

Thesis abstract

Pale Communion: whiteness, masculinity and nationhood in heavy metal scenes in Norway, South Africa and Australia

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In response to the current dynamics of the Global Metal model, this thesis draws attention to how whiteness maintains an invisibilised instrumental hegemony within heavy metal music, even as research on the genre continues to grow. I address the complex problem of how whiteness is represented in heavy metal scenes and practices, both as a site of academic inquiry and force of cultural significance. I argue that the whiteness and white heteromascularity of heavy metal emerges in disparate locales as expressions of distinct nationalist projects. This research addresses the national specificity with which whiteness is valorised in heavy metal scenes, and how disparate national identities are tacitly and explicitly tied to white heteromale identity.

This thesis negotiates scholarly ways of addressing whiteness in heavy metal that move beyond discussions of demographics, virtuosity and spectacular racism. I analyse how the normalisation, construction and performance of whiteness, masculinity and nationhood within heavy metal scenes can have profound, pervasive and systematic oppressive consequences. The objective of my thesis is therefore to unveil the (in)visibility of whiteness within heavy metal scenes, and indicate how such whitenesses are deployed within particular countries, as both explicit political violence and instrumental hegemony. The quest in pointing to the fragmentation and multiplicity of whitenesses across three different countries is to

deconstruct the structure of white hegemony, and call into question the strategic political position that emerges in treating white selves as a uniform category.

This research maps the matrix of whiteness, masculinity and nationhood through which heavy metal scenes across Norway, South Africa and Australia have produced and defended national identity. I distinguish three key forms of white nationalism—Norway’s monstrous nationalism, in which the nation is constructed as terrifying and atavistic; South Africa’s resistant nationalism, which responds to post-Apartheid claims of white victimhood; and Australia’s banal nationalism, which consecrates mundanity as an authentic national condition. Such constellations of whiteness, masculinity and nationhood have enabled tacit and explicit constructions of exclusionary communities formed through collective memory and territory. These scenes are demonstrative of the ways in which white inflections inform the practices of both heavy metal scenes and the specifically local whitenesses manifest within them.

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