

Introduction

Redefining the Boundaries of Scenes

No two art scenes are alike.

Whether one is discussing heavy metal scenes, rock music scenes, jazz, blues, hip-hop, ballet, theatre and even literary scenes, no two exist as mirror images of each other for any variety of reasons. Every single imagination is shaped by not only desire but also by the circumstances that envelop them; social, political and economical models have directed the manner in which an imagination is able to work, compose, perform and create.

Creative minds – and those who appreciate their results – have long celebrated scenes and their geographic origins, comparing their creative output to those with similar interests in other places. Whether it means looking at towns and cities within their own regions or states, or the work of others in disparate countries and continents, where artists are working from provides an opportunity for the artists to relay these circumstances. Yet, so much of the entertainment that is consumed around the world has a Western origin. Further, Africa and African creativity has continually found itself misunderstood, stereotyped, patronized, overlooked or ignored entirely.

Heavy metal is no different.

This genre, one that has grown to become embraced by fans all over the world, has long been dominated by acts with Western origins, relaying Western struggles. With roots in the British midlands in 1970, heavy metal has grown to encompass different musical perspectives, having splintered into countless sub-genres. Musicians and fans have labouriously honed their dedication into creating scenes that exist within the confines of their locality, which have begun to become better integrated into global markets over time. However, there remain metal scenes that often get overlooked (see also Varas-Díaz 2021; Banchs 2016b; Wallach et al. 2011).

This book is about those various scenes in Africa that seldom get discussed. African metal and rock scenes are often overlooked because they are a disruption of the norm, a disruption of what we have come to expect from Africa and from rock and metal music. Further, Westerners have seldom considered the impact these types of music can have on fans outside of this periphery.

My interest in heavy metal stretches back to grade school, when my obsession with the sounds of amplified guitars and the energy that came from listening to heavy metal records grew insatiable. Growing up in rural Pennsylvania, I was unaware of bands existing in my hometown. I figured that the existence of metal bands must have occurred in faraway places such as Los Angeles or New York. That was where bands came from. It seemed impossible for bands to exist where I was living.

It would come as a surprise when I discovered that there were metal bands in my hometown. In fact there were several, performing various styles of rock and metal and existing with varying degrees of ambitions. It felt like stepping into a new world. Embracing the local scene allowed me to discover the punk, hard rock, hardcore and extreme heavy metal that was being performed in our town as well as to connect with those who also shared similar interests. This scene – our scene – existed to not only fulfil our need to bring this music closer to us but to also serve as a communal bond. The latter of which was fulfilled through live spaces. We occupied various spaces throughout town in order to organize performances from local bands, which included abandoned warehouse spaces, a community YWCA, local fire halls and VFW halls (that is Veterans of Foreign Wars, for those who grew up outside of Appalachia!).

Our scene, in a sense, was the gathering of those of us who had something in common, and whether we came together as performers or fans, our shared preference for this style of music (Cohen 1999: 239), its history and its culture guided us. Our scene was defined by us, as participants, our bands and their creative output, our scene's history and origins, and our identity as a scene: one that was rooted geographically in our region, state, country and continent. We knew that ours had its defining characteristics, which Sara Cohen says is intrinsic to any scene as every local scene would have its own 'distinctive characteristics, conventions, and identities' (Cohen 1999: 242). Will Straw defines the way in which scenes are created as heterogeneous 'coalitions' and 'alliances' (cited in Cohen 1999: 245), marked by the musical preferences of individual participants. Likely in bigger cities, too, scenes are clearly marked and defined, leaving room for fungible participation.

Scenes like the one I grew up in, and the ones I would come to embrace as I moved away, exist everywhere because of the willingness of participants to bring heavy metal to life with their own local interpretations, including within the African continent.

What I hope to do in the proceeding pages is to challenge the conversation and assumptions that metal fans may have about local scenes because their scenes act as a representation of who they are, and how they are able to reflect the locale that their scene is based in. Thus, not all scenes are created equally, and not all scenes are able to confront their challenges equally. Whether it is Western perceptions

about those who live in non-Western settings, or internal distractions, African metal and rock scenes face difficulties that are unlike any that Westerners would ever imagine.

Africa is a continent that has long been marginalized and generalized. What Westerners know about Africa likely comes by way of assumptions and detrimental stereotypes that glaze over the continent's humanity and contributions. I chose to write this book in order to outline various issues that I felt needed to be discussed in relation to the perceptions and assumptions that outsiders have towards the African continent. *Scream For Me, Africa!* is a collection of chapters that discuss a few of the underlying themes I have noted since I began to research rock and heavy metal music and its culture in the African continent. I have chosen to separate this book into two distinct parts. Part I details how Africa's metal and rock cultures are perceived, looking at metal and rock in Togo, Ghana and Botswana. Part II of this book discusses how two metal scenes, South Africa and Kenya, were able to navigate their way through difficult periods of authoritarianism and political turmoil, and how this is shaping the identity of the musicians in these countries today.

While my original idea was to piece together a work that discussed the growing relationship between decolonialism and heavy metal in Africa, reality, however, forced me to shift my approach because African countries were not created and do not exist equally. Each country (and region) confronts its own set of economic, social and political circumstances. Musicians, therefore, are holding different mirrors up – reflecting the circumstances that only they know how to confront. Thus, this book is presented as a book relating to different issues in different nations.

My approach here was not purely academic. My purpose was to allow the musicians to tell their stories, about their surroundings, their lives and their music. What are their lived experiences like? How is it different from that of Western performers? How do they approach songwriting? Why is this type of music important to them? These were the sorts of questions I asked performers, knowing that the answers were going to vary. What I did not expect, however, was for the answers to be incredibly wide-ranging, thus necessitating a readjustment of my original vision for the book. And most of this was due to where the musicians were from and their interactions within their local scene.

Ethno-journalism explained

Delving into the research that informed this book stemmed from years of studying various African metal scenes by way of immersion and personal communications. I have documented how some metal scenes in Africa had come to fruition while

anecdotally detailing the circumstances and challenges faced by the musicians in these countries in another book called *Heavy Metal Africa: Life, Passion and Heavy Metal in the Forgotten Continent* (Banchs 2016b), a book that, while it was not peer-reviewed as it was intended for a non-academic audience, was informed by academic proclivities. This is a style that I refer to as ethno-journalism.

This term reflects my tendency to write about matters with an eye towards a larger audience, one that may not have the academic training to read a monograph, yet still introduces new concepts and ideas that are widely discussed in academia, without dense jargon.

The choice to write a book based on fieldwork stemmed from two reasons. First, I wanted to fulfil a curiosity, to answer the questions I had about heavy metal music scenes throughout the African continent. Second, I had to. There was no academic research that had been published on the subject, and it seemed appropriate to jump in headfirst. Instead of waiting for someone else, I simply began travelling to Africa in order to answer the questions myself. I framed *Heavy Metal Africa* as a travel narrative to engage readers with a first-hand perspective on Africa that could potentially place the reader alongside personal connections, while still maintaining a discourse on the issues at hand as told through the eyes of the musicians I profiled in the book. It was after the publication of the book, and my interactions with academia, that I realized the amount of work I could continue to build on as a result of my entry into Africa's various metal scenes. It became abundantly clear to me shortly after the publication of *Heavy Metal Africa* that my book was incomplete. I had a lot more questions than I did before and challenged myself in the manner I set about accomplishing this.

For me, fieldwork was vital as it was the only way to bridge the necessary requirements needed to fully comprehend the circumstances of what the musicians were faced with and forced to overcome. As noted by George Marcus, while immersive research provides stimulation and ideas, traditional fieldwork 'is focused on observations and understandings emanating from intensive work with informants and access to their situated practices and ways of thinking' (2006: 115). In my own way, academic fieldwork and journalism met halfway, as most reporters are in the middle of the story, gathering as much information as possible. Ethno-journalism enables me to keep my work 'small', to avoid the pitfalls of ethnographers who tend to present their work in enlarged, exaggerated language on paper in order to exude authority and experience (Desmond 2016: 334).

However, and this must be noted, I do not work under the aegis of an applied academic practice. I actively observed and participated in minor instances, such as assisting with the loading and unloading of gear into and out of venues and even working a band's merchandise table for them. Further, when conversing

with musicians, I, as a fan, would personally introduce musicians to artists that I enjoy because they were curious as to what motivated me. This experience assisted them as it enabled me to share my preferred bands, some of whom are unknown to residents of nations where only well-known acts such as Metallica, Slipknot, Megadeth and Linkin Park, for example, are the metal and rock acts that the musicians are most familiar with. This scene-crossing also enabled me to gain a relative amount of trust with the participants, which better provided me with a ‘you are one of us’ (Varas-Díaz et al. 2016: 279) insight into the local scene. Notably, this approach also allowed me to strip away any inclination to exoticize my subjects.

My process involves me personally staying with participants in a manner that allowed for a better observation of their interactions with their circumstances. This is a mutual understanding between the scene participants and myself, which are mutually agreed on. I do not pay for interviews, only offering up the opportunity to provide my own provisions as wages earned by residents of the countries I visit offer a stark reality in income disparity between Africa and the West. As documented in the book, my travels revolve around festivals and concerts, which have allowed me to be present during bands’ rehearsals as well as their performances.

Where my method is flawed is in the manner in which I ask questions. Adhering to a more journalistic standard of digging deeper (think of a long-form profile in a magazine or newspaper) into their work ethic, drive and the challenges that they are forced to confront within their countries, questions that would fulfil academic methodology are generally omitted as academic models tend to not be misunderstood by those who have no experience or training within academia. Further, I have not spent years of research in academic settings much like a professional ethnographer would have focusing on one particular region or culture and immersing myself in a foreign language, therefore my knowledge on the country and circumstances is generally approached in the months leading up to my trips via journalistic research, not academic research. Everything I ask musicians is about them, their work and their country based on the circumstances I am witnessing and experiencing myself, and only complement my work with academic research after I have begun to outline my chapters.

If a topic came up in informal conversations, that in retrospect seemed relevant to my research, I would then recontact that individual to clarify what was spoken and request permission to cite their comments. I must note, that for the purpose of this text, none of the quotes cited in this book, except for one, were acquired this way. All of the quotes from musicians in the book were acquired through interviews with the musicians that were conducted at their discretion and with the full knowledge that they were being recorded for the purposes of being cited in this work. When necessary, I would contact musicians again through social media

messengers or email to clarify spellings of geographical locations, individuals' names, or for re-confirmation of specific events and details. Follow-up interviews are also cited accordingly.

Given that 2020 was not a conventional year, it must also be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic hampered my travel plans that were being accommodated for the purposes of researching this book. Thus, some of the interviews for this text were done via e-mail or Skype, and are cited accordingly.

Though I must concede that my first book would have strongly benefited from the guidance of academic eyes throughout the editing process, the book you hold in your hand is a better reflection of the academic pursuits that have interested me in the years since the publication of my first book. *Scream for Me Africa!* is not only a continuation of what I set out to do in 2016 but also a reflection of the knowledge I have acquired by way of the academic world, which has allowed me to follow up on the items discussed with musicians and the observations I have had.

Having already familiarized myself with certain African metal scenes and participants, I was able to build on this existing knowledge and push dialogues into research that I felt was missing from the academic world. My thinking has been shaped immensely by the acceptance my research was given in academic circles. The benefit of not writing a book with an intended academic audience allowed me to see what was missing from my work and what else I could do with the knowledge being acquired. However, publishing a book initially without the rigour of a peer-review helped me greatly, notably by providing the metal world with a conversation that it needed to have about the places and themes being researched. Thus, the need to complement my work with academic support.

Metal fans are growing ever-aware of the fact that metal is now a part of the African continent, and whether or not it was previously known to metal fans before, metal has long been part of the continent. Yet Africa's metal contributions are seldom viewed equally, and a lot of this has to do with the manner in which Africans are viewed and heard.

The first chapter of this book digs right into this topic with a discussion about hybridity and the expectations placed on acts from the Global South (a term I will use interchangeably to describe the non-Western world). My research for this chapter took me to the West African nation of Togo where I was able to spend time with the band Arka'n Asrafokor, a heavy metal band that has fully incorporated the music of their Ewe culture. Their sound signifies a turning point in African metal, as many are quick to dismiss their locality in order to honour their heavy metal heroes. Without shedding their influences, Arka'n Asrafokor has chosen to also honour their ancestors and their sacrifices. And, in doing so, they have begun to reinvent Togolese music and expectations.

Life as a metal fan from the West has informed me of metal fans' attitudes towards acts from the non-traditional centres of performance, and the expectations to mark their territory through the hybridity of their locality, thus compromising their existence for the exoticization of their identity. What I hope to do with this chapter is highlight that bands can indeed reflect their home if they choose to without falling into the trap of Western assumptions.

The second chapter of this book highlights the masked band Dark Suburb, an alternative rock band from Accra, Ghana. Choosing to present themselves as skeletons named after figures of Africa's rich history, the masked sextet has used their music to speak for the voiceless in their hometown by spotlighting those who occupy the poorest, often ignored corners of the world – the slums. By advocating for Accra-area slum dwellers, Dark Suburb is challenging perceptions and possibilities within their nation. Unlike the previous chapter, Dark Suburb are purposely using the stereotypical Africa as a way of invoking change.

The third chapter of this book delves into a topic that I have long wished to discuss: 'othering' and the heavy metal scene in Botswana. I chose to begin with the metal scene in this underpopulated, landlocked nation because something happened to African metal when viewers confronted the photographs of Botswana metal fans. The powerful imagery – which made their debut in a *Vice* magazine article (Kahn-Harris 2011a) – was an eye-opener to the Westerners peering at their former colonial subjects. These images reflected something that Africans were never 'supposed' to do: embrace a powerful form of Western art. Westerners had created powerful economic and financial systems that were 'advanced' (to borrow a colloquial expression) because of the overarching and expansionist mechanism – colonialism – that fuelled their capitalist ambitions. Modern Africa was to do no such thing: they were supposed to lay down and watch the world grow around them while the continent collectively kneeled to the world with their heads bowed and a bowl-clutching hand raised.

Much of the dialogue around heavy metal in Africa was formulated around the images from Botswana of leather-clad, Cannibal Corpse T-shirt wearing metal fans, was that expectations set were not expectations met. Africans had found a strong voice for themselves in heavy metal. As Wendt argues, it is art that allows the colonial subject to break away from the bindings of colonialism as self-expression 'bolsters [...] self-respect' (1976: 53) and sheds the caricatures that were created by the colonizers, perhaps too leading to a new form of 'racial intolerance' (1976: 53). And for some Africans, heavy metal is this equalizer. Now, whether metal fans are listening to Slipknot in Uganda, head-banging to Gojira records in Togo, trading Iron Maiden T-shirts in Botswana, debating their favourite Metallica albums in South Africa or screaming along to Megadeth songs in Madagascar, heavy metal has found another home in

Africa. Another place to dig its horns into, and another continent where fans are discovering what they can become through this genre: a new identity, a new culture, one that is without borders, religions, language or colonial baggage. This is not a genre that patronizes, this is a genre that empowers. This is one that just wants the listener to scream along!

The downside of the images of Botswana's metal fans came in the manner in which these photographs were viewed. Botswana metal fans were being 'othered', viewed only as a novelty, less so with the same reverence of their Western counterparts. The othering of the metal fans in Botswana has led to a stereotyping of sorts that has, in my view, only diminished the contributions of the local metal scene, which features international touring acts.

In this chapter, I look deeper at the manner in which the fans of the country are presented by discussing photographs that have been published by at least nine other photographers in a variety of publications, including major media outlets. The effects, in my view, were not positive, but simultaneously these images enabled the Botswana scene to expand beyond its borders.

Part II of this book shifts the dialogue, focusing on two countries, South Africa and Kenya. Both of these nations are two of the more recognizable nations within the continent for a variety of reasons, whether it is success in international sporting events, their celebrities or their popularity among Western holiday seekers. However, for metalheads, the struggle to achieve validation for their scenes has been incredibly arduous. These two chapters will delve more into the political aspect of these two African metal scenes.

Both South Africa's and Kenya's rock and metal scenes are bound by their formation through a history of authoritarianism, with the latter country having a longer, more arduous climb, existing not only under a more perfervid police state but also one enforcing an official policy of racism. And both metal scenes are bound by a youth chasing an identity of their own in order to escape the ills of their post-colonial life: the former was desperate to create a new identity away from the validation to their authoritarian, racist political institution, the Dutch Reformed Church, while the latter was attempting to step away from the cultural ethnicity inscribed into their lives.

For South Africans, music served an important role during a tumultuous political period. While the similarities between these two nations' authoritarianism are found in over-reaching policing desperate to silence those who stood to rout the status quo, the South African police state was ruled by the nation's White minority through a policy known as apartheid.

This chapter will also focus on the only rock and heavy metal scene in the African continent that is comprised mostly White participants. As a result of the scene's primary racial makeup, and considering the nation's political history of

apartheid, I consider how this form of music promulgated racial identity from the very beginning, and how the scene of today has used this music to create an identity of their own despite this past and a lingering conservatism that remains omnipresent in South African life.

Kenya's metal scene is one that hobbled through political difficulties to reach its status today. By no means is the nation's rock and metal scene a major focal point for international audiences like the South African and Botswana scenes, yet it has come along well since the nation's transition to liberal democratic elections. Yet there have been substantial hiccups in the decades since, including horrific episodes of violence that have been directly tied to subsequent elections – elections that have forced Kenyans to confront one of the uglier vestiges of colonial rule, ethnicity.

The metal scene in Kenya is still young, vibrant and slowly learning how to engage with the world around them. My visits to the country have informed me of the local bands' alacrity to push forward, to embrace the world around them, and to shed their colonial legacies once and for all. This final chapter will also look at how music was able to endure through various facets of their post-colonial experience, as well as how rock music was able to gain a foothold in the modern Kenyan state. Through the tumult of authoritarianism and any variety of economic difficulties, the modern rock and metal scenes exist by dint of the endurance of those that came before them, whether or not the current generation is even aware of what existed in previous generations.

A note on culture and tradition

Throughout this book I use the terms 'culture' and 'tradition', neither of which I mean to use as interchangeable descriptors. Cultures are local norms. They are not static. They are living, breathing entities shaped by people and time, defined by their common histories. Western ideas of cultures are quite often linked to a romantic idea of what our expectations are, not what reality shows.

Post-colonial cultures, however, are still shaped by lingering vestiges that have transformed their economic, political and religious makeup. Populations located in the Global South remain attached to a colonial entity as a result of the era of colonial expansion. Notably in Africa, governments are dependent on the global economy, firmly attached to their former colonial partners for trade and goods, as well as those of their neighbouring nations, who also tether themselves to Western markets. Inevitably, culture is also linked to the West for other variables of entertainment, which includes music.

Whether or not post-colonial cultures seek to redefine themselves in a manner that separate from their colonial history, they will do so under a matrix of

post-colonialism, not pre-colonialism, as too much has changed in the lives of sub-Saharan Africans for cultures to be reverted to pre-colonial life. Thus, I am intending to identify the culture and norms that the musicians have grown up with, and the patterns and ways associated with their lives in their countries of today.

Tradition is the way you understand things to be, how you were taught to do them or what is 'customary' to the individual. Traditions are the agreed-upon thoughts and ways within a societal grouping that exist to form boundaries of celebrations, entertainment, passages of time, births, deaths and unifications (marriages). Culture is what encompasses these norms.

Throughout this book, I use the term 'traditional' and define 'traditions' as the approach taken to their norms and routines in their everyday, modern lives. I am saying this because I also believe that traditions are in motion, always evolving and adapting while retaining certain aspects of their origins, notably for frequent occurrences (such as birthdays). And, because I believe that African 'traditions' were greatly affected by the arrivals of not only colonial governments but also religious missionaries, I have chosen to accept that traditions are in fact linear. As Sean Mallon says:

One of the key problems with the way 'tradition' is used is that it implies an evolutionary linear progression from the past to the present, but there is also a timelessness associated with the term. 'Tradition' can be used to conveniently describe a 'non-time-specific' way of life. People talk about 'traditional' societies and practices as if they are somehow pure and untouched by the outside world.

(2010: 364)

The reason I feel that traditional practices are this way in modern Africa is because cultures have to interact with their settings, whether organic or imported – as is the case in former colonial nations. It is these interactions which are required when it comes to understanding the work of musicians, and, as such, they can only be understood with personal interactions.

What is presented in the following pages is how heavy metal (and hard rock) music and its global sub-culture fits into these African settings and the manner in which this sub-culture has been acclimated to not only its participants but also Westerners viewing this scene from afar.