METAL MUSIC AND THE RE-IMAGINING OF MASCULINITY AND PLACE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTION ON WHEN GRAND MAGUS CAME TO KEIGHLEY

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In Spracklen (2020), I explore the history of the construction of heroic, hegemonic masculinity, place, race, and nation in heavy metal. I show how the heroic masculinity (Butler 2006; Connell 1987) and national heritage ideology at the heart of black (folk) metal emerged from similar myths and narratives in earlier heavy metal genres and bands – such as Iron Maiden (1975-present) and Manowar (1980-present). As I write in the conclusion (Spracklen 2020: 183):

> Heavy metal normalised the Gender Order of the late twentieth century, and metal bands became representations of a heroic, warrior masculinity that became hugely popular among fans. While much of this was just heterosexual male fantasies of groupies, and of conquest and rape written for young men who had never had a girlfriend, it normalised the idea that women were inferior to men and the Other to be conquered (Butler, 2006; Connell, 1987). This narrative of heroic masculinity emerged at a time when gender roles were being challenged and overturned in the West in the 1970s and 1980s, when traditional male working-class jobs were disappearing with the new global order of neo-liberalism.

Furthermore, I show that the interest in Vikings in metal, while present in earlier bands such as Led Zeppelin (1968-1980) (or at least their 1970 song 'Immigrant Song'), grew exponentially with nationalism and bands that play music and songs that are designed to evoke the romantic mythology of pre-Christian times in northern Europe. Bathory (1983-2004), for example, took the heroic masculinity of Manowar and added in nationalism and racism. Other extreme-metal bands followed Bathory in the late eighties and early nineties and took the anti-Christianity of metal as an excuse to sing heroic songs of their own blood and soil, creating their own racial myths that denigrated outsiders. While some bands flirted with these myths of heroic warriors fighting for their race against the outsiders while it was transgressive and part of their bid to be successful in the underground, others rejected their early misdemeanours or have distanced

themselves from it without admitting their mistakes. Others, however, remain unrepentant about their nationalism, their racism and their anti-semitism, and are deeply contested within the metal scene. As part of my account of how heroic masculinity and nationalism has become challenged in metal itself, I show that metal has become more diverse, filled with fans and musicians who are not white, not British, not American, not working-class, heterosexual men (Spracklen, 2020). It is these bourgeois, liberal globalised metal fans who campaign against and reject the racism of National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) and bands aligned with that, and the rise of fans and musicians who reject the hegemony of heterosexual, masculinity and the elitism of race and nation has been explored by many academics (Clifford-Napoleone 2015; Hill 2016; Jocson-Singh 2019). Metal has become more respectable, more about self-help and belonging and less about burning churches and masturbating over 'rock bitches' because of the involvement of these fans and musicians in the global metal scene, both in the mainstream and in the underground (Hill 2016; Kahn-Harris 2007). It is these fans and musicians who work to make sure metal is no longer a space for working-class white male resistance against grown-ups, and I argue that this is a good thing. Metal has outgrown songs about having sex with groupies. It has become something that accepts different stories and songs, different bands and singers, although metal is still fixed on the rules of its sub-genres. Epic, folk, Viking metal, for example, has to be about standing up as individuals, standing strong with one's comrades, against those who reject us. And the lyrics and the visuals have to be inspired by Viking mythology, even though much of that mythology is deeply contested by historians and archaeologists (Spracklen 2020).

This paper uses the theoretical lens of Spracklen (2020) – metal as leisure space; metal as site for the construction of hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity; metal as a site for the construction of imagined and imaginary communities of race and nation - and its historical analysis to frame new ethnographic reflections about extreme metal. In particular, I want to explore the construction of the heavy metal communities in the north of England using Keighley and Yorkshire as my focus – and how they intersect with other communities in metal and in the region. The ethnographic reflection that immediately follows this introduction describes the moment when Grand Magus (1996-present) came to Keighley, a mainly working-class town in West Yorkshire, with a significant British Asian, British Muslim minority-ethnic community [1]. The paper then discusses the social, cultural and political context of Keighley and Bradford, and the tension between poor whites and others settled in each place. I then turn to Grand Magus and report on their success, before introducing a second reflection undertaken at Bloodstock Festival. I then end on noting how metal has become more diverse, but elements of it in the north remain places where whiteness and hegemonic masculinity continues to be a norm. All discussion of ethics and methods can be found in Spracklen (2020), out of which this project has emerged. I am a metal fan and an insider, and all my reflections are based on the expert knowledge I have of the ethnographic field combined with my own diaries (Blackman 2007; Hodkinson 2005). More importantly, I am from a white working-class Yorkshire background, with working-class tastes and customs and practices, even though I have been to University and remain in academia [2]. I still live in Yorkshire, but I have moved to the edge of the Yorkshire Dales, the pretty national park that is the subject of feelgood television programmes such as James Herriot, to a town that is in Airedale, just beyond Keighley, but in the posher North Yorkshire.

Reflection One: Manorfest

It's a Saturday in May, 2017. Keighley Victoria Hall, on the edge of the town centre. Victoria Hall is out towards Keighley Cougars rugby league ground at Lawkhome Lane, past the big Mosque by the new Asda, and through terraced streets filled with British Muslim families. We walk down from the

railway station with excitement, following a handful of others making this pilgrimage. The people ahead of us are all white, all male, metal fans, with long hair and the current metal uniform: denim jackets with back patches on them. We are here for Manorfest, a one-day metal festival that has got bigger and better each time it has announced its line-up. The festival was started by a local metal musician who wanted to raise money for the Manorlands hospice. Today we have come because Grand Magus, a well-known Swedish epic heavy metal band, are headlining. We (Beverley and I) first saw the band in 2005, when they played in Bradford supporting British band Orange Goblin (1995-present). That was at Rio's, up from the university across the road from a mosque. In a previous work [3] I reflected on the way black metal fans standing outside Rio's waiting to see Mayhem's (1984-present) frontman throw a pig's head into the moshpit was uncomfortable for the British Asian mosque attenders and the fans. The British Asians that night would not have known what was happening at Mayhem gigs; but they would have sensed the danger and the hatred from some of the black metallers. The metal fans standing in the same line for the Orange Goblin gig received the same funny looks as the black metal fans waiting for Mayhem, but no-one for Orange Goblin was wearing a Burzum tee-shirt. That tour line-up, with Finnish band Witchcraft (2000-present) as the openers, showcased the best of the Rise Above Records label, the independent label set up by Lee Dorrian of well-known British doom metal band Cathedral to sign and release the best alternative, underground, dark, doom metal. Doom metal and alternative occult metal was not as big as it became at that time, so the gig in Bradford was barely full even for the headliners. Witchcraft were channelling the sound of a seventies occult rock that had never existed, using analogue technology. They had their debut album on vinyl before vinyl became a fashionable, hipster thing. They were amazing but not as good as Grand Magus. Grand Magus played Rio's with the bored Orange Goblin fans in front of them as if they were Iron Maiden playing Long Beach. JB the band's singer-guitarist frontman and writer of all their songs, was losing his hair but he was too metal to care. His backing band moshed with every riff. They blew us away then, and we have seen them rise up the metal premier league. From Rise Above Records they graduated to major metal label Nuclear Blast. They have headlined concerts in Europe and the rest of the world, releasing nine albums of classic heavy metal.

And now they are in Keighley, West Yorkshire, once and forever still the West Riding of Yorkshire, the rough end of the county that backs into the Pennines and the Dales and cradled the Industrial Revolution. Keighley is now part of Bradford Metropolitan District Council but it has its own sense of identity, and is physically cut-off from Bradford by fields, hills and some moorland above Bingley. It is the home of Timothy Taylor's Brewery, makers of the finest real-ale in the country. Importantly, Keighley is just down the road from where I live, my most local metal town. And Grand Magus are playing here! The last time we saw a band in Victoria Hall was the goth-rock band The Mission (1986-present), who played it at a low ebb in their career because the drummer at the time had a local connection. Victoria Hall is a small publicly owned venue in Victoria Park, with a modern leisure centre built next to it. It is in reasonable working order but it has seen better times, and has clearly suffered from generations of austerity measures imposed by respective national governments on local governments since the 1970s. It is usually used for other things: we have been to it many times for real-ale festivals and for bellydance haflas. But tonight it is the turn of metal fans to embrace the delights of its council bar and Victorian toilets.

The first band we see is Valafar (2013-present). Our friend Nigel is their bass player. We bang our heads at the side of the room. I raise my hand and give them the devil's horns. One of Valafar's musicians is responsible for setting up Manorfest (I forget which one). Valafar are from Keighley, this is their home crowd, and they are here as a support act for the professional bands later in the evening. This is all for the good cause of charity and I think how amazing it is that they have brought family and friends in to watch them. These are all white, working-class Yorkshire

people, mainly men but some women who are obviously relatives of the band – even some that look like mums on a night out in any Wetherspoon's, all dresses and lipstick and blonde hair and without the standard metal uniform: black jeans; band shirts; Thor's hammers; spiky jewellery designed to prove one is anti-Establishment. As the band plays music designed to emulate the attack of the Norsemen on the soft-handed monks of Lindisfarne, the music gets me excited. I scream along to every chorus even though I do not know the band enough to have learned the lines. None of the band looks particularly Viking or Anglo-Saxon, apart from Nigel, who stands taller than his mates. He looks like he is loving every moment. When I first met him, the partner of a friend of my wife, he was playing in a progressive rock band doing music that musicians want to make but metal fans tend to avoid. Valafar allows him to drink huge amounts of alcohol and to metaphorically raise the hammer high. It allows him and the others in the band to be adored by the small group of Valafar fans who they meet every time they play a gig across the north of England. It also means the musicians are adored by the fans who have known them for a long time in Keighley itself, neighbours and workmates, fans who talk to them before and after shows as if they are metal gods, though northern enough to bring them back down to earth with humour. All the band members are amateurs. That is, they have normal working-class jobs to pay their bills, and the music is something they do because they love it, in their leisure time. Our Nigel bangs his long hair in a very manly manner and his Thor's hammer bounces up and down close to his guitar, but he keeps his cool and the band finish. One of the other musicians in the band thanks everyone for coming and mentions we are all here for a good cause. Then the room empties as everyone heads off to drink, to smoke outside, or to grab a pie. The meat and mushy-pea smell of the latter begins to fill the venue, as this is tea time for Yorkshire folk, as well as Viking warriors. Being bourgeois vegetarians with our fancy Leeds ways, we have to make do with chips. Not proper chips, just catering chips, but in a white teacake and with plenty of salt, vinegar, and tomato sauce. This is my food of the gods.

As the night goes on, and the support acts play, I am getting more drunk. There is no real-ale in the bar because real-ale needs regular customers or it goes off. So I am forced to drink the least worst alternative: Newcastle Brown. I have a problem when I drink this beer, but I can't help drinking more and more of it. Others there have done the same, so we are now out of Newcastle Brown and I am forced to drink Tetley's in a can. But beer is beer. I am getting more and more excited! Everybody has come in from the fag break and the crowd is shouting for Grand Magus. There is a cluster of people up front, a mosh-pit in waiting. The rest of us stand back slightly, in the mob but out of the way of any mental pushing and jumping. The space where I have watched Beverley dance is half-filled with us metalheads. Not a sell- out, but the best crowd Manorfest has had I imagine. We are all waiting, impatiently, as the band, seasoned pros that they are, lead us on with their preparation: the lighting, the music beforehand, the mundane fiddling around with bits of kit on and off stage. Then, suddenly, they are there! And in front of us is Viking god JB. And he blows us apart while the rhythm section behind him makes us jump and bang our heads. I am so drunk that I cannot tell if there is a second guitarist that night, or whether JB just plays all the guitar parts as he does on all the albums. When we first saw them, they were more of a doom metal band with some classic heavy metal influences. In the last few years, they have grown into an epic heavy metal band drawing on all the old and true metal musical styles: they have drawn on the heroic, warrior masculinity of Manowar, Iron Maiden and Judas Priest (1969-present), and the imaginary Viking landscapes of Bathory. JB sings in English, and already we are all singing along. Every song is about being true, being strong, defeating your enemies in battle. Here, in Keighley, in West Yorkshire, we stand up AND YELL and we are strong.

I cannot believe this, I tell the person standing next to me. I cannot fucking believe this! He looks at me, I don't know him at all. But he grins and gives me the horns. He replies: Can't fucking believe it! Grand fucking Magus in fucking Keighley!

It is necessary here to understand the modern history of Bradford and Keighley to make sense of the reflection and to understand the intersections of identity that are being constructed and contested in the first reflection. In the English Civil War, Royalist forces took control of Parliament-supporting Bradford. The leader of the Royalists, the Earl of Newcastle, decided to spend a night at Bolling Hall before he executed the locals. At night, though, he received a visit by a ghostly woman who told him to 'pity poor Bradford' [4]. He did, and 'pity poor Bradford' has become a catchphrase for the city that is used to summarise its fate. In the seventies and into the eighties, Bradford suffered the enormous collapse of its main industries. It has yet to recover from that economic decline, unlike other cities in the north of England such as Leeds, Manchester and even Liverpool. This decline evokes more pity when one realises how wealthy Bradford was at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was a new city built on the new money, entrepreneurialism and confidence of people migrating to the place from the Yorkshire Dales, Germany, and Ireland (Koditschek 1990). Through the twentieth century it continued to grow, contributing to both world wars. Its economy rested on two industries in this period. The first was wool, and wool processing in the huge mills built in the nineteenth century. This industry had grown up in Bradford when steam-engines replaced watermills as the way of moving machinery. But it had older roots in the relationship between Bradford and the hills of the West Riding, and the sheep farms that sent their wool down to its traders and weavers for hundreds of years before. The second industry that appeared and expanded in the twentieth century was mechanical engineering. New factories were built all over Bradford with assembly lines run on the Ford model, producing all kinds of goods and products.

After the Second World War, it expanded even more to contribute to the wellbeing of the British economy, and took in a wave of immigrants: Italians, Poles, Serbs displaced as refugees from the war, but especially people from what became India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. These latter migrants came here because of the history of imperialism and the long but unequal relationship between Britain and her colonies. Like migrants from the Caribbean who arrived in the same period in Bradford, these non-white migrants came to work because they were invited by factory owners and agents. They saw Britain as a land of opportunity and of fellowship. The British Government wanted the emerging nations of the Commonwealth and the former Empire to still feel part of Britain's cultural and political sphere – even though many in power and in the street never wanted non-white people to feel they belonged in Britain (Hansen 2000; Jackson 1992).

Bradford's British Asian community's first generation came as single men. They came to work in night shifts in the mills, and they were initially denied employment in other places by the activity of white trade unions. Many of these men became self-employed, opening shops and restaurants if they had some capital, becoming taxi-drivers if they had none (Akhtar 2012; Jackson 1992). Meanwhile, Bradford's white British working-class community moved out to the new council estates where they had homes with indoor toilets, gardens, and space to have a car. For a while the jobs survived for both ethnic communities in Bradford, and although there was racism and racial tension and some poverty, Bradford in the nineteen-sixties was still prosperous. People still wanted to move to Bradford to find work, whether they came from Mirpur or Manchester. Although there was some segregated housing as just described, there were many streets and districts where white, British Asian, and black families lived alongside one another. Then Bradford faced a series of catastrophic declines through the seventies and into the eighties. The wool trade collapsed and the mills were closed. Heavy engineering also collapsed. Even before Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, Bradford was shrinking. Thatcher's decisions ensured mass unemployment, increasing crime, and the hollowing out of Bradford's city centre. The arrival of the New Labour government of Tony Blair brought some good policies and money to Bradford, but not enough to tackle the poverty, the lack of jobs, and social exclusion

(Alexander 2004). Bourgeois families from all ethnicities moved out of the city, and Bradford became more racially divided, with an inner-city of British Asians who were mainly Muslim and an outer ring of white council estates, all of which suffered multiple problems of social deprivation. The credit crunch of 2007 and the austerity measures of the Coalition Government of 2010 have exacerbated the divisions and the deprivation, with large parts of the city centre left derelict. In recent years, migrants from eastern Europe and from war-torn countries such as Syria and Iraq have rejuvenated Bradford's public sphere and its community and culture, but many of these are resented by some white people and by some British Asians because they are willing to work the long hours that all young migrant communities do in their attempt to be successful (Duda-Mikulin 2020).

Everything that can be said about Bradford can be said about Keighley, but on a smaller scale given the size of the town in relation to its neighbour. Keighley suffers from racism and racial tensions between its white and British Asian communities. Keighley sits in the shadow of Rombald's Moor to the north, and Brontë country to the south. The gritstone moors above Keighley shine clear on a good day – more often than not they are lost in cloud and rain. Tourists in their thousands flock to Haworth to see the Parsonage and to walk out on the South Pennines to dream of Heathcliff at Top Withens (Spracklen 2016). But not many of those ever walk through the Airedale Shopping Centre to the indoor market. Surrounding the steam railway station and its mainline equivalent are abandoned mills and factories. The only new thing is a Further Education college built like a police station.

Grand Magus may not be the most obvious band you might expect to see in Bradford and Keighley. When we saw them in Bradford, they had just started out. Bradford at that time had a thriving heavy metal scene, centred on Rio's, a venue and nightclub housed in an ugly industrial building in a post-industrial area beyond the University. Bradford had shops in the city centre that sold metal records and merchandise. It was common then to see white people walking around wearing metal t-shirts: mainly classic metal bands from the seventies and eighties but some underground ones, too. Rio's was in the middle of an inner-city district that housed mainly British Asians, yet it never had any of those neighbours present as far as I can recall. As the number of metal fans in Bradford declined the number of people attending Rio's declined, and the venue moved to Leeds before coming back in a smaller club format. Grand Magus in Keighley in 2017 is strange for me as I associate Victoria Hall with the other leisure activities I do, because the venue is almost on my doorstep. But it was also strange because Grand Magus in 2017 were at the height of their career.

Grand Magus were founded in Sweden in 1996 under a different name by guitarist-vocalist-songwriter Janne (JB) Christoffersson, along with long-time bassist Mats (Fox) Skinner. These two remain at the heart of the band, though there have been various drummers. The band changed its name to Grand Magus when they changed their style, which on their debut album *Grand Magus* (2001) displays a mighty combination of doom metal with lyrical themes from classic heavy metal. Their 2003 second album, *Monument*, is the first one to reveal the band's love of Manowar, Judas Priest and Iron Maiden. There are songs that are explicitly based on Viking mythology: 'Ulvaskall (Vargr)'; and 'Chooser of the Slain (Valfader)'. There is also the fan favourite 'Baptised in Fire', where JB combines the lyrical themes with the enormous hooks of epic metal. This is the song every long-standing fan cries along to when the band plays it. I cannot remember for sure if they played it at Bradford or Keighley, but it would have been odd if they had not. With *Wolf's Return* (2005) and *Iron Will* (2008) they perfected a combination of lyrical affirmation of being yourself, being a Viking, being a warrior, with the vocal inflections of Rob Halford and the thundering riffs of Quorthon. The last track on *Iron Will* is 'I am the North', a song that can be sung as easily by a metal musician from Sweden as well as a fan from Yorkshire. They then signed to Roadrunner Records for *Hammer of*

the North (2010), an album title that captures perfectly what Grand Magus want us to think they are: these are anti-Christian pagan Viking warriors telling their fans to stand up proud and fight for the cause. Of course, the fact they are from Sweden gives them a sense of authenticity, even though JB and Fox are not Vikings, and have never been Vikings, and just happen to have been born and raised somewhere in that country. They are as authentic as if I decided to write songs about Anglo-Saxons fighting against the evil Norman invaders – we are all too far removed from the historical events to do anything other than perform the roles. But like fellow Swedish metal band Amon Amarth (1992-present), they won over fans around the world who wanted to believe they were tapping into something true about the North (La Rocca 2017; Sellheim 2018). From Roadrunner they were swiftly signed to Nuclear Blast, and their career as professional musicians headlining festivals was assured. So they are obvious headliners for a metal festival in Keighley, even if Manorfest is tiny (hundreds of fans) compared to the ten thousand who attend Bloodstock, the sixty thousand who attend Download, or the hundreds of thousands who attend Wacken in Germany.

It is to Bloodstock festival that this paper turns next, to consider how metal fandom has changed since I first saw Grand Magus at Rio's. This second reflection also allows me to remain in the north of England, where Bloodstock takes place, and to keep sight of the people of the working-class heavy metal community I have been discussing.

Reflection Two: Bloodstock Festival, August 2018

Bloodstock started out as an indoor festival in Derby that championed power metal and true metal at a time when these forms of metal were deeply unfashionable, caught between the underground nastiness of black metal and the mainstream of stadium nu metal). We went to the indoor version in 2005 just as power metal and female-fronted operatic goth metal was being replaced as the music of choice for the nerds by folk metal. Since then, Bloodstock had partnered with Wacken, the big German festival held near Hamburg, and developed into a multi-day open air festival. Like other rock festivals, Bloodstock has spaces for people to camp, basic shower and toilet facilities, and an arena with different stages and places to eat, drink and shop. The festival has attracted big names from the mainstream for its main stage evenings, yet at the same time it has had a stage/tents for new (amateur, up and coming) bands, and a stage (the Sophie Lancaster, actually another big tent) for anything non-mainstream: black, folk, death, doom, thrash, prog. Grand Magus played early on the main stage in 2008, then headlined the Sophie Lancaster in 2019.

The last time we were at the extreme/true metal festival had been in 2014. On that weekend, we camped in the so-called VIP area, because it had access to decent toilets, showers and a real-ale festival tent (a sign that good beer is now middle class). The bands that time had been excellent, the ones we had aimed to see – Emperor up on the main stage watched by half-asleep fans in corpse-paint sitting in comfy chairs (no one is too old to raise the horns, but of course time and biology move on), Winterfylleth (2006-present), Old Corpse Road (2007-present), Orphaned Land (1991-present), Rotting Christ (1987-present), and especially Bradford band Conquest of Steel (1998-2014) playing their last-ever show – but the camping experience had left me feeling too old. Of course, it is a non-mainstream metal festival and we are all Vikings who drink beer and listen to Judas Priest and Manowar all night. But I missed the feeling of having any sleep. And the toilets. Was it really a manly metal warrior thing to break the toilets and block them with rubbish? On the final day we gave up and escaped, fortuitously just before the rains came.

This weekend we are back at Bloodstock because Orphaned Land – Beverley's favourite metal band (Progressive metal from Israel with lots of Middle Eastern and Jewish musical themes) – are headlining the Sophie Lancaster stage. We are not camping, however. I have chickened out

and we are staying in a hotel in Burton-on-Trent and driving in. At breakfast that morning, everybody is wearing the metal uniform. Everybody here is in their forties or fifties. All white, maybe a third women with their male partner, the rest small groups of older metal men. One group is speaking some foreign language, maybe Dutch? Everyone at breakfast is white. This feels like a normal non-mainstream metal crowd, the profile I had observed in 2014

When we park up and walk in, I can see this crowd has changed. In 2014 it had been filled with mainly white men, screaming their heads off to the English Heritage Black Metal of Winterfylleth [5], or moshing before Emperor (1991-2001, 2016-present). Now there seems to be a number of different things. There are more women, lots with male partners but some in bigger groups of friends, and some all-female friend groups. There are more non-white fans, not many but enough to be impossible to count. The fans also look younger, though this maybe because I am four years older. We walk through to the main stage. There is a real-ale tent now in this part of the festival, now that real ale has become the beer of choice for metalheads. I remember when real ale was a working-class man's drink rejected by the middle classes who drank wine. I remember when young working-class white men drank lager because it was fashionable. They mocked men who drank bitter as old, sad, granddads. Even metalheads in the eighties and nineties preferred lager or shots to real ale. When I first started going to gigs, no place served real ale. Rio's in Bradford only had Newcastle Brown as an alternative. The same went for the second version of Rio's in Leeds. Yet here we are: real-ale has become socially acceptable not just for the middle-class hipsters seeking authentic tastes, but for the average metal fan at a not-quite-mainstream metal festival. We stand in the queue and in front of us is a whole bunch of white people dressed in Viking outfits. They are all drinking the real ale from horns. The drinking horns look real, I know you can buy them now, and that being a Viking seems to be a cosplay choice for the metal elite. These are the hipster metal equivalents of the Sealed Knot or the people who dress up as Nazis: they no doubt claim they just like the costumes and do not really want to sack Christian monasteries in England. When we get to see Valafar playing on the New Band Stage, some of the horn-wielding pretend Vikings are in front of us.

Metal fans in the UK are changing in the same way they are changing around the world. Metal fans here seem to be more middle-class, seem to be more diverse in their gender and ethnicity. Things that used to be deemed acceptable – such as wearing a Burzum (1991-1999, 2009-2018) tee-shirt – are now rare sights, because metal fans have judged themselves that the nationalism and racism in folk/black metal is not part of heavy metal. Still claiming the right to wear such merchandise is supposedly about embracing the communicative rationality of metal's transgressive history, as I once argued myself (Spracklen 2006). But there is no longer any excuse, and the old guard black-metal fans are finding themselves being squeezed out of the public sphere of opinion by younger metal fans. These younger fans still perform as Vikings, but they do not actually want to be them. Moreover, even the older, white working-class metal fans in the north of England prefer the fun of Valafar and Grand Magus to the evil of NSBM. They prefer to drink real-ale and cosplay at the festival precisely because they want to perform authentic working-class northern identities at a time when working-class society in the north of England is under threat. They want to be Vikings, as well, because being one allows them to embrace a heroic, hegemonic male fantasy that runs against the reality of their working lives: where traditional men's work has disappeared.

I am aware that this naming and identifying around race, gender and indeed class is deeply problematic – especially from someone who is a white British man. The moral, political and ethical objections to this labelling are well-rehearsed (Leaney and Webb 2020). On race and ethnicity, it is impossible to know anyone's family background by simply taking note of the supposed colour of

their skin. It may be possible to say people are white, or British Asian, or black British in the context of British society in this century, but such descriptions are crude attempts to identify the absence and presence of people from different ethnic groups. There may well be many people from British minority ethnic groups who become counted as white, and not just those who are Irish or from Eastern Europe. My attempt to make sense of people's whiteness may well have missed people who were black British or British Asian, or from polyethnic backgrounds. But the people in these spaces presented as white. Gender is easier to ascribe if one accepts that the people we are describing are performing gender roles. The facts of biology will sometimes make it possible to guess whether people are male or female, but again those assumptions are based on stereotypes of sex that do not reflect the full complexity of gender performativity in a world where gender is blurred (Clifford-Napoleone 2015). Class is something that is easier to ascribe. The metal fans spoke broad Yorkshire, but an urban West Yorkshire accent, showing they were mainly working-class. These are the things I remember, the things that stood out for me. This is an ethnographic reflection of a number of key events and spaces in the metal scene of the north of England. It is based on my memories and my personal diaries, but I did not undertake formal fieldwork. I did not take notes at the events I am describing. However, I have been an ethnographic researcher since I started my PhD in 1993, and I have lived my life making observations, taking notes, and making reflections. I have been involved in research where I have had to ascribe race, gender, and class to others without asking them: in rugby league grounds (Spracklen, Timmins and Long 2010); in real-ale festivals (Spracklen, Laurencic and Kenyon 2013); and in heavy metal gigs (Spracklen 2006, 2020). So I think I have the ability, experience and caution to identify race, gender and class – and especially race and gender inequalities such as whiteness and hegemonic masculinity at work in the unequal arrangement of people in space.

Conclusion

Metal in Keighley, then, at least retains a sense of (white male) working-classness even as the UK metal scene has become more middle class, and more representative of modern British society. This ethnographic reflection is meaningful because I am an insider and have been all my life: an insider in the north of England, and an insider in the UK metal scene since I was ten-years old. I know what shapes both cultural spaces, the myths and the symbols and the practices that define them. I know how those myths and symbols define both belonging and exclusion. So, this reflection is validated by my long years and by my professional ethnographic preferences as a qualitative researcher in the social sciences. Metal in the UK has become a space in which polyvalent identities are celebrated and constructed, even if tensions continue to exist in wider society about race, Englishness and Britishness: further, metal provides an inclusive, global community that crosses borders even as populist politicians try to shut them down. Metal has become more comfortable with transgression and gender fluidity, too. But the struggle or who belongs in metal is still highly contested, and in the north this intersects with working-class resistance to the hegemony of the south of England. The myths about warriors at the heart of heroic masculinity in some metal in the north of England is playful and embraced by fans as a sign of rejecting the south and the hegemony of mainstream popular culture, even if such myth-making is problematic in a town and region that is divided by race and racial politics. Heroic Viking metal provides these fans a sense of belonging and identity, but at the same time it creates problems of exclusion.

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author of over a hundred books, papers and book chapters on leisure, music, sport, and tourism. His latest monograph *Metal Music and the Re-imagining of Masculinity, Place, Race and Nation* was published in 2020 by Emerald.

Endnotes

1. I use British Asian as a term accepted by British Asians, and by policymakers and used in the UK Census. In Keighley and Bradford, most of the British Asian community originally came from what is now Azad Kashmir in Pakistan (Akhtar 2012). There are smaller communities that draw their family roots back to India and Bangladesh. Some British Asians in Bradford are Hindu, but most are in fact Sunni Muslims of the Deobandi and Barelwi schools (McLoughlin 2005).
2. My dad was the first of his family to attend university. He did not travel from his Leeds roots, though, and I was born and raised in the same city. I lived in council housing, first a high-rise flat in Burmantofts, then a semi-detached house in Bramley, in different parts of Leeds. I attended the state schools on the doorstop. This upbringing accounts for my love of metal, which in the early eighties was deeply uncool and the preserve of working-class white boys like me and my friends.
3. Spracklen (2006: 33-34).
4. https://www.hauntedhappenings.co.uk/ghost_hunts/Bolling_Hall.php, accessed 21 January 2020.
5. Winterfylleth have attracted attention from anti-fascist campaigners. I re-appraise their work and their relationship to nationalism and racism in Spracklen (2020) after coming to a different conclusion in earlier work with Lucas and Deeks (Lucas, Deeks and Spracklen 2011; Spracklen, Lucas and Deeks 2014).

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