, the reaction or response you get will get is more critical' (Dawes, 2012, p. 149). Fortunately there are bands that provide a counter to this; Napalm Death, already mentioned, is

probably one of the most well-known bands to do so. Not only does Napalm actively promote an antifascist and anti-racist stance as well as green political views, they can also be found indulging in reflective criticism within the scene regarding the image and symbolism represented in the performance space. An example to illustrate this comes from my own experience seeing Napalm Death at Hammerfest in Wales in March 2014. In a sarcastic well-humored dig, the singer Barney Greenway about to be enveloped in CO2 said from the stage: 'Can you turn the smoke off? We don't need any smoke on stage you know, we're not that kind of band. We're not Cradle of Filth, you know? We want everyone to see us. Thanks.' This statement alluded for me not only for the band members to want to be visible and transparent to their audience, but I took it as a statement about the visibility of their political presence – they want to be heard, and visual transparency contributes to being heard, being listened to. Their music is not about entertainment although it may be entertaining; it concerns Napalm Death's primary aim of communicating a worldview, one that ought to be paid attention to by anyone attending their gig. Although Scott Wilson reiterates the point made by Netherton above that 'In metal images and words are always subordinate to sound' (Wilson, 2011, p. 205). Napalm Death in their quip use a point concerning their image to focus attention on their lack of image – there are no gimmicks on stage, just the band and what they stand for. Another clear area where metal is engaged in an internal resistance is in the contested arena of gender politics. Sonia Vasan's 2011 critical analysis and research of women's practices, participation and tolerance of misogynistic, sexist and androcentric culture in the Texan death metal scene indicated that much needs to be done to challenge the power structures that either exclude women or make it a difficult space for women to participate in. The extensive research by Rosie Overell (2014) on brutality and belonging in the Australian and Japanese Grindcore scenes also sheds light on misogynistic and sexist views and practices that have no place in the contemporary metal scene. The research being generated on gender politics in heavy metal is a growing and exciting field where soon more critical work will be published. Heavy metal scholarship is not simply a movement of academics that express their allegiance to metal by writing about it, but it is involved in the production of knowledge. In this sense it is delineating, in cooperation with artists, and journalists a genuinely different way of thinking about (popular) cultural resistance by outlining new forms of knowledge and discourse; defining terms and also setting out structures in normative directions.

## Conclusion

Heavy metal is trapped between being a form of popular culture as resistance and a movement that has the capacity to resist popular culture. Where heavy metal culture expresses an imperative task to resist popular culture, it exposes itself too easily to failure in this task. At the UK Bloodstock festival in 2012, Rob Flynn's speech promotes the creativity and diversity in heavy metal music as well as a defense of its authenticity and rejection of simulation, reproduction and monotony. Heavy metal, both its music and culture, are in a position to resist the popular where the popular in music is an infantilized submission to sameness. Heavy metal can satirize the worn out and the ruined state of popular music, yet often falls prey to the very values and sounds of some forms of popular music it rejects in its commodification, institutionalization and standardization. This is a key problem for heavy metal as a potential form of resistance, notwithstanding the plight of metal musicians and fans as consumers in certain parts of the globe where it is sometimes dangerous to be a metal head. Heavy metal in affluent, liberal 'Western' music culture does not stand or represent an oppressed group per se, in the way that oppositional cultures often do. Yet heavy metal culture has at its disposal tools to perform subversive resistance in its use of language, image and capacity to lampoon and mock commodified popular music culture and at the same time not promote a notion of a dominant legitimated culture as opposed to a popular culture. Instead it has the capacity to expose the repression of an intellectual critique of popular culture whilst at the same time make popular culture unmanageable for those who consume it in the manner of standardization and pseud-individualization that Adorno was so critical of.

## Note

1. It has been pointed out though that a different narrative concerning King 810 has been reported. Retrieved from: <http://www.metalsucks.net/2014/08/07/king-810-may-actually-flint-michigan/>. However, as a close acquaintance to the journalist Dom Lawson I have no reason to doubt the veracity of his report in its context.

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