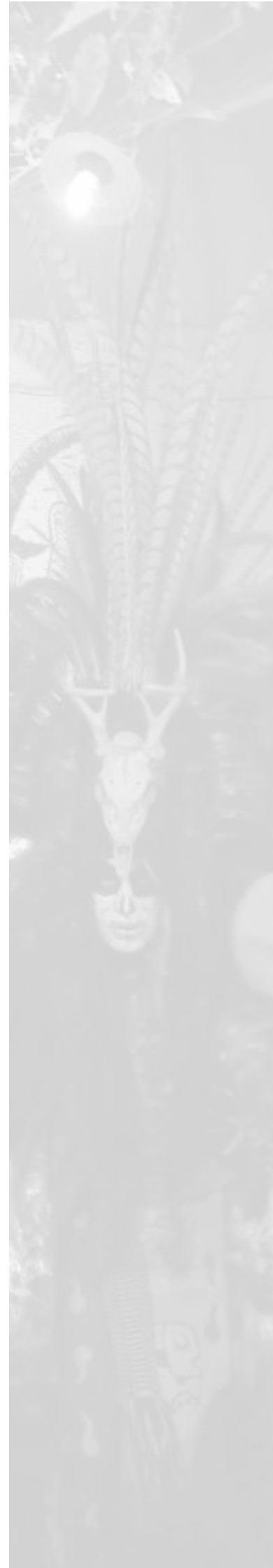


THE LEGACY OF THE SUN: CEMICAN, MESOAMERICAN INSTRUMENTS AND THEIR MATERIALITY IN METAL MUSIC

Marisol Pérez Pelayo

In this article, I discuss the music, practices, stage performance of Cemican – a metal band from México – and their use of indigenous instruments and sounds, drawing on interviews with the band members and my own ethnographic experience. By doing so, this work significantly contributes to the expansion of the existing body of ethnographic research in the field of metal music studies (DiGioia 2021; Shadrack 2020). I argue that Cemican brings the past into the present in ways that help the listener to embody the practice of metal and illustrate this through my writing and photos and video examples. In México City the mix of culture is very evident, especially downtown where you can appreciate a Catholic cathedral with some vestiges of the powerful Mexica (also known as Aztec) empire underneath and in other instances in the streets where a serpent head comes out of the building. This acts to both contrast and integrate the colonial and indigenous traces in the city. The use of indigenous instruments in metal music is often a subject of debate. Often band ensembles make use of the same instruments that position them as a traditional metal band, bass, electric guitar, drum set etc. However, when a band takes a different direction musically or thematically, a change in material culture – such as the incorporation of indigenous instruments – can be a powerful tool.

Metal music has been one of the few constants in my life, something I have found happiness, peace, refuge, and fulfilment in. I have been fascinated by Cemican and their influence on metal music from an anthropological point of view since 2017. They were a significant part of my master's thesis and continue to take a great part in the further investigations that I have undertaken as a metal music studies researcher, first inspired as a teenager. Equally, Mesoamerican cultures and archaeology have also been among my passions, through the years and other projects, cultural heritage, authentic artefacts, and objects have also become central to my research. I like to situate myself as an eclectic researcher, in terms of both methodological approach and the topics of my research.



Material Culture and Cultural Imaginary

For this article, artefacts such as musical instruments and music itself are considered a building base of culture. Material culture – physical objects, places, spaces, and resources that are fundamental to explain or shape a culture – is often a subject that is the centre of heated debates in social anthropology. Objects have meanings for people who produce and own, purchase and gift, use and consume them. Material Culture, according to Peter Stallybrass (1998), consists of not merely of ‘things’ (meaning here any kind of item; utile or decorative, holding meaning or not) but also the meanings that they hold for people. In this regard, we can argue that music itself is an artefact, a non-tangible artefact but a very real one that has physical consequences: instruments, concert halls, files to be played, CDs or vinyl, or music sheets. The most important consequence of music (in my opinion and for the sake of this article) is the emotion and drive that it gives.

Differences in cultural objects and materials reflect different needs and situations, to include rituals and celebrations. These objects are understood in relation to historical and cultural situations such as ritualistic practices, both religious and secular. This association (between particular musical instruments and historical/cultural situations) therefore has direct repercussions on the community and definition of social relationships, which in turn will later shape an individual and collective set of beliefs as well as the idea of identity. In my previous research about Mesoamerican sounds in metal Music (Pérez Pelayo 2022), I have studied the material symbolic aspects of anthropology and its consequences on a culture. However, I find that, sometimes symbols and situations that are normally considered nonmaterial – such as sounds and music – are just as important. I underwent fieldwork to understand the kinship and social structures in metalhead communities in Guadalajara México. During this time, I began to be interested in researching the material aspects of the bands that surrounded the communities, as well as exploring behind the process and shaping of the influences in some of the bands. The core focus of this article builds upon this and considers the complex meanings and uses of material culture in the metal music and instrumentation of Cemican.

As a Mexican, I am aware that common place tropes, idealisation, thoughts, and imaginary scenarios sometimes fed by nationalist propaganda or innocent nostalgia create an idea of what the Mexican nation was before its Spanish counterparts showed up. These commonplace tropes are not meant to be confused with international and commodifying stereotypes or caricaturised depictions of Mexicans in cartoons or movies. The idealisation comes from the perception that México was perfect before colonisation. Whilst I will not discuss this in detail because it is not pertinent to this article, I do wish to note that government propaganda attempts to instigate national pride and love for one’s country, positioning this as the best quality of any good Mexican.

During my fieldwork for my master’s thesis (where I covered the idea of kinship between Mexican metalheads), the question of Mexican identity always came up, and with it a collective idea of what this is and what it could have been. Writing about one’s own country can be challenging; it is at times hard to achieve neutrality about the past or cultural perceptions or ideas. The collective imaginary here represents a collection of concepts, myths and symbols that find lodging in the memory and imagination for an assortment of people that belong to a given community. A sense of shared consciousness for these people is achieved through the sharing of symbols which reinforces a sense of community. Castoriadis used the term in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975), sustaining that the collective imaginary of the society generates for each historical period its own peculiar way of living, understanding, and replication. In addition to this, he compared the central imaginary significations of society to the cords which bond a society close and the methods which establish how a society sees itself as real [1].

In this essay, I consider a particular cultural imaginary: a transcendental and transhistorical stronghold in which a set of experiences endeavour throughout its history, a past lived by communities through deep and abyssal struts of memory and through their experience of the material every day.

Mestizos

Mexican writer and Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz's work was inspired by the idea of mestizaje. During several of his narrations,[2] we can see that even though he rejects ideas pushed by the government (that ranged from the ideological discourses to an almost sickening national pride), he still believed that the self-identification of the modern Mexican people is rooted in the mestizo. Agustín Basave Benítez stated that:

Mestizophilia can be defined... as the idea that the phenomenon of miscegenation... is a desirable fact... the tendency to link mestizaje and Mexicaness [3] (mexicanidad) essentially responds to a search for national identity. (Basave, 1992).

However, for some matters and people being a mestizo has been a conflicting and contrasting concept and some still mistreat or relegate others based on their line of blood or heritage.

The mestizo has fulfilled this discursive enunciation as the highest representative of Mexicaness. However, this discourse has promoted the violent adaptation not only of the "Indian", but of all cultural heterogeneities, such as the Afro and Jewish-Mexican for example, to the national project through its silencing and not through active participation as it is. (Carreño Medina, 2019)

This quote above relates deeply with this study because, in essence, Cemican is a band that is inherently Mexican and but not indigenous in its totality; this is because their members are inherently mestizos. Additionally, it is because of this particular positionality that the band has songs in Spanish and in Nahuatl, as this idea of Mexicaness is rooted in the fact that we are in fact mestizos: mixed and culturally developed in the duality of two cultures. Octavio Paz discusses this duality in his novel *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (1950). He was inspired by the discourse of the Mexicanidad in contrast with the hegemonic mestizo and this concept continues to be very relevant in the field, often also taken as a textbook in some schools. This book refers to how the indigenous were seen as an agent that has incidence in the present and not as an exotic and faraway item. Most likely due to the legacy of colonialism, the indigenous people were seen as passive, submissive, and culturally of the past. Paz criticizes this systematic violence and revindicates the figure of the indigenous in many of his fiction works.

During my presentation *Spectral qualities of sound: pre-Hispanic resonances in the metal of Cemican at the Heavy Metal and Global Premodernity* in 2022, I talked about the importance of the mestizaje and its undeniable influence in the country. In México, the figure of the mestizo works on two levels – racial and cultural – and as a result of not only interactions and cultural clashes, but also due to the national political project from which nation, imagined as mestiza, was projected. A group of intellectuals and enthusiasts (like Paz) repelled this propaganda fed to the people by the government. In doing so, they proposed another historical process that reinterpreted and re-emphasised the wealth of indigenous, knowledge and culture, setting this in opposition to colonialist ideas and an imposed image of what and who a Mexican mestizo should be.

In 2021, scholar and metal music studies researcher Maria de la Luz Nuñez wrote the article “The stones sing: The mestizo metal music of Kay Pacha and Yana Raymi” about Mestizo metal culture in Perú and on how mestizaje is recognized and considered. In this piece for *Riffs*, I build on her work and apply it to the mestizaje culture of México. She cites José María Arguedas who was a Peruvian novelist to discuss mestizaje in Perú:

José María Arguedas has termed this phenomenon mestizaje, an idea that he sees, not as the loss or acculturation of the indigenous, but as a door allowing precisely for the dissemination of the indigenous. As Arguedas has noted, the influence of such complex factors led to the transformation of the indigenous valley dweller into the present-day mestizo who speaks Spanish, this without uprooting him or destroying his personality. This entailed a process of transculturation *en masse*, fuelled by the greatest transformative factors that simultaneously managed to effect change in the region (Arguedas 1981: 12). Thus, Arguedas speaks of a type of cultural mestizaje, which occurs during the exchange of social practices. Following this line of thinking, he posits the following as a clarification regarding Perú...

She applies this work to her case study which focuses on the mestizo and Mesoamerican roots of a metal band in Perú, claiming that cultural mestizaje is very important in this understanding. In her abstract she states:

That particular way of understanding mestizaje (cultural mestizaje) can be examined by paying attention to the development of local popular music, including metal; particularly by reviewing the music, narratives and aesthetics of Kay Pacha’s black metal and Yana Raymi’s folk metal. (Nuñez, 2021: 129)

Nuñez does not deny the influence of one culture of the other, nor does she say that racial mestizaje was not important for the development of these two metal bands, but rather emphasises that the cultural mestizaje was the founding point of it. Based on my own engagement with an analysis of Mexican metal culture, I can also say that syncretism [4] had a lot to do with our idea of mestizaje. Religious Syncretism happened in México during and throughout the outcome of colonialism. We can still see traces of Mesoamerican elements in culture, holidays and traditions that still survive to this day. For example, the dances of indigenous people became integrated and (to some) inseparable from the religious processions now relating to Catholic saints and festivities.

Guadalajara, the local metal scene, and the importance of radio

Cemican is a metal band from the city of Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco, located in the central west of México and the second most populated city of México. The name Guadalajara comes from an Arabic word that means 'river of stones', 'river that runs between stones', or 'valley of fortresses' (Gobierno de Guadalajara 2023). The city is rich in traditions, food, and culture, and considered by Mexicans and outsiders alike to represent Mexican customs. These traditions include mariachi music, the spirit Tequila and charro culture. The city has many emblematic places and historical landmarks that call upon the identity of the *Jaliciense* [5]. As a big city, it offers a range of bands and groups that play diverse genres of music, even within metal. Guadalajara has boasted a strong rock scene since the mid-sixties to the late seventies, with bands like *La*

Revolución de Emiliano Zapata, Fachada de Piedra and *Los Spiders* to name but a few. Entering the mid-eighties, the metal scene started to grow and diversify within areas of the city. However, Guadalajara is also a city that is known for its strong Catholic traditions in society, and it is no surprise that even rock music was considered scandalous during this period and to the so called “elites” till this day (Napolitano, 1998).

In my paper for the International Metal Music Studies conference 2022 on the first metal scene in Guadalajara [6], I gathered first account stories and testimonies of what this judgement and censorship was like from my participants point of view. When metal culture started to become more visible through concerts, gatherings and through individual style, it was not equally welcomed by all in the city. In some cases, this led to police harassment, purposely persecuting individuals with leather clothing, long hair and band t-shirts or the cancellation of events by the government and protests from the religious sector, calling for censorship and other forms of discrimination against metal music and its fans. One of them shared with me that for a while there was a photograph of a young man with a Guns N’ Roses t-shirt and long hair pinned in the town hall to depict what a “lowlife” looked like. The police even went as far as stopping metalheads in the street and forcibly cutting their hair. Bands in the late eighties had a hard time positioning themselves as “real” culture in a city that refused to recognize them as such. However, in some areas of the city this worked in the band’s favour because their affiliates and other metalhead devotees fought harder for their scene to survive. Metal bands, like Draksen, Megaton, Fongus, Hardware, Exus and Tenebrarum were some of the first to set the building blocks for a metal scene in Guadalajara. The bands’ genres went from Thrash metal to Death Metal and eventually established a diverse range of subgenres within the scene and new directions for other bands. Whilst the arrival of cable TV in the 1990s offered access to a range of specialised music channels and the arrival of the internet heralded an increase in rebellious and transgressive attitude, always against the mainstream, radio has been and continues to play a central role in the scene.

Radio allows the members of the community to develop their own discourses and interests about the culture with which they identify and also to build their identity. There are several radio stations in Guadalajara such as the one from the University of Guadalajara that dedicates hours and programs to various topics and interests. One of the resources that paved the way for a lot of bands either in their visualisation, distribution of their music or inspiration from listening to other metal bands was the radio. I had the opportunity to interview Alfonso (Poncho) Martínez who produces and today hosts *El Despeñadero*, a radio session at University of Guadalajara radio. Martínez has produced and hosted this programme since 1989 alongside his great friend Toño Muñoz until Muñoz’ death in 2019. *El Despeñadero* began in 1987 as a crusade against Disco music that other stations and the media wanted to force upon listeners.

I also collaborated with the legendary *Despeñadero* as a sort of special correspondent from Guadalajara living in Europe. I keep my comrades and other metal enthusiasts who listen to the show up to date with the scene here, concerts, small gigs, bands, and events. In addition to this I curate a playlist for that day. Several of the people that I have interviewed for previous research have expressed this connection to the thirty-plus-year-old radio programme. As one of them put it, *Despeñadero* was like a school or metal upbringing where they felt at home. The show has had an undeniable influence for not only the local scene but the national as well. The fact that this space in the radio is sponsored by the University of Guadalajara also makes it easier for its reach to be significant. Tecuhtli (Cemican’s lead singer and one of its founders) described during an interview how important and supportive *Despeñadero* had been to their career. They were constantly promoted on the show, had their songs played and were interviewed several times. Tecuhtli argued that it was support from wide-reaching media such as this that had made them as the popular band that they are now.

Cemican

Cemican is a Mexican folk metal band that has elements of ancient México in their music, themes, and aesthetic elements. The band often performs in costumes that refer to some Mesoamerican tribes and are known for developing immersive experiences of the past through the re-enactment of rituals during live performances. During these rituals, the band blends the sound of metal music with ancient Mesoamerican instruments. Cemican is born from the idea of adding the richness of the traditional sounds and mysticism of Mesoamerican instruments to the sounds of metal.



Cemican in 2018 after a concert (photo courtesy of the band)

Cemican translates as "the dual quality of life and death" from the Nahuatl Mexican language. It was this very duality that led the cosmology and mythology of many Mesoamerican civilizations in what is now Latin America, and (in their own words) inspired the members of Cemican to start a band. Cemican reconvenes metal music with the sounds of an ancient and the cultural imaginary of México. The band members also have performance names that correspond to their Tonal [7]. Cemican is comprised of Tecuhtli (for Mitlantecuhli deity of the underworld) on guitar and vocals, Ocelótl (Ocelot) on bass, Tlipoca (for Tezcatlipoca [8]) on drums, Mazatecpatl (deer) on wind instruments, Yei Tochtli (rabbit) on wind instruments and choirs, and Xaman-Ek (star) who is in charge of creating the aura and rituals on stage. During our conversations, Xaman Ek told me that his involvement within the band wasn't always as the ritualist. He started out playing the bass, but as the band's sound and overall demeanour evolved it became necessary for Xaman-Ek to offer his knowledge of Mesoamerican art, language and poetry to the band. The material elements of their attires and specially of Xaman-Ek's changing costumes fit in perfectly into what they wanted to

convey. The mere presence of Xaman-Ek charges the stage with a mood that touches even the audience: everyone is in for a ritual.

When you search for “pre-Hispanic” metal bands in the Metal Archives online [9] 67 results are returned. When you type Mexican it gives 52, Aztec gives 48 results, Mesoamerican only gets eight results, Mayan seven, and Toltec two. Why is this relevant? Writing about these topics often necessitates a careful consideration of terminology. This was something that came up in a discussion with colleagues in the Premodernity Conference [10]. I had named my intervention “Spectral Qualities of Sound: Prehispanic Resonances in the Metal of Cemican”. It had never even occurred to me to refer to it as Mesoamerican instead of Pre-Hispanic and someone asked me about it. It hit me really hard because I considered myself a big supporter of the decolonization movement. This use of terminology was unconscious, but I soon realised that it was representative of my own cultural baggage; I was putting all these advanced, important, and rich civilizations under the denomination of Spain. Culturally and for ages we have referred to all civilizations in Mesoamerica by ‘pre-Hispanic’ and thus, placing more emphasis on ‘Hispanic’ rather than on ‘Mesoamerican’.

Mexican culture is a product of mixing, a product of syncretism of religion, traditions and spirit. This mixing enriched and gave the country a diverse identity that we are still able to see in many places, to include music such as metal bands that make use of Mesoamerican instruments. Cemican mostly sings in Spanish with parts of their songs sung or spoken in Nahuatl. The band explained that this had to do with keeping Cemican in the present, despite that their music and live performances allude to the past, Cemican is a band very much of the present México, where Spanish is our language and part of our present identity. It is important to note that Cemican is not the first and most likely won't be the last band to engage in the mingling of Mesoamerican influences or even mixing in instruments in their performances. Cemican is a band that without a doubt blends in the use of material artefacts, instruments, execution and a powerful discourse of Mexican representation and identity in one performance that carries out a significant connection with the audience and the artist. It was exactly this that brought me to the conclusion that Cemican in its core would be an adequate representation of my work for this issue of Popular Music Materialities.



The band seconds before stepping on stage for their ritual in 2021 (Photo courtesy of Cemican)

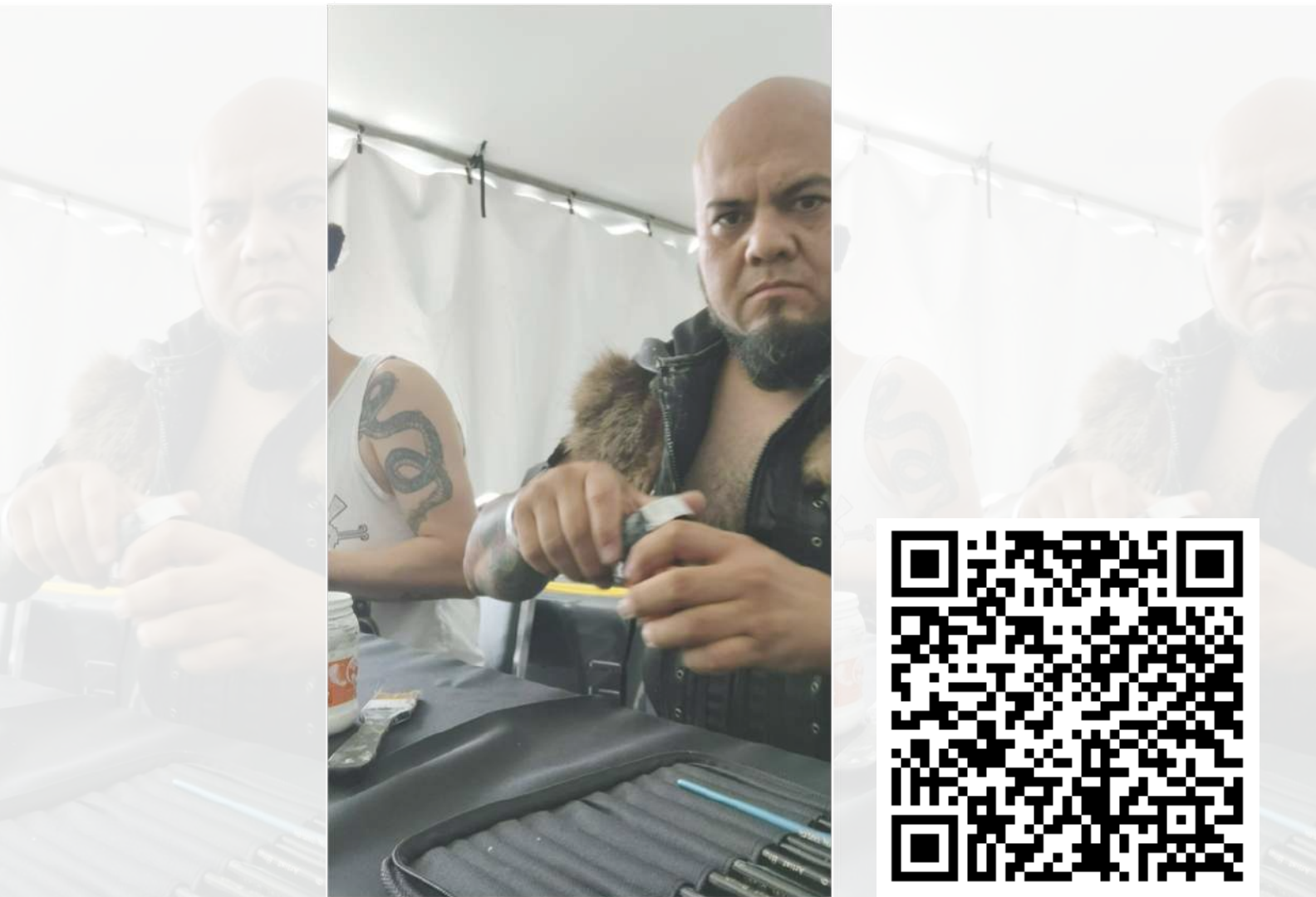


Xaman-Ek, photographed by the author in Madhouse studios in Guadalajara México July 2018

In Cemican, the body – such as that of Xaman-ek, for example – works as an instrument of material representation. Equally, the instruments are not the only sound producers, because the body also becomes a material element that is a means for experience. Xaman Ek can be seen dressed from head to toe in clothing that alludes to other times in ancient México. Feathers, animal skulls, bone motifs, fur, and colourful makeup adorn the character as he takes the stage. He also is seen and heard reciting Nahuatl poetry and blowing on conch shells and the famous death whistle. These sounds work as a medium that can channel many kinds of emotions. One of the most popular outfits among the audience and the band is the mask of the lord of death, Mitantecuhtli. The representation of the presence of this deity is something that Cemican considers fundamental to the journey of the show. For Xaman-Ek, this mask represents something strong and symbolic: a

representation of death. In wearing this outfit, he enters into the character. As Xaman-Ek said during an interview with me (Perez Pelayo, 2020):

Since I enter character, I no longer laugh and did not joke, I stop being me and I become Xaman-Ek as Mitlantecuhtli and with the mask see how I saw or try to feel it.



Frame from a video of Alex getting ready to turn into his stage persona Tlipoca
(video available via QR Code)

Metal and materiality of instruments

Extensive research on the distinctive Mexican sounds produced by ocarinas, wind instruments, and whistles has been conducted. Some of these instruments play a very vital role for Cemican because they are not just for music, but Cemican also brings these artefacts and objects into an atypical scenario: a stage in a Mexican metal music concert. The audience becomes engaged with these material items by being able to see them and hear them being played, rather than the compulsory study of these items as school students or viewing them on a school field trip, consigned to museums. Through these processes of education and heritage, some of the audience members perhaps disliked them or had lost interest in them due to their distance from

the everyday of their experience. For many audience members, these instruments have more often than not been a subject of exoticism and their real function confused. Mexican sounds in ocarinas, wind instruments and whistles have been studied by many. However, there remains a significant level of misconceptions relating to the artefacts that have been found, but as more research is done some artefacts are identified instruments used in ritualistic practices rather than ornamental use. Mechanical engineer and Mesoamerican scholar, Roberto Velázquez Cabrera (2011) has dedicated his life to studying Mesoamerican whistles, noise producers and resonators. He founded an institute in México City called *Instituto Virtual de Investigación Tlapitzcalzin* [11]. One of the most used studies that has aided me throughout my investigations is his contribution to knowledge of the death whistle.

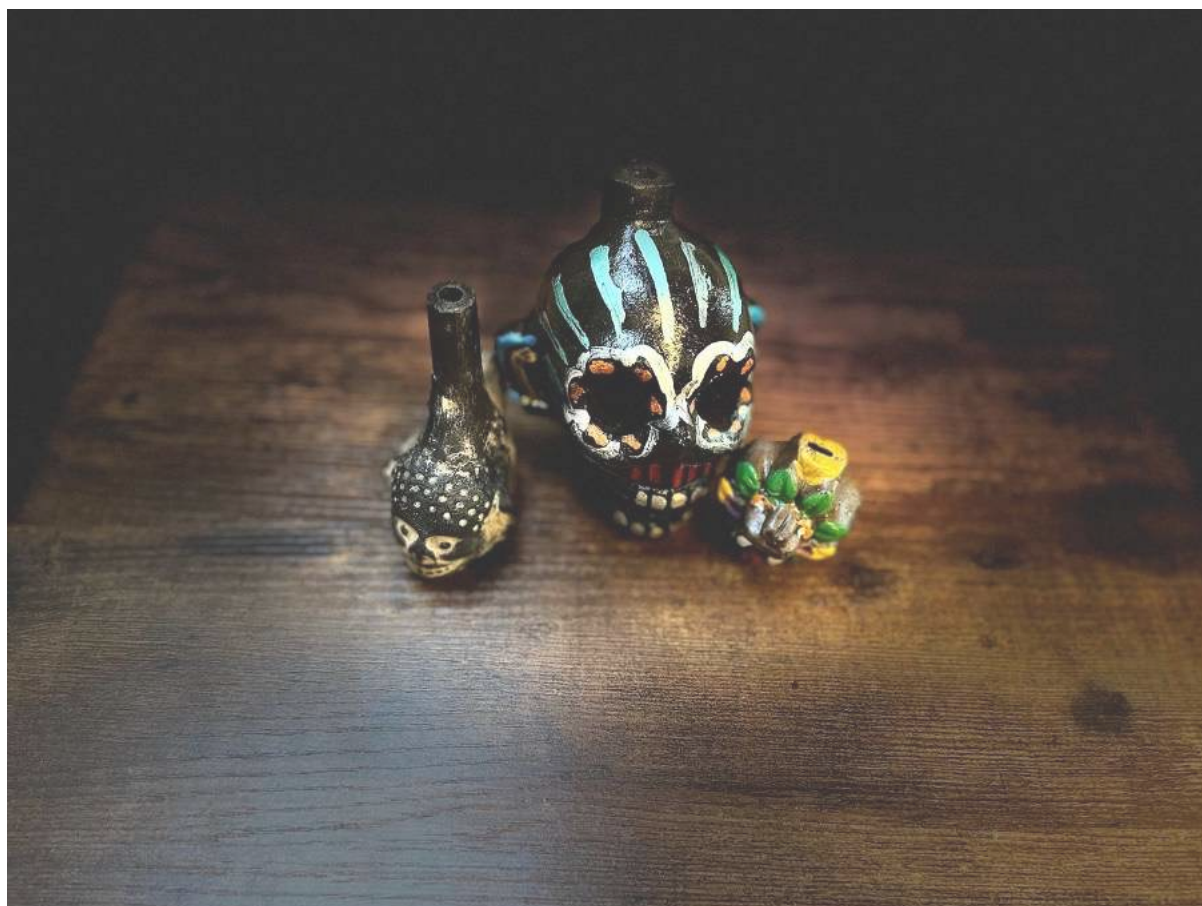
The extraordinary 'death whistle' was exclusively used in several zones of ancient México and belongs to a very unusual family of Mexican resonators that are not well known and which can produce special sounds imitating animal calls and the noise of the wind or storms. It is not a common whistle or musical instrument. It has been associated with death rituals by its decorated face of a skull and with the wind because two examples were found in the hands of a sacrificed male skeleton in front of the Ehécatl (wind god) temple at Tlatelolco. Unfortunately, the exact original use and purpose of the death whistle and many other ancient resonators have been lost. There are some ancient death whistles made of clay in museums and collections, but very few of their studies and sounds have been published. (Velázquez Cabrera, 2011)

In his article, Velázquez Cabrera (2011) notes that it was José Luis Franco who published the first known drawings of the death whistles. These drawings show the whistles in the shape of a skull. The cataloguing of these items, he argues, might have been where they got their name. They are also illustrated with shapes of animals, like an owl that is also known in Mexica culture as an emissary of death. Here, we also see the importance of the animals and their functions in traditions and beliefs. It is relevant that the members of Cemican take their names from the Tonal.

The study of Mexican sounds in ocarinas, wind instruments, and whistles has garnered considerable attention from Vázquez Cabrera (2011). He states that only known death whistles that can be traced and studied with archaeological background were first published in 1999 by Salvador Guillermo Arroyo. Death Whistles might have also been employed in the sacrifice of slaves because, as Velázquez Cabrera (2011) says, *chichtli* (in Náhuatl) was an instrument that could make a certain sound that was used during these ceremonies. Due to much stereotypical and inherited bias, and a lack of information, the musical identity and sounds of Mesoamerican México continue to be relegated as something 'exotic' and presented as a tourist commodity. Hence these sounds were considered to be a thing of the past with no place for it in the present, let alone in metal music.



Photograph of mainly Mexica artefacts that were instruments used in both religious rituals taken in the National Museum of Anthropology in México City (June 2022).



Photos of my own whistles, which can be purchased online or bought in Teotihuacan by vendor who walks along the archaeological site. The whistle on the far-left part of the merchandise sold by the Mexican Black metal band The Rise of Mictlán. The middle whistle is modelled after the denominated Death Whistle and the one on the far right has a sound more similar to a high-pitched flute and it's in the shape of a deity with feathers like the ones found in Teotihuacán.

Cemican employs the 'death whistle' in their songs especially those about warriors or battles. The death whistle sound is also used in outros and skits between rituals or the re-enactment of the ritual itself. The sound that emanates can generate profound effects. In antiquity, it used to be played regularly thanks to its dual characteristics of noise and intensity. We cannot speak of the death whistle as a "traditional" instrument but rather more of a rhythm instrument that is easily manageable in aperture of the sound chamber (García Islas 2021). The sounds made by the whistle are not melodic, but they are similar to the sound of the wind or other elements of nature. In an interview with Xaman-Ek (with author in Guadalajara, 2018), he explained to me that sometimes the Mexica would use the death whistle to intimidate their enemies. The sound is imponent alone, but multiplied by 50 or 100 could bring a man to fainting, as legend says it did for the Spanish when they encountered the death whistle.



Sound of Cemican 'death whistle' recorded by author

Cemican, as a metal band immersed in this existing time and with the audience that it attracts, acts as a musical overpass that conducts a collective identity of ancient México (the past) into metal (present) and aids the audiences (and listeners) to recognize how the ancient Mexicans were able to evoke feelings and emotions through sounds later incorporated in their music. Furthermore, since these sounds are lost in time, the authenticity of the sounds that bands like Cemican produce are often debated by so-called metal gatekeepers (such gatekeeping is discussed by Byrne 2022). Nonetheless, I believe – and have experienced as an audience member myself – that by re-enacting the sounds of the instruments and or the ritual (in both music videos and live performances), we are reaching and connecting into something that physically no longer is here in its original form, but that becomes tangible at least in the auditory manner.

The concept of mingling metal music with indigenous sounds and themes is not exclusively a practice of Cemican, but it is pioneering in the sense that a specific performance takes place during a concert. The most valuable part of the idea of a collected identity and the recapturing of the past through instruments and sound is the framing of experience of performative sounds as a collective experience that is produced and enhanced by a collective memory of the past. As Ingold says, “Sound is neither mental nor material but a phenomenon of experience, of our immersion in and coming with the world in which we find ourselves in” (Ingold: 2007, 11). Through the ritual, the audience manages to bond with the artists on stage in a dialectical relationship that occurs because the artist sacrifices himself, giving himself to the public. The audience is no longer only listening and watching the show, but somehow participating as first witnesses of human sacrifice.

Conclusions

My investigation of Cemican represents a satisfying and endless road, with many pit stops in different topics that surface the more I read and add to my research. I believe that the materiality of instruments, kinships and bonding and their sounds are just the tip of the iceberg and that I will continue to unravel these relationships as I continue my quest as a metal music studies researcher. As a researcher from the Global South living in the Global North, I continue to be interested in the research and events of my natal ground and area. I have for the most part of my life been interested in metal music and the Mesoamerican culture. I find studying and discovering this fusion is possible through metal music studies. Metal music studies often offers an opportunity for the academic consideration of neglected, excluded, or taken for granted topics. Equally, anthropology as a discipline requires much further self-reflection and change. Perhaps anthropology, as an established discipline of illustrious history (if now dubious content and theories) can learn something from metal studies.

Visibility makes all the difference for the studies that have been long in the dark and that now are reclaiming a spot in the general Geist of anthropology. Privileged people of nations of power have for a long time dominated the idea of how or why we should undertake anthropology. This was something that inspired me to do anthropology myself. I wanted to study “my kind” – metalheads, Mexican metalheads, women metalheads – and this is something that continues to fuel my passion for research and metal music studies. In the beginning, I thought that doing my research about “my world” would be easy, because I knew the people, the places, the situation. But I say this with relief, “Man was I wrong!”. It has been very challenging for me as a researcher to not be biased, to not romanticise, and to see that this world that I chose to belong to has its ugly parts, and its parts that need to be called out.

This article is hardly the end of my quest into Mesoamerica and metal. I look forward to undertaking more research and learning about the topic and themes explored here. Instruments that are from the spectral past, like those in Mesoamerica, and the ways that they shape identity

and culture is something that has an undeniable spot in our present, and that should be studied further. The example of Cemican illustrates the ways in which sound and music-related performance can reach into the past, through the material culture of Mesoamerica. The ways in which the band chooses to represent a part of the past, also comes as an interesting subject to study from the perspective of metal music studies. The combination of both is as mixed as the mestizaje itself and can only enrich our understanding of both metal music and Mexican cultural expression.

Marisol Pérez Pelayo (AKA Sol), a Metalhead from infancy, holds a degree in Philosophy and Social Sciences and Masters in Sociocultural Anthropology with a thesis on Metal Music Studies. She has published in the *Metal Music Studies Journal* and has participated in colloquiums and debates regarding Social Anthropology, philosophy, art and feminism. Before pursuing the line of social research, she worked as an actress and model. Currently, Sol is a radio host on a metal radio show for the cultural section of the University of Guadalajara and an independent researcher of Metal studies with a focus on society, horror genre, art and music.

Endnotes

1. Cited in *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* by John B. Thompson (1984)
2. Paz, Octavio. "Los hijos de la Malinche." *El laberinto de la soledad* (1959): 72-97.
3. Mexicaness is not a recognized term but there is no direct translation of mexicanidad and this is the closest it gets to it. The Mexicanity of something.
4. Syncretism is hybridization or amalgamation of two or more cultural traditions. All cultures without exception, amount to a diverse array of spread-out and acquired elements Ralph Linton in 'One Hundred Per-Cent American' (1937).
5. Referring to those from the state of Jalisco Napolitano, Valentina. "Between 'traditional' and 'new' Catholic Church religious discourses in urban, Western Mexico." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 17, no. 3 (1998): 323-339.
6. Tú eres la música Mientras dure la música Experiencia Colectiva, espacios y lugares que trascienden el tiempo: La primera escena metalera en Guadalajara (You are the music while the music lasts Collective Experience, spaces and places that transcend time: The first metal scene in Guadalajara). Unpublished.
7. Tonal means 'day' in the Nahuatl language, which is a language Cemican often uses to convey their meaning in their practices as a band. In the Mexica belief, the day when a person was born was estimated in the Tonalpohualli and it would influence the character that person would have, often at times they had an animal that represented it.
8. From Nahuatl translates as Smoking Mirror and was the deity of the night sky, one of the major ones of the Mexica although brought by the Toltec culture.
9. The Encyclopedia Metallum was first launched in 2002 by a couple from Montreal, HellBlazer and Morrigan. It is a database that works as an encyclopaedia that has even underground metal performers.
10. Heavy Metal and Global Premodernity took place February 24-26, 2022 as an Online Interdisciplinary Conference hosted by the Department of Classical and Early Mediterranean Studies at Brandeis University. <https://www.brandeis.edu/classics/heavy-metal-and-global-premodernity/index.html>
11. Tlapitzalintli means little flute in Nahuatl, the Mexica language. But this Mexica diminutive means more reverence than smallness. (Translation by Roberto Velázquez Cabrera)

12. Gatekeeping – the act of keeping others away from something you like – has plagued the metal community for decades.

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