



Music, Ideology and How They #Interact:

A Journey from Sacred Music to Black Metal

Elen Gevorgyan, 2020

Music and ideology – be it religious or political – are not as separate as it first seems. If we take a look back at the Middle Ages, when religious music, or sacred music was of great importance, there was a reason for it to be monophonic: one God, one melody.

Tracing the time only a century back, when the Soviet Union was still alive and breathing, and while the Nazi Germany was fervently attempting the conquer the world, the music that was to be played did not go unnoticed and faced its own regulations.



What about rock and metal music? Although Russian rock started emerging in the 1960s, its golden age being the coming 1980s, it was in 1985, when a list consisting of 38 'foreign musical groups and artists whose repertoires contain ideologically harmful compositions' was released in the USSR. Some of the examples of ideologically harmful compositions are those containing anticommunist lyrics, or texts about nationalism, religious obscurantism, religious mysticism, violence etc.

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Направляем примерный перечень зарубежных музыкальных групп и исполнителей, в репертуаре которых содержатся идейно вредные произведения, а также список тарифицированных вокально-инструментальных ансамблей СССР.

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Секретарь обкома комсомола

П. Гришин

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 13. Блек Сабат | — насилие, религиозное мракобесие |
| 14. Элис Купер | — насилие, вандализм |
| 15. Назарет | — насилие, религиозный мистицизм, садизм |
| 16. Скорпион | — насилие |
| 17. Чингиз Хан | — антикоммунизм, национализм |
| 18. Уфо | — насилие |
| 19. Пинк Флойд (1983) | — извращение внешней политики СССР («Агрессия СССР в Афганистане») |
| 20. Толкинхедз | — миф о советской военной угрозе |
| 21. Перрон | — эротизм |
| 22. Боханнон | — эротизм |

Приложение к письму от 10 января 1985 года

Примерный перечень зарубежных музыкальных групп и исполнителей, в репертуаре которых содержатся идейно вредные произведения

Название коллектива	Что пропагандирует
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- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Секс Пистолз | — панк, насилие |
| 2. Б-52 | — панк, насилие |
| 3. Меднесс | — панк, насилие |
| 4. КЛЭШ | — панк, насилие |
| 5. Стрэнглэрс | — панк, насилие |
| 6. Кисс | — неофашизм, панк, насилие |
| 7. Крокус | — насилие, культ сильной личности |
| 8. Стикс | — насилие, вандализм |
| 9. Айрон Мейден | — насилие, религиозное мракобесие |
| 10. Джудас Прист | — антикоммунизм, расизм |
| 11. Ай Си Ди Си | — неофашизм, насилие |
| 12. Спаркс Спаркс | — неофашизм, расизм |
| 23. Ориндживелз | — секс |
| 24. Донна Саммер | — эротизм |
| 25. Тина Тернер | — секс |
| 26. Джаниор Энглиш (Регги) | — секс |
| 27. Кенед Хит | — гомосексуализм |
| 28. Манич Мешин | — эротизм |
| 29. Рамонэ | — панк |
| 30. Бан Хейлен | — антисоветская пропаганда |
| 31. Хулио Иглесиос | — неофашизм |
| 32. Язоо | — панк, насилие |
| 33. Данич Мод | — панк, насилие |
| 34. Вилддж Пипл | — насилие |
| 35. Тен Си Си (10сс) | — неофашизм |
| 36. Стоджис | — насилие |
| 37. Бойз | — панк, насилие |
| 38. Блонди | — панк, насилие |

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Е. Пряжинская



My research demonstrates that black metal, which is often associated with Satanism, is ideologically very diverse through providing a close analysis of lyrics of bands such as Sargeist, Dissection, Horde, Shining, Goatmoon, Absurd, Jarost Marksa, as well as the Iran-based Armenian black metal band Avarayr.

DEATH ROW INMATE EATS AN ENTIRE BIBLE AS HIS LAST MEAL



rj4gui4r

If you claim to be metal and you're not this guy then you're just a poser.

This research also attempts to identify the internal conflicts of the metal community through surveying metalheads, as well as find out the reason behind negative attitude of the Armenian general public towards extreme metal music and matters of censorship.

Analysis of Lyrics

An expression and communication of a certain ideology in music has varied from century to century. In case of black metal bands and rock bands in general, aside the evident protest and dissatisfaction with the status-quo that lies within the sound of the music itself, lyrics play the most significant role in communicating the beliefs that the bands stand by. One of the ideologies that is most frequently associated with the metal community as a whole is Satanism, which in its turn varies its branches, and thus, depending on the band, can mean one thing or another.



Sargeist

In 2003, the band Sargeist releases an album *Satanic Black Devotion*, which shares its title with the first track of the record that the listener hears after a short *Preludium* resembling a sound of souls being tormented in the underworld. It is, then, not a coincidence that the track itself begins with the following lines:

**“Hear the chant of my tormented soul
In black devotion I have prayed
Veins re-opened, bleeding for Satan
With pride my flesh is cut”**

Sargeist

It would be reasonable to assume that the ideology that the band stands by is **Theistic Satanism**, meaning the band believes, or perhaps, pretends to believe in the biblical Satan, seeing the latter as an existing supernatural force to whom the supposed ritual is dedicated.

**I am the sick and devoted fanatic
My appearance is foul
In your fear you will avoid hurting me
Even in my name I carry rotting omens**

Dissection

The rise of anti-cosmic Satanism began during the 1980s in Scandinavia and the UK, merging ancient forms of Gnostic thought, the obscurity of the heavy metal subculture as well as some magical traditions from Latin America and the Caribbean, associating death and consequently suicide with the ultimate liberation.



Dissection

In 2006, Dissection releases their third and final album *Reinkaos*, based on the teachings of MLO as well as *Liber Azerate*, and the lyrics of which were co-written by the order's Magister Templi Frater Nemidial. After the short but mysterious sounding opening called Nexion 218, which is almost entirely instrumental - the only lyrics are "Zazas Zazas Nasatanada Zazas!", – the listener is introduced to the first song called Black Horizons. One of the verses goes as follows:

**This is the realm of Azerate, eleven as one
Destroyer of cosmic order, extinguisher of the sun
In this place so sinister I shall find my dreams
Illuminated by the blackest flame
To transcend with dragon wings**

Horde

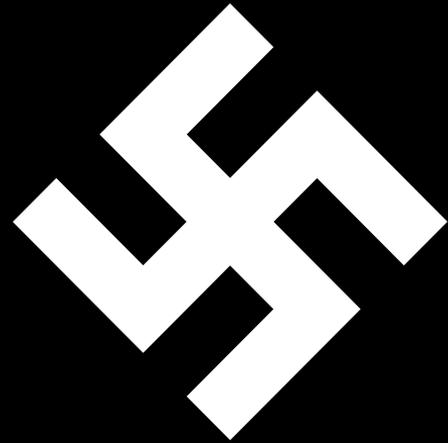


While it may seem like all black metal musicians had an almost unhealthy obsession with Satanism, such a suggestion, in fact, is not completely true. As we know, the 20th century is known for a number of changes, movements and counter-movements in the world of music. Not even black metal became an exception. The controversial movement within already controversial black metal scene called unblack metal, or Christian metal, emerged shortly after the rise of the Second Wave of Black Metal in 1990s, and took a stance against Satanism, Satanic lyrics and imagery.

In 1994, the Australian band Horde releases their debut album called *Hellig Usvart* which birthed the concept and the term “holy unblack metal”, a word play on Darkthrone's slogan “unholy black metal” used on the albums *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* and *Under a Funeral Moon*. The album begins with a one-minute ambient opening called “*A Church Bell Tolls amidst the Frozen Nordic Winds*”, which is very descriptive of what the listener hears. It is followed by the first song of the record called “*Blasphemous Abomination of the Satanic Pentagram*” and contains the following lyrics:

**five pointed star of hell
symbol of satanic goat
appearance at the ritual site
unholy amulet of the santanist
sacred to the devil's child
abomination to the mighty one**

This attempted “crusade” in the black metal movement did not become particularly popular and seems to be overlooked, despite the resonance it has received during the 1990s. It demonstrates yet again how the “offensive” black metal genre can offend not only the outsiders, but also the members of its own community. So is the case with National Socialist Black Metal bands that will be discussed further.



Shining

Before proceeding to start a conversation about NSBM, the band Shining, although not built on a particular religious or political ideology, clearly demonstrates the frontman's worldview, which is built on hate towards all humanity, misanthropy and nihilism. The reason why the band is important to mention within this context is due to the fact that besides varying politically and religiously in its themes, the black metal genre is anti-human in its core and was initially driven by misanthropy. The band is one of the best examples how lyricism accurately reflects the artist's worldview, who, not only sings about it but also acts on it, admittedly in the name of Satan, too.

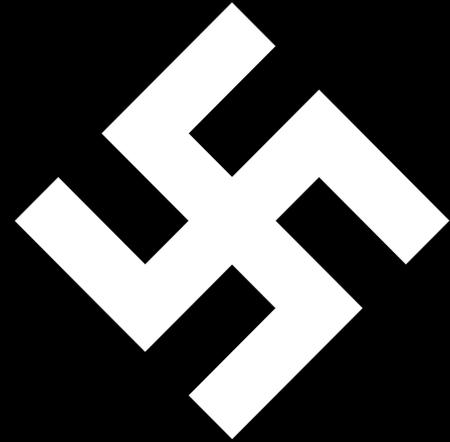


In 1998, when the frontman of the band Niklas Kvarforth was already 14, the band released their first EP called “*Submit to Self-Destruction*”, on which he played guitar and bass. The first song of the EP is called *Eternal Solitude* and contains the following lyrics:

**Bitter winds embraces my naked body
With it's eternal charm
I'm forced towards this eternal Darkness
With it's eternal pain**

**For what is the meaning of life?
If not... Suffering
I wonder what's the meaning of this weak existance
If not... Sorrow**

Shining does not deal with anything that concerns political matters, as a political inclination would show an attempt of betterment of at least a particular group within the society, or the society as a whole, which would be contradictory to what the artist believes in. The band targets the humanity as a whole, unlike, for example, National Socialist black metal bands, who clearly demonstrate their preference towards a particular group of people, whilst targeting those who do not belong in their group of preference.



Goatmoon

Goatmoon is a Finnish National Socialist black metal solo act, founded in 2002 in Helsinki, Finland by Jaakko Lähde who calls himself BlackGoat Gravedesecrator. The album most demonstrative of the band's political inclination is "*Tahdon Riemuvoitto*", which is the Finnish for "Triumph of the Will". The album consists of 4 instrumental songs (1.*Abomination of Winter*; 2.*Storming Through the White Light*; 3...*and Tears of our Fatherland Fell*; 7. *From the Barbaric Shores*) while the remaining three (4.*Race of the Heroes*; 5. *For our Blood and Native Soil*; 6.*Aryan Beauty*) support the bands' NSBM stigma.



Race of the Heroes, although contains three sentences, is enough to understand where the band stands ideologically:

Achtung Untermenschen!

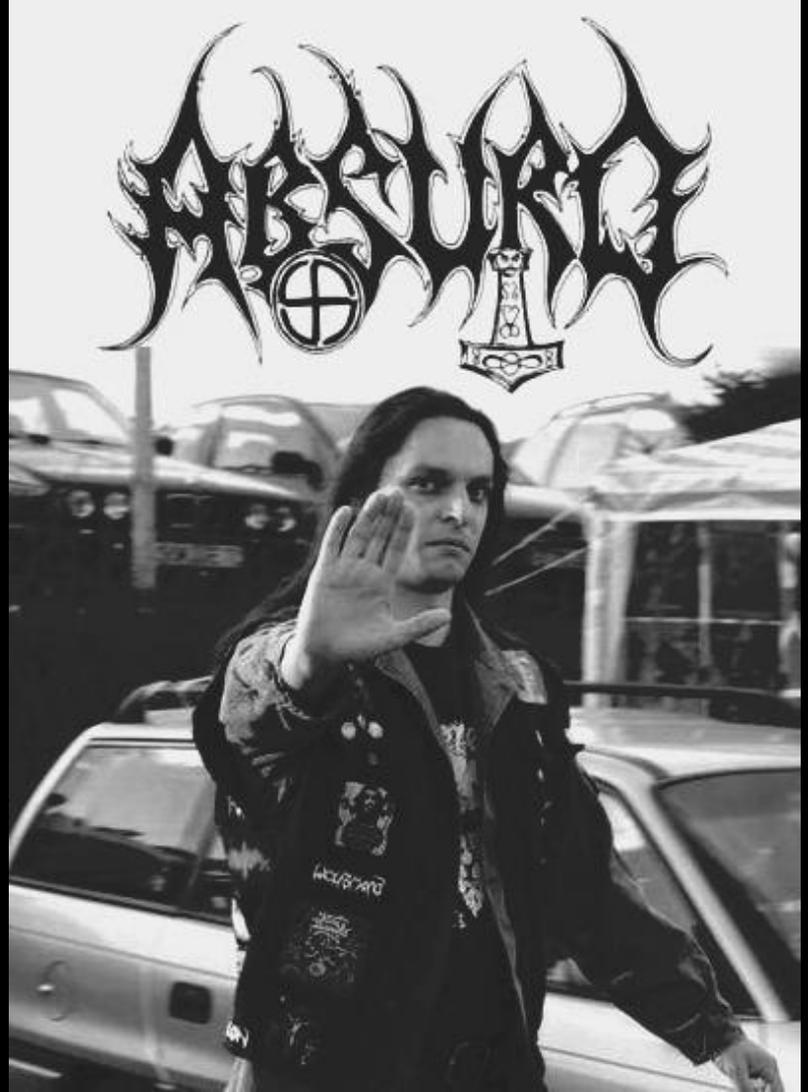
Ihr seid nichts im Vergleich zu uns!

Wir sind die Herrenrasse, die Rasse der Helden.

Translated to English, the following lines mean: “Attention, subhumans! You are nothing in comparison to us! We are the master race, the race of Heroes.” Considering the Nazi context, the term “subhuman” refers to the “inferior people”, or “masses of the East”, namely Jews, Slavs, Roma people as well as “Blacks, Mulattos and Finn-Asian.” However, today the right-wing Europeans are more concerned with the immigrant newcomers from the Middle East that adhere to the Islamic faith.

Absurd

Absurd is a German National Socialist black metal band founded in 1992 by Hendrik Möbus (also known as Randall Flagg / Jarl Flagg Nidhogg / JFN) and Sebastian Schauseil. Absurd's lyrics concern "nationalistic, pagan (Hendrik Möbus is the founder of the Deutsche Heidnische Front), pro-heathen revivalist Germanic, and anti-Judeo-Christian themes."



An example is the song “*Der Hammer Zerschmettert das Kreuz*” (English: “*The Hammer Smashes the Cross*”) from the album “*Totenlieder*” (English: “*Songs of the Dead*”). Below are the lines most demonstrative of the band’s ideology:

Feindesherrschaft muss vergehen, fremder Glaube fällt / Enemy’s rule must pass, “alien” belief falls

Hammerschlag malmt zu Vergang’nem, die das Kreuz erwählt / The beat of the hammer grinds all those who chose the cross into the past

Naturally, the “alien belief” in this context is Christianity. Here is another example expressing a similar idea:

Heidenkraft steht wider jene, die das Kreuz gebracht / The pagan power stands against those who brought the cross

Schwert und Hammer senden sie in ewigliche Nacht / Sword and Hammer send them into eternal night

Avarayr

Not all Armenian black metal bands with pagan themes in their lyrics come close to being put in the same category with Rahvira, for example, a band that merges Paganism and Nazism. Avarayr proves that one could appreciate their own culture without necessarily thinking of it as superior in comparison to other cultures. Avarayr is an Iran-based Armenian black metal band formed by Narek Avedyan, formerly of Symphony of Silence, after it disbanded in 2013. As it is stated on the band's official page, the music is "focused on Atmospheric themes and passages mixed with black metal voicing, with lyrical content covering Armenian legends and folktales as well as that incessant obsession with nature."



In 2019, Avarayr released its debut full-length album “*Symphony Carved in Stone*” which fuses elements from traditional black metal and Armenian/Persian folk music. The lyrical themes involve Armenian mythology and folktales. For example, the second song of the record “*Vahagn*” based on a Yeghishe Charents poem, is about the death of Vahagn. The song begins:

Հրդեհի աստված, հրդեհ ու կրակ, / God of fire, fire and flame
Օ, Վահագն արի: – Տեսնում եմ ահա, / Oh, Vahagn, come. – I see,
Որ ծիծաղում ու ֆրֆջում են նրանք / That they laugh and giggle
Արնաբամ ընկած դիակիդ վրա: / Over your fallen bleeding body

By “they”, Avedyan might have implied those Armenian who have forgotten their ancient culture.

Jarost Marksa



To the surprise of many, black metal music has a subgenre dubbed Red and Anarchist Black Metal, which is the polar opposite of NSBM. RABM bands, although very few due to their incompatibility with the core themes of the subgenre, are known for their communist ideology. Such was the Russian band Jarost Marksa (Russian: “Ярость Маркса”; English: “The Wrath of Marx”) formed in 2007 by French-born Antoine Durand, who moved to Russia in 2005. After a while, seeing the Eastern European reality, Durand was disappointed in capitalism, which pushed him to form Jarost Marksa along with Nikolay Vasilyev, Mikhail Sokolov and Ivan Kuznetsov.



In 2008, the band released its only EP called “We the People” containing three songs titled “Empires Shall Fall”, “United Under Red Banner” and “The Sacred War”, a black metal cover of the famous Soviet World War 2 song “Svyaschennaya Voyna” (Sacred War) which was originally performed by the Red Army Choir of Aleksandr Aleksandrov. Both of the band’s songs are straight to the point. Here are some examples from the first song of the EP, “Empires Shall Fall”:

**The streets are red with blood
Oh, comrades, do not falter
For the rich are powerless
Without the working class
End all racist ignorance
In unity we stand and fight
The enemy we have in common
Their empires will fall**

Important is to note that in the fight against capitalism, the band also addresses other forms of injustice such as “racist ignorance”, which could also be an attack on NSBM bands.

**Sisters and brothers
Let us share the earth
We need no possessions
Branded no more**

Unlike most black metal bands, Jarost Marksa does not show any hints of misanthropy, and on the contrary, calls for unity of all people, which is a curious phenomenon considering the “repulsive” sound typical of the subgenre.

**There can be no freedom while the state exists
So comrades, march on for the people's revolution
The bringer of democracy, workers, free yourselves
From the chains of capitalism to end all exploitation
Our unity is our strength**

Research Analysis

In order to answer the questions this research is raising, two surveys were conducted: the first one addressing the general public in Armenia (**90** participants) in order to find the main reason behind their dislike of the metal music as well as their stance on censorship of the given genre, whereas the second one, targeting the Armenian metal community (**55** participants), was aiming to identify the internal conflicts of the metal community, as according to metalheads in Armenia.

Survey #1: The General Public

Concluding Comments

Important is to note that there is, in a fact, a huge dissonance among the given answers. While the majority believes that each is entitled to have their own musical taste - and naturally, this does not include fondness of music containing hateful or vulgar lyricism – it is also the majority of participants who voted for the ban of such music, more so out of dislike rather than the belief in the ability of music to have an effect on its listeners. The latter could be interpreted as a cultural characteristic, which could be the result of the remaining Soviet influence and mentality or due to the lack exposure of the genre. According to Avarayr’s frontman Narek Avedyan, who shared his opinion on this issue as well, people might feel like such music “threatens their everyday lifestyle.”

Another crucial point to mention is the association of liking extreme metal music with Eurocentrism/ being pro-European, or an attempt to appear more “Western”. In this way, the nationalistic tendencies of some people are not only political, but also have the capacity to influence such factors as like or dislike of a certain types of art. Yet again, one could draw parallels with the oppressive regimes of the 20th century.

Survey #2: the Armenian Metal Community

Concluding Comments

Considering that the majority of metalheads in Armenia identify as apolitical, as according to the research results, their openness to the genre with its numerous politically charged branches becomes self-explanatory. While most metalheads do give lyrics great importance, again, as according to this research, due to their lack of interest in politics, or rather the absence of the latter, lyrics expressing strong political beliefs can often be overlooked.

It is also crucial to mention that most participants of this survey claimed to identify as atheists, which neutralizes their attitude towards lyrics dealing with religious matters, including Satanism that naturally opposes the dominant religion in the given country.

Conflicts in the Metal Community | The participants were asked to share their experience and observations regarding the internal conflicts they have identified in the metal community. While there is a similarity in answers, there are also some contradictions. According to the Armenian metalheads, musical elitism causes the most tension in the community. One of the participants referred to the metal community as **“mostly full of snobs who think listening to metal makes them better, calling metal is real music and thinking they are better and have a better taste in music...most common in the old school listeners (dad rock- boomer rock metal).”** Another metalhead claimed that **“old-school metalheads hate it when young people do that ridiculous Hardcore dancing...swinging their arms and kicking like a bunch of 4 year olds throwing temper tantrums.”**

On the contrary, another metalhead believes that intolerant behavior is rather common among the younger generation of metalheads:

“Actually I saw the metal community as friendly, however sometimes conflicts appear between old and new generation, where the new generation is of a bigger opinion about itself, and because of it they behave inappropriately with others, especially with the old generation of metalheads.”

Regarding musical elitism particularly, another metalhead expressed a similar idea:

“The metal genre is vast, and some "metalheads" tend to dictate the others which branch of metal genre is 'true', and which one is 'false'. You escape the world full of boundaries and narrow minded people not to experience the same in the metal community, where these elitists try to put you in some kind of boundaries.”

Here, the participant touched upon an important idea. A number of studies and documentaries demonstrate how people turn to the metal community precisely because they feel that they do not fit into their societies and refuse to conform to certain societal norms. The metal community, however, grants them the opportunity to communicate with like-minded individuals. Two other metalheads claimed to have had a negative experience as well, saying **“narrow minded assholes, most of them [metalheads]. But still much better than the other communities, so...”** and **“I don’t care really. I hate them all specially the core scene.”** However, some of the participants, although mentioned elitism as a problem, saw the metal community as **“very friendly and open-minded.”** Another participant offered expressed his desire seeing the metal community more mature, saying that **“we can all be square-headed sometimes, but we should all have critical discussions instead of blatantly calling each other posers.”**

One metalhead touched upon sexism in the community by quoting those who say that **"bands with female vocalists can't be metal."**

Another portion of metalheads saw the **"differences in political and cultural views"** as one of the main reasons behind the clashes between fellow metalheads. For example:

"Some have very problematic views, like Nazi or Satanic ideology, but overall the Armenian community isn't that bad I think" as well as **"Theres is some mild racism, lots of genre hypocrisy and internalized prejudice towards different styles."**

Some specify the racism particularly prevalent among black metal bands:

"I do agree there is a racism problem especially within the far right BM community" and **"Neo Nazi and anti-Nazi. Especially in black metal community there are many neo Nazi bands, even in Armenia (bands like Rahvira) but there are also many black metal fans that hate those bands."**

One of the metalheads, on the contrary claimed that it is **“cancel culture”** that is **“annoying”**, as well as **“crybabies in the scene”**, perhaps referring to those who criticize far-right bands.

For the note, “cancel culture” is the practice of refraining from supporting, or canceling public figures after they have done or said something that is generally considered offensive.

Religion has also been described as a cause for conflicts; however the latter has rather been interpreted as an external conflict rather than an internal one (e.g Christian Black Metal vs Satanic Black Metal). The idea was expressed the following way:

“The Armenian metal community is having a lot of trouble with the religious people both inside and outside of Armenia, the latter considering metalheads as satan worshipers. Typical story, but causes a lot of problems mainly with the touring bands. Yeah, it sucks. But the metal community in Armenia overall is pretty cool, the people I’ve met are really far out.”

Last but not least, some metalheads disregarded the question saying that “**the biggest problem in Armenia is that we don’t have a metal community.**” While there certainly is a metal community in Armenia, the members of it are very small in numbers. The reason why this could be seen as a problem for the metalheads is due to a number of popular Western bands not considering to visit the country with a concert, as well as the community being more vulnerable to external criticism, be silenced or disregarded. In fact, to this day, all metal concerts in Armenia are organized by Zhesht Events, a one-man organization run by Arsen Hakobyan.

Conclusion

Drawing parallels with the political and musical events of the 20th century, this project attempted to demonstrate how music, being a powerful tool of communicating a particular belief system, whether political or religious, can often be attempted to be subjected to censorship.

Providing the reader with the thorough analysis of lyrics of the chosen bands, as well as a research demonstrating both the attitude of the general public in Armenia and the insights into the community and its problems as according to metalheads, the paper shows that the black metal genre has the capacity not only to spark controversy but also unite people around a particular idea, despite being misanthropic and anti-human at its core. For further research, however, it would be necessary to conduct a larger scale survey, which could give a better understanding of the attitude of the general public. As for the metal community, considering its small amount of people identifying as metalheads, an attempt to reach out to more people would be necessary to see the bigger picture regarding the metal scene and the community in Armenia.