

The ‘other’ as projection screen: Authenticating heroic masculinity in war-themed heavy metal music videos

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Abstract

This article tries to come to terms with Islamophobia as an undercurrent of US culture, heavy metal’s notions of masculinity and authenticity, and the ways in which these two seemingly separate issues intersect in war-themed music videos. By analyzing the official music videos of Metallica’s “The Day that Never Comes” (2008) and Lamb of God’s “11th Hour” (2003), I will illustrate how the Arab or Muslim ‘other’ is used as a trope to affirm genre-specific notions of masculinity and authenticity. In support of my reading, and to help understand the ways in which music videos are used to communicate with a broader audience, the formal features of the medium will be investigated. Focusing on the structure of my chosen examples and on the way in which meaning-making processes are shaped and perceived by a knowledgeable, pre-informed audience, offers a new perspective to scrutinize the cultural impact of Islamophobic sentiments and shows that they found their way from the mainstream into heavy metal countercultures.

Keywords:

- Music video
- Islamophobia
- Anti-Arab racism
- War
- Masculinity
- Authenticity

Introduction: Authenticity as currency

In many discussions I took part in while preparing this article, the question of authenticity and its importance for the heavy metal genre and its scene was repeatedly raised. It is one of the most talked about aspects within heavy metal studies and fuels many panel discussions and scholarly works. Questions that are commonly asked are: What does it mean to be authentic? What measures are being used to decide whether an artist is to be considered authentic or

inauthentic? What measures are taken to consolidate an artist's authenticity? How does authenticity influence the relationship between artists, fans and the market? The presence of these and related questions marks not only the importance of authenticity's role within heavy metal discourse but also the significance within the genre. It became clear that authenticity and credibility are qualities that are desired and sought after. At the same time, however, it is my contention that the category of authenticity itself is often not sufficiently problematized. Contrary to how it may appear, authenticity itself is not "*authentic*". It relies on processes of authentication that are marked and driven by genre-specific conventions that are far from neutral: An artist's degree of authenticity is immediately connected to their reputation and thus their popularity; the better the reputation, the better this reputation can be sold. In this way, I think of authenticity as a form of currency that ensures the profit of artists and their product. It is this tension between authenticity as an idealistically neutral concept and authenticity as a part of the genre's market logic that I will problematize with my discussion of masculinity in heavy metal and the as of yet insufficiently discussed aspects of Islamophobia and othering. The focus of this article lies on the ways in which othering is used in heavy metal music videos as a means of authenticating the artists and their masculinity. In order to do so I will analyze how stereotyped images of the 'other', tropes of war and masculinity markers intersect in Metallica's video for their song "The Day That Never Comes" (2008) and Lamb of God's video for their song "11th Hour" (2003).¹

In this article I will show how fundamental and long-lasting the mechanisms of othering—of excluding groups based on their differences in order to define and/or empower the group which excludes—Muslims as well as Arabs² have been and continue to be in the United States; and how ingrained othering based on Islamophobia is within popular culture. Drawing on scholarship that conceptualizes and problematizes Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism and their impact on popular culture, it will be explored where strong stereotyping impulses are in place in US culture as one example for Western culture. Western representations dangerously simplify and generalize Muslims and Arabs and categorize them most often along a binary that only distinguishes between "the victim" and "the villain".³ These mechanisms of strictly categorizing and demonizing an entire group based on their belief and ethnic background are constantly reaffirmed and especially present in depictions of war.

As one of the most archetypical themes in heavy metal, war infuses not only the content but also the aesthetics and symbolisms across metal music genres. The war theme, as has been observed by Robert Walser in his article 'Forging Masculinity: Heavy-Metal Sounds

and Images of Gender', exemplifies masculinity and authenticity and speaks to the patriarchal ideologies of the predominantly white, male, heterosexual heavy metal audience. Music videos are a platform that utilizes genre-specific signifiers and speaks to the expectations of the audience in order to promote the artist and their image (Keazor and Wübbena 2005: 14, Railton and Watson 2011: 1, Goodwin 1992: 74, Weinstein 1990: 166). As such they cannot be regarded only in terms of constituting straight-forward expressions of a band's artistic integrity but have to be understood in relation to the market since they cater to the expectations of an intended audience. These expectations of course differ according to genre: Carol Vernallis makes a compelling argument for the ways in which setting, plot and ethnicity vary in different genres when comparing a hip hop video with Metallica's "Hero of the Day" (2004: 74-75). Discussing genre-specific elements of rock videos, Walser pointed to the omnipresence of the element of live performances⁴ (1993: 158) and Vernallis for example to the change in narrative structure (2004: 6-7).

Considering the visual, sonic and narratological characteristics of Metallica's video for "The Day That Never Comes" (2008) and Lamb of God's video for "11th Hour" (2003), I argue that the one-dimensional way in which the 'other' is portrayed in depictions of war not only stays in the aforementioned binary opposition but, more importantly, serves as a crucial trope to establish masculinity and authenticity which are core elements of Western heavy metal genres.⁵ In the two exemplary videos, that I will read as cultural artefacts, the (implied) images of the 'other' are utilized as a projection screen for heroic white masculinity and are thus a powerful force in reaffirming patriarchal structures both within the diegetic framework of the video as well as between the video and the viewer. Providing an overview of how sentiments of Islamophobia operate on a broader societal and cultural scale and how they find expression in cultural productions will offer a newly-informed perspective with which to approach music videos.

Between victim and villain: Islamophobia in visual culture

Islamophobia, mostly defined in terms of fear and anxiety of Islam, carries important cultural notions such as stereotyping and structural racism that are not only part of society but also find expression in numerous media and pop culture outlets. Neil Chakraborti and Irene Zempi define Islamophobia generally 'as a fear or hatred of Islam that translates into ideological and material forms of cultural racism against obvious markers of "Muslimness"' (2012: 271). Besides the implied stereotyping mechanism, Chakraborti and Zempi problematize Islamophobia as part of the overarching structure of implicit and explicit cultural racism, which 'is largely rooted in frames of inclusion and exclusion, specifying who may

legitimately belong to a [...] community whilst, at the same time, determining what that community's norms are and thereby justifying the exclusion of those whose religion or culture assign them elsewhere' (2012: 271). In a similar way, Steven Salaita places Islamophobia within a systemic framework of discrimination because he understands the concept 'as the systemic marginalization by non-Muslims of Muslim individuals or communities based on Islamic practices, Muslim identities, or ethnic features deemed synonymous with religious observance' (2006: 248). As such, the immaterial fear of Islam finds expression in real-life and institutionalized practices. In this way Lawrence Davidson defines Islamophobia as a stereotyping practice that expresses underlying anxieties: 'Islamophobia is a stereotyping of all Muslims [...] as real or potential terrorists [...]. Islam is reduced to the concept of jihad and the concept of jihad is reduced to terror against the West' (2011: 90). Notions of simplification, exclusion, othering and stereotyping, found at the bottom of these definitions, reflect societies in which they are omnipresent. As one example for Islamophobia's visual omnipresence in US media I want to mention the news coverage of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal that was criticized by Susan Sontag in her piece "Regarding the Torture of Others (2004). Examples of global pop culture's continuous mal-depiction of Muslims and Arabs include popular and critically acclaimed blockbuster movies such as *Argo* (2012) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and TV spy series such as *Homeland* (2011-) and *Covert Affairs* (2010-2014) in which the Islamistic terrorist has replaced the ubiquitous Russian villain that was present during the cold war.

Importantly, Islamophobic tendencies have not only been influential since 9/11 and overt anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiments that followed the attacks. Salaita compellingly draws attention to the long history of anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia in the US: 'The attacks on 9/11 provided an ostensibly empirical pretext to legitimize anti-Arab racism, but in no way did 9/11 actually create anti-Arab racism; 9/11 merely validated it' as well as 'stratified preexisting attitudes about Arabs' (2006: 251). The ways in which anti-Arab racism—targeted against people connoted as Arab and/or that is based on the conflation of "Arabness" and "Muslimness"—is '[m]orally' inextricably linked to America's 'historical influences and sociocultural values' and 'supplies the United States with a moral validation of manifest manners' (2006: 264, 258) bespeaks not only the long tradition these sentiments have but also the degree to which they impact US society. This 'moral validation of manifest manners' is very present in the movies and TV series mentioned before, and their high popularity speaks to a high degree of acceptance of anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia within society (see Shabi 2013).

One of the most important practices that continually informs and reaffirms Islamophobia is, as already indicated, stereotyping and the ways and the extent to which stereotyped imagery is circulated. Stereotyping, understood in Stuart Hall's sense as a 'part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order' that establishes 'a symbolic frontier between the "normal" and the "deviant", the "normal" and the "pathological", the "acceptable" and the "unacceptable", what "belongs" and what does not or is "Other", between "insiders" and "outsiders", Us and Them' (1997: 258, cf. Awan 2010: 524-25). Furthermore, and importantly so in the context of Islamophobia, stereotyping occurs in contexts of 'gross inequalities of power' (Salaita 2006: 258). I will later come back to this notion of stereotyping as a means of establishing a 'symbolic frontier' as it is also in place within the imagery used in heavy metal music videos. For the moment it is necessary to recognize that Islamophobia and 'anti-Arab racism in the United States [...] [are] simultaneously overused and underdiscussed' and that both concepts are 'extrinsic, intrinsic, and most importantly, ubiquitous' (2006: 266). In this way stereotyping that is ignited by Islamophobic sentiments influences the entirety of society and subsequently becomes 'a key element of cultural production', not just in the US but throughout Western societies that feel threatened by the Arab 'other' (2006: 264).

The representation of the Arab 'other' in culture, of course, has been broadly discussed ever since Edward W. Said published *Orientalism* in 1978. More recent efforts dealing with the visual representation of Arabs in cinema contend that the omnipresence of '[m]alevolent stereotypes equating Islam and Arabs with violence [has] endured for more than a century' (Shaheen 2008: 1), and consider the effects on the realities of the ones represented past and present. Scholarship on cinematic representations of Arabs and Muslims is a productive approach to discuss the content of music videos because they take their cue from cinematic visuals and reproduce established stereotypes in much the same way even though the medium-specific execution can differ. Jack G. Shaheen elaborates in this context that 'Arabs have been so demonized that it has become impossible for some world citizens to believe they are real people; they are perceived only as the enemy, as terrorists, as the "other"' (2008: 1). In his remarks, Shaheen also points to an important aspect that not only influences representations of the Arab 'other' but also encompasses the notions of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism, namely that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims look Arabic. Thus it is not only 'Hollywood's fractured mirrors of imagination [...] [that] lumped together Muslims and Arabs as one homogenous blob' (2008: 1) but a general mediatized conceptualization of Arabs 'as a globalized ethnic group manufactured into ostensible unity' (Salaita 2006: 246, Said 2003: xxii) which influence societies as well as real politics and are reflected in and

multiplied by manifold communicative ways. As a result of this demonization of the Arab other ‘suspicion, resentment and a desire for revenge’ (Philpott 2010: 335, Nacos and Bloch-Elkon 2011) are omnipresent among the general public and even more so are deemed ‘legitimate and right’ (Pickering 2001: xiv).

In the context of this article, I would like to draw attention to one particular kind of rhetoric that is part of the othering process and the representations it informs. This process is marked by the strong binary opposition between the Arab ‘other’ as the helpless victim on the one end of the spectrum and the Arab ‘other’ as the evil terrorist on the other end. While not leaving room for positions in between and while keeping the ‘Us’ against ‘Them’ dichotomy intact (cf. Chakraborti and Zempi 2012: 276, Maira 2009: 633), this binary is furthermore established along a gender binary in which women signify the victim and men signify the terrorist. In her article Sunaina Maira establishes that the clear distinction between “good” and “bad” Muslims is mainly drawn according to gender. Most often men are portrayed as brutal, malicious, deceiving and standing against liberal and Western ideals, whereas women are most often used to present testimony against fundamentalist violence and oppression in a patriarchal structure or to embody the ones in need of saving by a Western ‘benevolent empire’ (2009: 633). In Maira’s own words:

The preoccupation in the United States with women in hijab, or presumably “oppressed” Muslim and Arab women, coexists with a desire to rescue them from their tradition in order to bring them into the nation. At the same time, there is a deep anxiety about Muslim and Arab men as potential terrorists and religious fanatics who are antithetical to Western liberal democracy and ultimately inassimilable. (2009: 641)

Especially in relation to the war on terror in which the US was engaged in Afghanistan (2001-2014) and Iraq (2003-2011), a Western mindset is revealed which claims to bring freedom and democracy to people deprived of it. This rhetoric, which is again organized according to a gender binary, has been broadly discussed in postcolonial criticism as it assumes the necessity of what Gayatri Spivak has termed ‘a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men”’ (1993: 93). This rhetoric that is, to this day, globally used to explain and defend military missions, torture, war, murder, etc. regards brown and Muslim ‘human subjects [to be] trapped in anti-democratic, patriarchal, and tribalistic cultures [and thus] need to be liberated in order to achieve the “freedom” of individual autonomy promised to the fittest by neoliberal capitalism’ (2009: 631, see Abu-Lughod 2002: 783-85 and 2013: 27-53).

In this context the veil worn by Muslim women is of crucial importance because it has become not only a symbol of ‘Islamophobic victimization’ but even more so ‘*the* key symbol

of Islam in the West' (Chakraborti and Zempi 2012: 275; 270, emphasis in original).⁶ As symbol with this kind of cultural signification, the veil, as Chakraborti and Zempi argue, 'represents a visual element that in Western thinking conveys submission' and 'keeps its wearers powerless, vulnerable and dominated' (2012: 275).⁷ They, too, suggest, in reference to Sonya Fernandez, the importance of the gender binary in stereotyping the veil, its wearer and the culture that inhibits both.

Chakraborti and Zempi make essential observations concerning the Western construction of Islam: 'Two important themes emerge as inextricably intertwined in this "gendered" construction of Islam: the positioning of veiled Muslim women as oppressed and in need of saving, and the consequent equation of Muslim men with the concept of barbarism' (2012: 275). In this way, the gendered binary which constitutes a crucial component of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism is ultimately utilized to promote white masculinity. By fostering perceptions of Muslim and Arab women as oppressed victims of a patriarchal system and of Muslim and Arab men as either barbaric, perverted terrorists or feminized, weak men, hegemonic white masculinity is established and repeated in public discourse in manifold ways. The example of the veil shows that othering and stereotyping Muslims and Arabs is always already gendered. Thus, a proper analysis of Islamophobia in heavy metal music videos necessitates an intersectional approach that also takes into account Western hegemonic gender constructions, which, in the case of heavy metal is primarily masculinity.

Iron men: Hegemonic masculinities and the iconographies of war

Heavy metal has been considered, by heavy metal scholars and active members of the scene(s) alike, as a predominantly male surrounding even though recent scholarship, as evidenced by the "Metal and Marginalisation" conference and the resulting contributions to this volume, has worked toward shifting the focus to consider positions at the margins. As early as 1993, when Robert Walser published his essay 'Forging Masculinity: Heavy-Metal Sounds and Images of Gender', it has been stated that heavy metal constitutes, 'inevitably, a discourse shaped by patriarchy' (154). The fact that this assessment is still considered to be true emphasizes not only that the heavy metal scene is indeed very much reliant on patriarchal norms but also that it is a very stable system. Deena Weinstein famously claimed that British heavy metal (as part of the Anglo-American heavy metal scene) is fundamentally 'an expression of masculinity' (2009: 17).

Masculinity is, of course, not exclusively bound to male bodies and finds expression in a multitude of ways. Scholarship, up until now, seems to have lead a somewhat male-centered discourse that is concerned with a 'male audience' (Walser 1993: 154), considers heavy metal

and rock ‘a male preserve of masculine heroes’ (Medovoi 1991-92: 158) because the ‘primary images’ as well as the music’s ‘creators are males’ (Weinstein 2009: 26, 17). Due to this preoccupation with defining the genre primarily through masculinity, scholarly discourse deals with the female body, femininity and misogyny mostly by implication, exclusion or by presenting the two positions as mutually exclusive ends of a strict binary opposition. The existence of this binary has broadly been acknowledged and led Rosemary Hill and Karl Spracklen to conclude in the introduction to their volume *Heavy Fundamentalisms* that the ‘music’s construction of commodified outsider identities, its conformity to hegemonic masculinity and its globalised, globalising appeal is clear’ (2010: vii). In how far these ‘commodified outsider identities’, however, have been used not only to dissociate the genre from the establishment but also to reaffirm genre-specific notions of masculinity *within* the genre seems to be in need of further exploration and scrutiny. Part of why heavy metal should still be regarded as misogynist and heterosexist is the exclusion and/or an outspoken non-concern with women, matters feminine (Weinstein 2009: 18) and LGBTQI people and issues. Leigh Krenske and Jim McKay argue in this context that heavy metal’s ‘predominantly young, white, male performers and distinctive signifying practices mark it as an aggressively heterosexist formation. H[eavy] M[etal] lyrics, artwork, language, bodily practices and dress generally valorise hegemonic masculinity and denigrate women and gay men’ (2000: 290). Whereas the under-representation of the feminine has been the subject of much debate for quite some time and has been criticized in recent scholarship, the representation of ethnic and racial minorities has curiously yet to receive the same degree of attention.

There have been many important works dealing with the globalization of metal and the many diverse scenes that have emerged and that vary in style due to local traditions and folk music influences, such as Keith Kahn-Harris’s work *Extreme Metal* (2007). However, I would like to point out that the ways in which these scenes operate with othering mechanisms should be explored further, as I cannot accept the following statement to be a sufficient explanation for heavy metal’s tendency for color-blindness: ‘[T]he limitations to metal’s diversity, the exclusion of certain groups, is largely down to complex processes of self-exclusion’ (Kahn-Harris 2010: 99). To be absolutely sure, I am not concerned with racial or religious diversity among the practitioners or scenes themselves but want to investigate in which ways representations of a racial ‘other’ contribute to the self-understanding and authentication of artists and established notions of masculinity. Whereas I am aware that, as a counterculture, heavy metal relies on ideas of separateness in order to define itself and to position itself in opposition to established (mainstream) norms, discussions of how imagery of a racial or

ethnic ‘other’, that takes its cue from mainstream representations, is utilized to promote the image of artists have been largely neglected.

As one of the central themes in heavy metal, masculinity is ubiquitous and ‘circulate[s] in the texts, sounds, images and practices of heavy metal’ (Walser 1993: 154). As Walser observes, these ‘enactions of masculinity include varieties of misogyny as well as “exscription” of the feminine—that is, total denial of gender anxieties through the articulation of fantastic worlds without women—supported by male, sometimes homoerotic, bonding’ (155). The ‘exscription of the feminine’, the outspoken non-concern with the feminine, is brought to the fore and communicated via various means. For one there are sonic expressions of masculinity, such as metallic guitar riffs or growling vocals, and their effects on the audience which have broadly been discussed within the genre (Walser 1993: 153-55, Weinstein 2009: 24, Grossberg 1993: 175). The record itself might have been considered to be the most crucial element in the past, as it mostly preceded any other visual or live encounter with the music and its performers (Grossberg 1993: 175, Auslander 2008: 87), but in the age of the Internet the record is immediately paired with and embedded in (already existing) visual components and images, i.e. the paratexts of a band’s website or cover art, lyric videos, fan videos, (interactive) music videos, etc. This pairing in which music and imagery closely work together to create an (emotional) effect, however, does not weaken the individual components but function to mutually enforce each other. The immense impact of the sonic, alone, has been summarized by Weinstein who asserts that the sonic codes of masculinity not only become ‘symbols of power but [...] power itself’ (2009: 24). This observation not only attests to the powerful way in which the sonic acts by itself, let alone if paired with the right imagery and themes, but also draws attention to the transition from being a symbol of power to constituting power itself which then entails that something is needed that power can be exerted upon—a ‘symbolic frontier’ has to be established (Hall 1997: 258).

It is at this point where the notions of masculinity and Islamophobia again intersect and where an intersectional analysis proves to be productive. As my previous discussion of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism has shown, othering is carried out from an assumed position of white, male power in order to stereotype, stigmatize and exclude ethnic groups based on their differences in order to empower the group that excludes. These processes of stereotyping and stigmatization gain more weight in the context of conflict and war when Islamophobic sentiments informs real politics (Maira 2009: 631, Abu-Lughod 2002: 783-85). Thinking of US military engagements and wars in the Middle East, the impact of an “Us-vs-Them”-rhetoric as well as the imagery and sentiments that accompany it becomes apparent. In

this way war is a theme that not only embodies masculinity, patriarchy and exertion of power extremely well but also has far-reaching implications for Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism and othering.

Within the heavy metal genre the war theme is one of the most prevalent and has been subject to wide-ranging considerations: It was discussed in relation to, for example, lyrics and politics (Puri 2010, Flockher 2010) or practices of torture (Cusick 2008). War quite literally serves as a representation of Walser's observations about metal themes and their imagined realities

in which men are the only actors, and in which male bonding among the members of a "hero-team" is the only important social relationship. [...] Male bonding itself becomes crucial to the reception of metal that depends on masculine display, for it helps produce and sustain consensus about meaning. [...] Metal [...] [evokes] images of armoured, metallized male bodies. (1993: 159-60)

In these realms of masculinity, and in the context of war especially, it is the figure of the warrior that takes precedence as it 'is highly mythologized and is entangled in concepts of masculinity, heroism, violence and power' (Lucas 2010: 45, Weinstein 2009: 26). Manowar's 2002 song "Warriors of the World United", in which they 'are fighting for metal that is true', is an obvious case in point to illustrate that the figure of the warrior is widespread and takes on a central role in heavy metal. Moreover, the two protagonists in the music videos discussed in this article are (also quite literally) male warriors, therefore connotations that are ascribed to them, i.e. 'heroism, violence and power' should be kept in mind.

The war theme can hardly be considered unique to the heavy metal genre and their music videos but has a long and lasting tradition within popular culture and cinematic productions. As examples from the incredible amount of war-themed movies that have been produced since the onset of movie making and that were extremely profitable/iconic I want to mention *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and *American Sniper* (2014).⁸ The imagery and visual and thematic characteristics developed and established over the last century, however,—and with them notions of the Arab 'other' as Shaheen has argued—have had crucial implications for the ways in which war and warfare have been negotiated in heavy metal. In his analysis of heavy metal lyrics dealing with war, warfare and battle Samir Puri illustrates and parallels quite powerfully the ways in which imagery and emotions triggered by lyrics and music respond to and are entangled with audience's concepts of war established by the cinema: 'Together, music and lyrics stimulate the passions of listeners by provoking

excitement at the clash of arms, veneration at the display of heroism, and sorrow at the scale of loss. This is executed in a manner that is quite akin to a cinematic telling of the same historic tales' (2010: 57). To compare the modes of how lyrics and music operate while having the story telling abilities of the cinema in mind not only demonstrates how closely connected they are but 1) that the heavy metal genre draws on already established themes and the story telling mode of (mainstream) cinema and 2) the audience's ability to link the music to cinematic imagery.

The connection between heavy metal and the war theme, however, exceeds this representational mode of the cinema. Without going into much detail, I want to mention some examples that illustrate how heavy metal music itself functions as a signifier of war and masculinity. More fully explored in Jonathan Pieslack's groundbreaking study *Sound Targets*, the interrelation between power, the military and heavy metal in for example recruitment advertisements of the US military exemplifies the ways in which 'metal's projection of power' paired with war-related imagery establishes desire (2009: 143). He writes that '[b]y associating metal with military images, including guns and combat training, the music inscribes the ideological component of power to characteristics of military service, and thus seeks to attract recruits by appealing to their sense of personal empowerment' (143-44). In this way metal music is used to promote the patriarchal institution of the military and the hegemonic masculinity it stands for. Drawing on the same mechanism of signification, one can find countless self-made war-themed videos on Internet platforms such as YouTube that pair heavy metal songs with own video material or with already existing imagery from news media and/or movies. These videos reach from war-themed fan-made videos for a favorite song—as is the case with one video for Metallica's "For Whom the Bell Tolls" (1985) in which a live performance of the band is combined with imagery from the 1943 movie *For Whom the Bell Tolls*—to professionally produced image films—as is the case with Five Finger Death Punch's video of their tour to Iraq which is supported by their song "Bad Company" (2009). These examples only begin to show how the multifaceted interconnectedness of heavy metal and war plays out and how established it is. Whether heavy metal uses imagery that signifies war or whether heavy metal music is used as a signifier of war, the combination of these two themes works powerfully to promote strength, heroism, valor and, above all, masculinity.

Staging the other, selling the self: The cultural politics of heavy metal music videos

In the two music videos I discuss codes of masculinity and warfare as well as mechanisms of othering and Islamophobia are employed to create not only coherent meaning but also to sell

their music. To achieve this, the artist must retain their authenticity, which is partly already done by integrating war tropes in to their plots. In music videos genre-specific ideas of authenticity (and expectations of the audience) are met by following certain visual parameters. One such parameter is the mediatized live performance as has been discussed by Philip Auslander (2008: 2). With the rise of music videos (but also live DVDs) as promotional tool, live performances became a necessary ingredient to authenticate the band because ‘[a]uthenticity [...] [is] produced through a dialectical or symbiotic relationship between live and mediatized representations of the music, in which neither the recording nor the concert could be perceived as authentic in and of itself’ (Auslander 2008: 185). It comes as no surprise that live performances—together with elements such as the “phallic thrust of guitars” (Walser 1993: 153) and singing directly into the camera (Goodwin 1992: 78)—are an inherent part of the majority of heavy metal music videos (Walser 1993: 158). In this way music videos have become another medium to not only showcase a band’s authenticity but to ‘[assure]’ it because the artists ‘promis[e] continuity of self with the space beyond the stage’ (Goodwin 1993: 31). Of course music videos cannot mirror a live performance but they can allude to the audience’s experiences, thus, functioning in a complementary or triggering way for the audience and their expectations.

Music videos are primarily thought of as promotional clips to advertise the artist and their products, i.e. their songs (Keazor and Wübbena 2005: 14, Railton and Watson 2011: 1, Goodwin 1992: 74, Weinstein 1990: 166, Pieslack 2009: 18). This is not to say that they cannot be aesthetically and/or artistically sophisticated and challenging but rather that the medium is aware of its audiences and tailors its content and aesthetics accordingly to be pleasurable. Thus, music videos have become a very sophisticated medium that is ‘both “promo and product”’ (Railton and Watson 2011: 2). In order to analyze and understand music videos it is crucial to acknowledge that they work on multiple levels simultaneously (Vernallis 2004: 13): Visual, sonic and narrative components as well as their execution in relation to both the song and the artist, create a medium that is complex and demands an attentive and knowledgeable viewer. Consuming as well as producing a music video is highly informed by political and genre-specific ideologies in which expectations, experiences, visual tropes and themes as well as underlying cornerstones of the genre are constantly negotiated and interpreted in order to create coherent meaning. This meaning-making process is dependent on agreed upon tropes and implied notions that make reading the codes pleasurable but is at the same time informed and influenced by culturally and socially constructed norms.

The war theme in music videos is widespread and can be found in multiple genres as is evidenced by Henry Keazor and Thorsten Wübbena’s chapter ‘Operation “Shock and Awe”’ in which they discuss different approaches to the Iraq war in music videos from artists such as Blur or George Michael (2005: 143-70). Other examples of the war theme as a crucial visual and narratological element in hard rock music videos include Green Day’s “Wake Me Up When September Ends” (2005), Rise Against’s “Hero of War” (2009) or 30 Seconds to Mars’s “This Is War” (2010) and heavy metal music videos such as Metallica’s “One” (1989), Megadeth’s “Holy War ... Punishment Due” (1990), or System of a Down’s “B.Y.O.B.” (2005). Even though all these videos engage with an ‘other’ in some way or another just by way of dealing with war, I chose Metallica’s and Lamb of God’s videos because they so openly engage with processes of othering that more overtly show how ingrained mechanisms of Islamophobia actually are.

Metallica’s official music video for “The Day That Never Comes,” the first single off their album *Death Magnetic* (2008), was released on the band’s official website on 2 September 2008 in the midst of a public debate concerning the use of Metallica’s music in US detention camps in Guantanamo Bay. Highly acclaimed Danish film director Thomas Vinterberg was selected to take charge of the video. The story of the video is set in a combat zone in the desert and revolves around the protagonist, a US Marine officer, and his comrade who is severely injured during an ambush and has to be evacuated. The song as well as the storyline of the video can be divided into three parts (table 1): The song based on three tempo changes into a) the melodic part that introduces the main theme of the song; b) the rhythmic part in which a new theme is introduced, the tempo is picked up and the beat intensifies, which translates into the intensified manner in which the lyrics are sung; c) the virtuoso part that demonstrates the musical ability of the musicians due to extensive solo parts. Accordingly, the narration can be divided into a) beginning, establishing of the relationship between the protagonist and his comrade; b) crisis, the protagonist’s reaction to loss and establishing of the motive of revenge; c) catharsis, the protagonist is able to demonstrate his valor and virtue when encountering a Muslim couple in the middle of the desert. This structure and the overall length of the song of 08:24 minutes allows for an elaboration of the

	Song	Narrative	Frames per minute
00:26- 04:14	Melodic part (focus on musical harmony)	Establishing of relationship between the two soldiers	19
04:14-05:28	Rhythmic part (focus on lyrics)	Protagonist’s crisis and establishing of revenge motive	20
05:28-08:20	Virtuoso part (focus on musician’s ability)	Protagonist proves himself as virtuous	40

narrative in a filmic way, with a lot attention to detail. Even though elaborate story lines such as this are mostly considered to be distracting from the music (Vernallis 2004: 3-6, Goodwin 1992: 84), Carol Vernallis interestingly acknowledges that some narrative-driven videos can be successful if they revolve around ‘tragedies’ and ‘possess a hint of inevitability, as if the outcome were already embedded with the opening of the tape’ (2004: 7)—a detail that gains more weight in the context of this video in particular as it is set out to evoke very specific expectations in the audience.

Lyrics present a crucial part of establishing the narrative in a music video as they ‘play a key role in establishing the *mood* of a song’ (Goodwin 1993: 65; emphasis in original) and can ‘complement or extend’ the visual narrative (Railton and Watson 2011: 55). This is certainly the case for “The Day That Never Comes”. In an article for MTVNews Hetfield describes the overall style of his lyrics as ‘vague but powerful’, implying that this vagueness can lead to an application of a variety of themes that on the whole deal with ‘the human element’ as he calls it (Harris and Brown 2008). Hetfield’s statement about his lyrics complements Niall Scott’s assertions about Metallica’s and Hetfield’s general tendency toward the political that is marked by ‘a sense of apathy, a complete, but knowing lack of concern and an unbiased view of the world; a blanket, uncritical criticism that is knowingly disengaging’ (2011: 229). However, it is clear that the message being conveyed to the audience in this video is far from being free of ideology and politicization: Pairing this kind of lyrics and music with the video’s rather unambiguous and simplifying portrayal of Muslims and US military engagement in the war on terror emphasizes the humanitarian and liberating efforts of the US (see the point I am making to problematize this using Spivak). The idea of disengagement seems farther removed when considering Hetfield’s problematic statements in which he expresses his views on Metallica’s music being used in Guantanamo. In an article published in *The Guardian* in June 2008 it was reported that Hetfield took no issue with the fact that “Enter Sandman” was used for torturing detainees and said ‘If the Iraqis aren’t used to freedom, then I’m glad to be part of their exposure. [...] We’ve been punishing our parents, our wives, our loved ones with this music for ever. Why should the Iraqis be any different?’ (Smith 2008).

I would suggest that the video not only takes a favorable position on the West’s superiority toward others but also constitutes a mirror that reflects and caters to Islamophobic and anti-Arab racist sentiments that circulate within society. As illustration of how the song’s lyrics contribute to this Goodwin’s concept of amplification is helpful as it ‘occurs when the clip introduces new meanings that do not conflict with the lyrics, but that add layers of

meaning' (1992: 86-87). Thus, it is in fact the thematic openness of Hetfield's lyrics that *allows* for a video that is not bound to a certain story but can be applied to a multitude of themes which the band then represents and that are, in turn, representational of the band. This is most powerfully illustrated by the way in which the motive of revenge is established against the terrorists who were responsible for the attack on the unit by way of Vinterberg's visual support that ascribes new meaning to single open phrases. At the beginning of the second verse both soldiers are leaning against the wheel of a truck, waiting for the helicopter to arrive and evacuate the wounded soldier (Fig. 1a). The camera does not move for seventeen seconds and the viewer has enough time to scrutinize the scene. There is a lot of blood and when the wounded soldier is no longer able to support himself it is evident that his condition is critical (Fig. 1b). The close-up shot of the protagonist is supplemented by the words 'God I'll make them pay' which are heard very clearly due to the intensifying and loud manner in which they are sung. The lyrical I, presumably the protagonist, will make God pay for the dire enemy-caused situation of him and his comrade that is carefully laid out in front of the audience.



Figure 1: Establishing motive of revenge

The same method is used in the ad libitum section of the song that introduces a new musical theme and that is characterized by an increase in tempo, the repetition of phrases (e.g. "This I swear"), the growing intensity of the vocal performance and overall increase of volume. The section itself starts with the phrase 'Love is a four-letter word', a line that connotes "love" as something negative or out of place in these circumstances. Accompanied by a close-up of the protagonist's hands loading a rifle, the revenge motive is re-emphasized (Fig. 1c). In a manner that indicates male bonding and ties it directly to the terrorists, the word love is explicitly connected to the relationship between the two soldiers; and transmitted through powerful vocals. The image of the isolated protagonist loading his rifle suggests what he is willing to do to revenge his

comrade and ‘make *them* pay’ (my emphasis). During this sequence the viewer is confronted with a protagonist filled with rage and ready for action against the invisible but all-around terrorist who is made responsible for his comrade’s injury. In the following shot while Hetfield repeats ‘This I swear’ three times from the top of his voice, the camera pans over the back of the vehicle, where at least three other soldiers and an automatic weapon are situated as to imply material power. The warning to ‘put an end to this’, emphasized by Hetfield’s direct address toward the camera, is at full force—established by the lyrics, supported by the image, and dominated by the music—when the unit encounters an Arab man on the road in front of his broken-down car, holding jumper cables in his hand; an immediate threat the audience is primed for. Immediately alarmed (and culturally inscribed by Islamophobia), the US soldiers react aggressively and exert their power by ordering the man to his knees. When they detect his wife, who is completely veiled, in the back of the car, the situation seems on the verge of escalating. However, the woman resolves the charged situation by stepping out of the car and approaching the protagonist, who can prove himself a hero by not shooting the couple. After helping them to start their car and send them off their way, the video ends with a shot of the protagonist’s cathartic moment as he looks up the sky into the bright sun.

The most obvious formal indicator of the rising tension and the power relation in this scene is, apart from the storyline, the cutting pattern which doubles in speed compared to the earlier two sections of the video (table 1). In this way the editing mirrors the increased tempo of the song, which also doubled compared to the beginning of the song. During this tense encounter, from the moment the protagonist confronts the couple with his rifle until he finally lowers it, forty-nine cuts occur, meaning that the images change more than every two seconds. Moreover, the editing also mirrors the power relation between the US soldiers and Arab couple: Of the fifty-one frames during that critical scene, seventeen are close ups of American soldiers holding their weapons at the ready. The Arab man, who follows the orders of the protagonist and surrenders, is mostly shown on his knees in a submissive position. Thus, he constitutes the opposite of the hypermasculine American soldiers and exemplifies the



Figure 2: Symbolic powerlessness

inability to react to the threat they pose toward him. His powerlessness is furthermore symbolized by the feminized way in which he is portrayed: his full lips, his slim figure and the subordinate position in which he is shown does not fit the established ‘barbaric’ terrorist aesthetic (Fig. 2).

The woman, too, embodying not only Islam per se by way of her veil (Chakraborti and Zempi 2012) but also embodying the justification for Western military engagement in the Middle East as a liberation tour by way of being a Muslim woman, is despite her potentially posing danger⁹—since it is impossible for the soldiers to estimate what she could hide under her clothes—rather a subject that needs to be saved from the inhumane circumstances she lives in (Maira 2009, Abu-Lughod 2002 and 2013, Spivak 1993). In this situation, the culmination point the music video carefully constructed by mirroring the song’s structure, the protagonist with whom the audience is supposed to sympathize can demonstrate his virtue by sparing the couple’s lives and act as liberator and facilitator. This is illustrated by the highly symbolic moment when the veiled woman climbs out of the backseat of the car, where she is expected to sit according to Islamic tradition, and takes initiative something she might not



Figure 3: Cathartic moment

have done without this encounter with the US soldiers, without the assistance of the West. Even though it might look as if there is a humanizing moment of recognition when the woman’s eyes meet the soldier’s (Fig. 3) that seems to award her a certain amount of agency—her active role in diffusing the situation would speak to that—it actually is only through her that the soldier can prove to be a hero. In other words the ethnic other enables the cathartic moment for the soldier and is utilized to showcase his moral integrity.

Based on Islamophobic notions and othering processes that exclude ethnic others, the video portrays the Muslim couple, and the implied terrorists responsible for the attack, in an essentialist manner for the sole purpose of highlighting the virtue of the

white warrior. And it is this essence that Metallica aligns themselves with in order to authenticate their genre-specific masculinity on thematic, visual and affective levels that affirm their reputation.

In a similar vein, even if with a contrasting stance toward the matter of war in general¹⁰ and the war on terror in particular, Lamb of God tells the story of a US army veteran in their official video to “11th Hour” from their much acclaimed war-critical album *As the Palaces Burn* (2003)—an album that was released shortly after the US invasion in Iraq and that music critic Clay Marshall considered ‘a fitting soundtrack to World War III’ due to its unapologetic commitment to sonic ‘brutality’ (2003). Lamb of God, known for their outspoken criticism of the US government and their policies, has been discussed in relation to their lyrics and their dealings with the war theme by Samir Puri who contends in his consideration of the song “Contractor” that this track successfully ‘correlates the velocity of its music with the severity of its theme. This is not just metal as storytelling—this is metal as a kind of sonic simulator’ (2010: 59). The musical intensity that is indicated here also characterizes the song “11th Hour” which was described by Ray Van Horn, Jr. as ‘tempo-mad’ (2013). As such the structure of the song, the sections of which—intro, verses, refrains, interlude, outro—are clearly marked, is paid less attention to in favor of several rhythmic breaks, counter-accent of the guitar, the steady doublebass and the growling vocals.

Correspondingly, the aesthetics of the song’s music video are in stark contrast to Metallica’s video as to fit the specificities of the song. Instead of using an elaborate and cinematic story line Lamb of God’s video combines a veteran story with a fast-pace montage of images of military troops in the Middle East, sequences of (violent) protests, images of people suffering and extensive sequences of the band performing. The intensity that is already established by the velocity of the music is visually enforced by a collage of images that create an atmospheric background that emotionally affects the audience. This atmospheric background is established through a rapid editing pattern that I would also like to call “tempo-mad”. In the first, somewhat slower, part (until 02:30) an average of 106 frames per minute is in place and in the second faster part (until the end) an average of 146 frames per minute is in place the intensity of which is furthermore enhanced through flickering images. That is to say that the audience is overwhelmed by the intensity of the images on the screen and that therefore an affective reaction is triggered rather than a cognitive. While the band is performing in an outside setting and the various unrelated images of Middle East-related content flicker over the screen, the protagonist of the video is shown in his living room. These three layers of imagery are explicitly separated from one another by differently colored filters:

a blue filter for the sequences in which the band is performing, a black and white filter for the home sequences of the veteran and a sepia filter for the flickering war images of the combat zone. This separation suggests spatial as well as temporal distance between the three visual realms. Whereas Metallica's video was set out to ensure coherence by implementing the band in the same desert surrounding as the narration, Lamb of God's visually clearly distinguishes between the different layers thereby emphasizing incoherence and discontinuity.

Relatedly, the overarching theme of the video is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from which the protagonist of the video suffers. The flickering images of the combat zone could be read as flashbacks of his previous employment in the combat zone and the alcoholism which is addressed in the lyrics as well as the images—showing repeatedly half-empty bottles and glasses—is presented as his strategy to cope with what he has suffered through in the combat zone. Similarly to Metallica's video, it is again the ways in which the lyrics' meaning and visual means are paired that illustrates the interdependence of the two and the way in which they 'complement and extend' each other (Railton and Watson 2011: 55). The lyrics alone suggest an emphasis on alcoholism and addiction that could well lend itself to a more general application to an array of situations, the visual story line of war and PTSD, however, corresponds to the lyrics in a way that opens up new meanings and new ways of understanding and experiencing the video as well as the lyrics.

The imagery of the combat zone mainly shows armed men protesting, crying men and helpless children asking for help (Fig. 4). In this way, the stereotyped gendered binary between dangerous, barbaric men and helpless, oppressed women, explored and exemplified before, is again utilized as a projection screen to complement the back story of the broken yet heroic war veteran. As an example to show how Islamophobic sentiments of the audience are evoked, the sequence that shows Saddam Hussein holding a speech seems suitable. Hussein is subtitled with saying that he was 'guided by the great principles of life, of jihad' (Fig. 5), a statement that recalls Davidson's observation that from an Islamophobic perspective, 'Islam is



Figure 4: Gendered Stereotyping

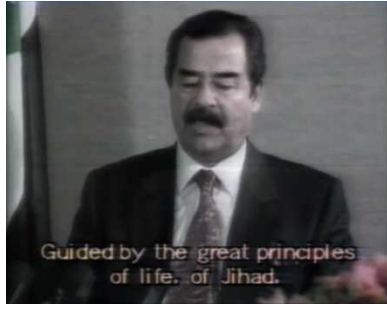


Figure 5: A trope of terrorism

reduced to the concept of jihad and the concept of jihad is reduced to terror against the West' (2011: 90). Using Hussein, the presumed embodiment of all evil at the time, as a visual trope for terrorism against the West ensures strong emotional reactions from the audience. This is furthermore supported by Lamb of God's lyrics 'mark my words and remember me', that offer a way to justify, enhance and maybe even create

Islamophobic sentiments and consequently demonize everything connected to it. The 'other' is reduced to the image of Saddam Hussein and thus stigmatized as posing the ultimate terrorist threat to Western society. In Lamb of God's music video this is achieved in a matter of seconds by simultaneously engaging the audience in textual levels and by playing on anti-Muslim sentiments deeply-rooted within society to strengthen the visual message of the song.

Especially toward the end of the song the intensity of the video is heightened by increasing the editing pace to match the pounding double-bass and by adding a flickering effect to the visuals which makes the video hard to watch. Toward the end the emphasis of the video's storyline lies solely on the veteran's memories and war experiences which feature also images of tanks and his own unit. The realm of male bonding within the military is exemplified by several pictures that show the protagonist in his full gear and among comrades. Furthermore the mental problems resulting from his deployment, alongside with the tragedy that he is re-deployed despite his condition and his isolated suffering that he tries to drain in alcohol are foregrounded. To pit this veteran-centered (thus Western-centered) story against the Muslim 'other' simplified and essentialist imagery of the violent and angry Muslim is utilized (Fig. 6). In this way the endurance of the veteran and his ability to have survived the combat zone are emphasized as well as the violence enacted by Muslims, who are thought to be responsible for the situation. With their video for "11th Hour" Lamb of God created visual testimony that, while presumably speaking from a different political perspective than Metallica, ultimately presents the second side of the same coin, the 'other' as projection screen.

Conclusion

Drawing on conceptualizations of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism that are deeply ingrained in US society, politics and culture, this article explored the ways in which this finds expression in heavy metal music videos, more specifically in Metallica's "The Day That Never Comes" and Lamb of God's "11th Hour". By considering genre-specific understandings of masculinity, authenticity and themes of war an informed analysis was

possible and showed how images of the ‘other’ and mechanisms of othering are employed to position the respective protagonist in direct contrast to the demonized ‘other’. The utilized images of Arab men which are by way of their ethnic background (and a dangerous case of conflation) linked to Islam can easily be categorized according to a stereotyped and gendered binary between barbaric Muslim men and oppressed Muslim women. Since these music videos are mostly used for promotional and distributional purposes these images are ultimately used to reaffirm the artist’s masculinity and contribute to their overall reputation as authentic members of the heavy metal scene.

With this article I not only point to the cultural implications of Islamophobia in heavy metal but also provide extensive aesthetic and cultural analyses for music videos that have been not been discussed in depth as of now. Approaching heavy metal music videos in an intersectional manner, provides a perspective that allows to engage with the interconnectedness of Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism, genre-specific concepts of masculinity and authenticity, patriarchal tropes of war and the ways in which they are negotiated and represented in the medium music video. By discussing two very different videos from two very different metal bands I could furthermore demonstrate that Islamophobia, as a cultural undercurrent, is omnipresent and functions in ways that enable representations thereof also in war-critical contexts. What is more, Islamophobic sentiments and processes of othering have become so naturalized and are expressed so overtly that awareness has to be established as to *how* naturalized and overt mechanisms of Islamophobia and othering have become in Western societies and cultural productions. Ultimately, I hope to have offered an aesthetically and culturally informed perspective on music videos that fosters much needed critical discussion on the relation between ethnic marginalization and metal.¹¹

¹ Since the use of music videos by heavy metal bands is somewhat controversial and at times considered a “sellout” and “inauthentic” in itself, I would like to follow Benjamin Earl’s proposition to not strictly follow a binary that distinguishes between “authentic” subculture and “inauthentic” mainstream. Using Bourdieu’s concept of the field, he implies that a more relational and dynamic approach is beneficial as it can also account for the in-between positions (Earl 2009: 33, 47).

² I use the term ‘Arab’ with Steven Salaita’s critical assertion regarding the generalizing way in which Arab Americans are ‘homogenized’ in mind: ‘Although diverse religiously, culturally, geographically, economically, and politically, Arab Americans generally have been homogenized in various American discourses as an unstable [...] presence’ (2006: 245). In using the simplified term ‘Arab’ I do not wish to follow the same generalizing patterns I am problematizing but rather I want to draw attention to racist undercurrents that Islamophobia—informed by centuries of Orientalist stereotypes—bears as it conflates Muslims with Arabs as to say that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs (cf. Shaheen).

³ These representations are commonplace in contemporary media or popular culture as evidenced not only by the music videos discussed here but also by TV series such as *Homeland* or *24* and movies such as *Jarhead*. For a more detailed discussion of how this binary plays out in the media see Alsutany (2012). These representations also have a long tradition in US literature that started in the late eighteenth century with the captivity narrative—such as Susanna Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers*—and is still very much alive as exemplified by John Updike’s novel *Terrorist* (2007).

⁴ For the ways in which live performance, or concert settings, and authenticity are connected in a sonic as well as visual way please consult Lawrence Grossberg (1993): 175 and Philip Auslander (2008): 185.

⁵ These two videos are of course neither the only nor the first ones in which othering mechanisms are in place, an earlier example is Megadeth’s “Holy Wars ... Punishment Due” (1990).

⁶ I will use the more general term ‘veil’ when referring to the different forms of head covering—e.g. the hijab, the burqa, the niqab, the abaya—worn by Muslim women because I want to draw attention to the perceived significance of covering itself in Western societies rather than the cultural particularities of the different forms of covering.

⁷ Besides signifying victimization, the veil is a site of (orientalist) erotic fantasies of the forbidden and unknown as has powerfully been shown by Meyda Yegenoglu in her book *Colonial Fantasies* (1998) and a site that signifies a threat to Western civilization in ideological and fundamentalist ways (see Khiabany and Williamson).

⁸ On the ways in which the war theme became fit for ‘pleasurable consumption’ and an integral part of pop culture see Roger Stahl’s insightful analysis *Militainment, Inc.* (2010: 6).

⁹ See endnote 7.

¹⁰ I should mention at this point that Metallica has been considered in the past as a band that stood against war and was very vocal about that. Samir Puri mentions in this context Metallica’s song “Disposable Heroes” (2010: 59). I would like to add their very first music video for “One” (1989) which was directed by Bill Pope and Michael Salomon and featured besides extensive performance sequences clips from the 1971 movie *Johnny Got His Gun* which famously deals with the consequences of World War I, being a prisoner of one’s own body and the state of living death caused by the loss of all of the soldier’s limbs. Metallica’s video, by reflecting on this movie and its themes, explicitly problematizes the outcomes of war which makes very clear that reflecting on the intentions of the band is a slippery slope that rather supports my argument that at the core of these videos lies not necessarily the distribution of a certain opinion but the inherent mechanisms of othering expressed through war imagery and implied concepts of masculinity and authenticity.

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