Théologiques

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Volume 26, Number 1, 2018

Dire et/ou maudire Dieu par la musique
Praising and/or Cursing God Through Music

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1062069ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1062069ar

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Publisher(s)

Faculté de théologie et de sciences des religions, Université de Montréal

ISSN

1188-7109 (print)
1492-1413 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Varas-Díaz, N. & Morales, E. (2018). Decolonial Reflections in Latin American Metal Music: Religion, Politics and Resistance. *Théologiques*, *26*(1), 229–250. https://doi.org/10.7202/1062069ar

Article abstract

Latin America's history is deeply embedded in the experience of coloniality. Still, its history cannot be told without stories of resistance to its colonial experience. This resistance takes many shapes, from armed conflict to the use of the arts, and addresses many consequences of coloniality. We aim to explore how metal music in Latin America has been used to challenge the colonial legacy of the region. Although coloniality has had many implications (e.g., political, economical, environmental), we focus on the specific challenge towards religion (Christianity in particular) as a strategy to critically assess this colonial legacy. We present three thematic examples that highlight this critical approach in Latin American metal towards coloniality in general, and Christian religion in particular. These include : 1) highlighting the presence of indigenous populations in the region, 2) reframing of religious culture as an act of resistance, and 3) linking religion to current colonial politics.

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Decolonial Reflections in Latin American Metal Music

Religion, Politics and Resistance

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I vividly remember the first time I visited Mexico.[1] Colleagues who had taken time out of their busy schedules to show me some of the city's most visited cultural sites took me to the *Catedral de la Virgen de Guadalupe*. The Cathedral was massive in size, and the sheer number of people visiting it was impressive, and at times overwhelming. I was told the amount of

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1. The described event was experienced by the first author and narrated from a first person perspective, although both authors have frequently visited the country.

local visitors was large in any given day of the week. The building itself had electronic walkways so that people could be moved through the structure and wonder at its architecture. The current Cathedral, a newer building, sits right next door to the original structure that has been abandoned in light of its failing structure. It served as a reminder to visitors that Christianity is alive and well in Mexico, and that even when old structures crumble to the ground new ones would be built.

While walking around the Cathedral grounds I saw an enormous statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which was unavoidable. It depicted the Virgin as an apparition, while a priest gazed at it directly as one does when recognizing a familiar face. The priest was accompanied by a group of indigenous people who kneeled in reverence and brought offerings to the Virgin. The statue was shown to tourists as a place to take photographs before buying small religious trinkets and walking into the Cathedral itself. This touristic gaze happened throughout the day with an eerily sense of normalcy. After all, just as the population in many countries in Latin America, most Mexicans self-identify as Christians.

My experience during this visit to the Cathedral and the Virgin of Guadalupe statue was keenly different from that of my colleagues. To me they stood as symbols of the process of Spanish colonization and the role of imperialism in the formation of Latin America, with the well-known consequences for the local people of the region. Colonialism, although seen as an event in the distant past, is still alive today in many shapes and forms. Sometimes it just takes a critical examination of one's context to see how it is experienced in our daily lives. Still, it must be noted that the experiences and consequences of this colonial experience do not go unchallenged by many in Latin America. This brings up an important question for debate : how is this colonial history and its consequences challenged today ?

In this paper we aim to explore how metal music in Latin America has been used to challenge the colonial history of the region. Although this colonial experience has many implications and consequences (e.g., political, economical, environmental), we will focus on the specific challenge towards religion (Christianity in particular) as a strategy to critically assess the colonial legacy in Latin America. We will achieve this aim through an examination of metal production in the region and via specific examples from Puerto Rico, an active colonial scenario still today.

1. Examining coloniality through the lens of metal music

Most analyses of the effects of colonialism throughout the world tend to examine it as a phenomenon of the past and limit their focus to the European colonization process that began in the XV^th^ century and was later challenged by the emergence of independent nations in the XIX^th^ and XX^th^ centuries. This approach is limited, as it understands colonialism as a process that if finalized or completed, with little consequences for the world as we experience it today. Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano's work, has richly described the ever-present legacy of colonialism in Latin America, long after the period of traditional colonization of the region (Quijano 2010). He uses the term « coloniality » (e.g., coloniality of power) to describe a « form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed » (Quijano 2010, 24). Coloniality therefore encompasses a structure of oppression, linked to the colonial experience of the XV^th^ century, but that simultaneously surpasses the end of that same colonial period. The social categories that fostered oppressive experiences (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, political positioning) may have been created, implemented and exploited during the colonial period, but were later transformed to sustain the project of modernity characteristic of Europe. Walter Mignolo (2011), extending Quijano's vision of coloniality, conceptualized it as an experience inextricably linked to modernity in an effort to make explicit that the Western modern project is anchored in the exploitation (geographical, physical and psychological) of the colonial settings. Devalued settings and peoples could be systematically oppressed to advance the project of modernity and its capitalist strategies. Those same devalued settings and peoples continue to face the effects of coloniality today via political repression, the exploitation of natural resources, and neoliberal policies, among many other practices.

These experiences related to coloniality have not gone unchallenged through many forms. For example, grassroots organization and university-led educational projects are important examples of how resistance to coloniality has taken place. The arts have also taken an important role in challenging coloniality (Neustadat 2004 ; Soto 2008). Folk musicians, painters, and novelists have all used the arts to engage in decolonial agendas related to race, ethnicity, and gender, just to name a few axes of analyses. For those of us engaged in research on metal music in Latin America, the use of art as resistance brings forth the question : what role does metal music play in this critical assessment of coloniality ?

This question is simultaneously complex and relevant for contemporary political and musical analyses. Metal music in Latin America is, and always has been, a reflection of its context and scholars have addressed this issue in their work (Scaricaciottoli 2016; Sánchez 2014; Varas-Díaz & Mendoza 2015). This does not mean that discussions of the intersections between metal music and its political context are easy or clear. Two main challenges for this integration seem to coexist today. First, research has documented that discussion of politics among musicians and fans that engage in metal music is sometimes seen with disapproval, as it has the potential to incorporate rifts into the ever-present sense of togetherness and solidarity that the music tries to foster within its communities (Kahn-Harris 2007; Scott 2012). This is particularly challenging for musicians and fans making metal music in settings experiencing coloniality, as the integration of their context into the music is sometimes inherently political, frequently decolonial, and therefore the target of some rejection. Second, academic research itself has been an obstacle for the exploration of the political and decolonial dimensions of metal music. Much of the published research on metal music during the 90s focused on the perceived detrimental effects of the music on adolescents. Metal music was interpreted as the cause of depression, anxiety, and suicidality (Arnett 1996; Scheel & Westefeld 1999). Scholars seemed to gravitate towards the political narratives included into other musical genres like hip-hop and punk, and labeled metal as a purely hedonistic antireligious endeavor (Phillipov 2012).

This limited perspective on metal music has been challenged by more recent scholarly work that has opened the door to the examination of the interrelation between politics and metal music, positioning its output as a potential critical vehicle of popular culture (Scott 2016). The call for international and comparative approach towards metal music has fostered the examination of regions like Latin America and inevitably positioned the subject of coloniality front and center (Varas-Díaz et al. 2016). Issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and political repression have begun to emerge in metal related research (Clifford-Napoleone 2015; Dawes 2013; Varas-Díaz & Mendoza 2015).

2. Why focus on religion and metal music?

Metal music has had an interesting and sometimes tense relation with religion. Many of the original metal bands positioned themselves as either

anti-religious or at the very least critical of these belief systems. On the other hand, metal music has also incorporated pro-religious content into its productions and some small scenes have used religion as a strategy to develop cohesive communities (Moberg 2015; Varas-Díaz, Rivera, Mendoza, & González 2014). Therefore, these pro and anti-religion stances coexist within metal today with seemingly little tensions for some fans. Metal music has always been fascinated with religion in one way or another (Walser 1993).

In the case of Latin America anti-religion or anti-Christian stances within metal music have been closely linked to the region's colonial past. As we will describe later in this paper, many bands have explored the intersection of coloniality and religion, particularly the imposition of Christianity among indigenous people since the xvth century. This thematic intersection is important in order to understand how metal music in Latin America has critically challenged coloniality.

Nelson Maldonado Torres has vividly described the role of religion in the process of colonization in the Americas and its plethora of consequences (Maldonado-Torres 2014). He explains, based on Christopher Columbus' written accounts of his encounters with the indigenous peoples of the Americas, that the navigator perceived the locals as having no religion. This description is vital for understanding the subsequent exploitation of the local people, as it would allow colonizers to not recognize them as valid individuals. People without religion would be considered irrational, not even human, and sometimes compared to animals. These conceptualizations of the colonized would allow for their exploitation and forceful conversion to Christianity. This process entailed the devaluation of their customs, including their religious beliefs and their language.

Authors like Walter Mignolo have warned that this systematic exploitation of those that were considered inhuman is not simply a phenomenon of the past, but rather still a vital part of the project of modernity. Mignolo describes this logic on conversion as part of the modern agenda and states that « the rhetoric of modernity is a rhetoric of salvation (by conversion yesterday, and by development today), but in order to implement what rhetoric preaches, it is necessary to marginalize or destroy whatever gets in the way of modernity » (Mignolo 2011, xxiv). In this scenario, the exploitation of the local population that was an essential part of the colonization process is still a vivid force today. Metal music in many places in Latin America has been critical of this process.

Table 1 Sample of bands that challenge coloniality through the integration of indigenous themes from Latin American and the Caribbean.

Country	Band	Subgenre	Mechanism
Argentina	Werken	Power Metal	Use of indigenous imagery and lyrical content in defense of these populations.
Bolivia	Oscuro Mito	Black/Folk Metal	Use of lyrical content in defense of indigenous populations. Addresses specifically Inca culture.
Brazil	Tierramystica	Folk Metal	Use of indigenous imagery and lyrical content in defense of these populations. Use of imagery depicting battles between European conquistadores and local people.
Chile	Folkheim	Folk Metal	Use of indigenous imagery and regional instrumentation.
Colombia	ThunDarkma	Folk Metal	Use of indigenous imagery and lyrical content in defense of these populations. Use of regional instrumentation.
Cuba	Tendencia	Thrash/Groove Metal	Use of Afro-Caribbean instrumentation (i.e. batá) linked to non-Christian religious practices.
Ecuador	Aztra	Folk/Heavy Metal	Use of indigenous imagery and overtly political lyrical content in defense of these populations.
El Salvador	Indezoquixtia	Thrash Metal	Use of lyrical content in defense of indigenous populations.
Mexico	Cemican	Progressive/Power/ Folk Metal	Use of indigenous imagery and lyrical content in defense of these populations. The band engages in onstage rituals reproducing indigenous religious practices.
Panama	Spirit of the Deep Waters	Black/Doom Metal	Use of indigenous instrumentation, specifically the rain stick that is characteristic of the Mapuches in South America.
Paraguay	Kuazar	Thrash	Sings some songs in Guarani, one of the main local indigenous languages in the country.
Peru	Chaska	Folk/Death Metal	Use of indigenous imagery and lyrical content in defense of these populations.
Puerto Rico	Argyle	Black Metal	Use of indigenous imagery and overtly anti-Christian messages.
Uruguay	Pecho e' Fierro	Folk/Heavy Metal	Use of indigenous imagery and lyrical content in defense of these populations. Critical of religion in general.
Venezuela	Gillman	Heavy Metal	Use of indigenous imagery and lyrical content in defense of these populations. The band uses the figure of "Guaica" as a representation of leaders of the region's indigenous tribes.

As stated earlier our aim in this paper is to explore how metal music in Latin America has been used to challenge the colonial legacy of the region, focusing on the challenge towards religion (specifically Christianity). Below we will navigate three thematic examples that we understand highlight this critical approach in Latin American metal towards coloniality in general, and Christian religion in particular. These examples include: 1) highlighting the presence of indigenous populations in the region, 2) reframing of religious culture as an act of resistance, and 3) linking religion to current colonial politics. Let us examine each example individually.

2.1 Example 1: Highlighting the presence of indigenous populations in the region.

In order to understand the role of metal music in challenging coloniality one must start with the most evident ways in which this is done. In the case of Latin American metal, this entails the outright inclusion of indigenous populations in the music's imagery, lyrical content and instrumentation. Table 1 provides a summary of 15 countries in which metal bands have integrated indigenous elements into their music. We have provided one band per country as an example of this endeavor due to space constraints, but it should be noted that more bands that have engaged in this type of reflection exists in each of these settings. Under the labels of "folk metal" and « pre-Hispanic metal », among others, musicians in the region have addressed the plight of indigenous populations through their musical output. This is not a new phenomenon and can be traced to bands that engaged in the creation of regional metal music since the early 80s.

Metal in Latin America has called for attention to the plight of the indigenous populations who carried the burden of the colonization process through a plurality of strategies. These strategies are closely linked to the use of specific imagery, lyrical content, instrumentation, stage practices and language.

Imagery — Some of these strategies are purely visual and aesthetic, and rely mainly in the inclusion of indigenous populations in the artwork of their albums. One important example of this integration is the artwork from the Brazilian band *Tierramystica* (2010) which clearly depicts the European invasion and indigenous resistance in their album *A new Horizon* (See image 1).

Image 1

Lyrical content — Other bands have created lyrical content that is descriptive of the injustice committed against the indigenous populations of the Americas. One important example is the Argentinian band *Werken* (2010) who frequently sings about the extermination of the indigenous populations in South America.

Instrumentation — Musicians have integrated instrumentation that is characteristic of the region in which they are embedded and is linked to indigenous population. Bands like Chaska (2009) in Peru and Spirit of the Deep Waters in Panama have integrated regional wind instruments into their music. The latter has been known to use a rain stick as part of their live shows.

Stage practices — Bands have incorporated traditional ceremonies of indigenous populations into their stage performances as a way to both entertain and educate people. The Mexican band *Cemican* (2012) is an excellent example of this practice as they use body paint and recreate rituals during their presentations.

Language — Finally, some bands have integrated their indigenous languages into their songs. One example is *Kuazar* (2009) from Paraguay, who sing some of their songs in Guarani. Another is *Miquian* (2015) from Mexico, who sing in Nahuatl. This process serves as recognition that the colonial experience also used the imposition of language as a strategy of control.

Through the examples provided above we wish to highlight two main issues. First, that metal bands throughout Latin America have made a conscious decision to focus on a subject matter that outright addresses the colonial past and present of many countries and groups in the region. This focus should not be taken lightly as it talks about those 'without religion', as described by Nelson Maldonado Torres in his analysis of the colonization process. It is a decision to pay attention to populations that the colonization process has historically perceived as less than human. This attention to the indigenous populations of the region is simultaneously of a religious nature as it frequently references their beliefs about nature and earth as the mother of humanity (Pachamama), and also positions these ideas as political resistance to colonial exploitation. It also pays attention to their ritual practices, which were mostly religious in nature. There is a process of vindication of the indigenous which, in a region still plagued with experiences of coloniality, is considered a political act in itself.

2.2 Example 2: Reframing religious culture as an act of resistance

A second example of how metal music critically assesses the colonial legacy in Latin America is by reframing existing religious cultures. During the past five years the local scene of Puerto Rico has witnessed an increase in the inclusion of regional cultural artifacts into metal music's visual aesthetics. This integration of the local within metal has served to make a global musical genre more regional, and highlight contributions made by Puerto Rican musicians. Interestingly one of the entities used for this integration between local culture and metal music is directly linked to religion. Specifically, artists have begun to use the figure of the « vejigante » in many aspects of metal music.

« Vejigantes » are portrayed as grotesque figures with prominent noses, jutting teeth and wide-open lips. They dress in vibrant colors and run through the streets as part of local festivities. Wooden horns are used as part of their masks, which are made either from dry coconut husks or paper mache. Appearing in popular festivities in Puerto Rico, the « vejigantes » represent North African and Arab Muslim figures. The popular festivals celebrate the victory of Christians over Muslims in Europe. In these festivals, the « vejigante » figures run through the streets teasing onlookers with strange shouts and scaring them with the threat of being slapped with inflated and dried out animal bladders. With their colorful shawls and long

wide sleeves, they are known to strike out at parade watchers and then just disappear. Even today, if you go to festivals in several towns of the Island you will see « vejigantes » run through the streets and hit people over the head (Fiet 2017). They are used as teaching resources in children's classrooms (Nardulli,2014) and have been used by the Island's migrant population as symbols of national identity (Underberg 2010).

The « vejigante » figure first made its appearance in the local metal scene as part of the promotional materials of black metal concerts in Puerto Rico (See image 2). Local artist Kadriel Betsen began using the concept as a way to link black metal's critique of organized religion and Puerto Rican culture. The customary colorful imagery used as dress codes were changed for a darker, and sometimes completely blackened aesthetic. I had the opportunity to interview the artist on several occasions and discuss the use of the « vejigante » as part of these events. He mentioned the following :

> We tried to avoid cliché elements like « coquies » and « garitas » and other Puerto Rican icons that many artists use [...] We decided to use the « Vejigante » because it has an interesting cultural origin. The *vejigante* has a really interesting cultural origin. We constantly see *vejigantes* appear at different town festivals in Puerto Rico, accompanied by all the other intangibles that we associate with them, right. But we rarely think about what a

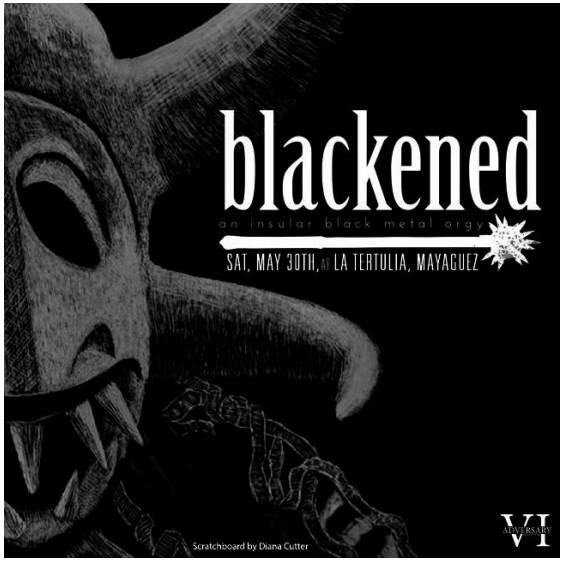

Image 2

> *vejigante* really is. The *vejigante,* in a nutshell, is a demon. Within each town the *vejigante* can possess various meanings, but the « real » meaning, at its basic level, is that they represent the fears we have towards « bad things ». Within Christianity, believers saw them as demons who struck fear into people, frightening them so that they felt afraid and in need to seek the Lord so as to find refuge in him. If we're talking about black metal, then that aspect has to be included.

It was evident from our conversations that the artist was interested in linking local culture to metal music but was wary about reproducing overused images to represent Puerto Rican culture. These images are mostly geared towards tourism and tend to be purely celebratory of particular icons of local culture. In this case, the selection of the « vejigante » represented a different way to integrate local culture into metal music, by focusing on the darker underlying historical and religious meaning of the figure. The artist was aware of the religious undertone of the « vejigante », which is rarely discussed in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, it allowed him to reflect on the undertones of this religious significance, which echoed wars fought over differing beliefs and the constant use of fear as a strategy to keep churchgoers in line with religious tenets.

After the Blackened concerts took place, the image of the « vejigante » began to emerge in other spaces of the local metal scene. Concertgoers and musicians had caught on to the use of the figure in local events, and discussion about its meaning was included in a documentary on metal in the Caribbean entitled « The Metal Islands » which was produced by the first author of this paper (Varas-Díaz, González-Sepúlveda, *et al.* 2016). Discussions over the meaning of the « vejigante » were evident and took place in local concerts and informal meetings between fans. The image began to emerge in the artwork used by other bands and individuals in the metal scene.

For example, the « vejigante » made its way into t-shirts being sold in local metal concerts. Graphic artists and black metal singer Daniel López Miranda included the figure as part of apparel which sold out almost immediately in small concerts (See image 3). The images present the « vejigante » in menacing postures over other symbols of local culture. The most graphic of the images centers the « vejigante » as a demonic figure, now with its already gruesome features even more highlighted. The emergence of the figure in these t-shirts is important as it showed that it had made its way through the local scene and that discussions over its meaning, and potential reinterpretations, were taking place.

Image 3

Another example of this integration of the « vejigante » into local metal productions came in the shape of artwork in albums. Thrash Metal band *Calamity* (2015) included the figure in the cover artwork for their 2015 release entitled *Imminent Disaster*. The artwork for the album shows the « vejigante » in a menacing posture facing the Spanish fortifications that were built on the Island during the colonization process (See image 4). Members of the band described their decision to use the image as a way to link their international presence to representations of local culture that fit with metal aesthetics. Eduardo Acevedo, the band's drummer mentioned the following :

> Since we started we had something very clear ; we were going to let everyone know where we are from. It is inevitable that in our compositions, whether it is music, lyrics, graphic design or videos, we make allusion to our culture. We have made it clear that we want everyone to know that we are from Puerto Rico. This is why in the cover of our album « Imminent Disaster »

Image 4

> we have the mask of a « vejigante ». The « vejigante » is a folkloric character from Puerto Rico. The one that we use in our album is a traditional mask from the town of Ponce, because out of all the « vejigante » masks available, it is the one with more fangs and horns. What better way to represent an imminent disaster than with a « vejigante » falling from an thunder storm ?

The above-mentioned examples are important as part of understanding metal's potential role in challenging coloniality for two main reasons. First, the use of the « vejigante » has served as a reinterpretation of religious iconography and activities that are linked to the Island's colonial past under Spain. This process helps shed light on the underlying historical meaning of the « vejigante » which has gone widely undiscussed in Puerto Rico. Where most people see colorful figures as celebratory representations of local culture in small town festivities, metal fans have highlighted a darker underlying meaning linked to its origins and more importantly, stressed its role in the vilification of other cultures to foster participation in Christian religious activities. Second, the wide us of the image in promotional materials, t-shirts and album covers highlights how the Puerto Rican scene serves as a conduit for critical analysis of local culture. This includes an ongoing critique of Christianity. Although this might be interpreted as commonplace in metal music, doing so though the lens of local culture shows that metal fans are reflective about their setting and engage in efforts to challenge coloniality today.

2.3 Example 3 : Linking religion to current colonial politics

A third and final example of how metal music critically assesses coloniality in Latin America is through exposing the current linkages between religion and politics. The critique of religion within the colonial scenario is not limited to examinations of the past via reframing of culture, as explained in the previous example. Young people in Puerto Rico, who are leaders within the small metal scene, have engaged in critical reflections towards the role of religion in their lives and its implications for the society in which they live in. Some of these critiques have successfully achieved to link organized religion, specifically Christianity, to politics on the Island. This linkage is important, as it is recognition that religious organizations in Puerto Rico are entities where power is centered and are concerned with control of the population.

During 2017 a new band emerged in the local metal scene (*Moths*). The band plays a mix of stoner metal with progressive laden arrangements. Although at the time the band had not released an EP or any official songs, they began to sell t-shirts with their logo as a way to gather funds for their first recording. The images included in the shirts were very telling as they showed local politicians and religious leaders with the word « cancer » written on their foreheads (See image 5). The critical image became an instant hit among local metal fans and the t-shirts sold out immediately. The first author had an opportunity to speak with the band's leader, Weslie Negrón, and he placed the idea in the context of his upbringing in Puerto Rico, where the mix of apathy and fanaticism for political parties co-exist among the population. He mentioned the following :

> I grew up in the typical Puerto Rican family that was/is very apathetic to the situation of the Island. They always complained about what was going on, but they did nothing to fight against it. My father has never voted in his life, my mother keeps voting for the same party. My brother, as family tradition, also became a « fan » of the same party. I say « fan »because it did not matter who was campaigning for any position, they would vote for them, because they were part of the party. As you can guess, there wasn't a lot of critical thinking and analysis in my household.

This concern over lack of critical thinking in the family setting is important, as he would describe his involvement in metal music in general, and *Moths* in particular, as a critical endeavor. It was his way of surpassing what he perceived as political and religious fanaticism in his household. The band's music and the imagery on the t-shirts would become a

Image 5

way to engage in a political statement. He described the process of developing the images as a consequence of the 2016 election process. He mentioned the following:

> After the last elections, when the most incompetent candidate was elected for governor, I decided that there was something I had to do to express my anger and my rejection to that event. I wanted it to feel as raw as possible. I wanted to express my anger through it and that's where the whole cancer image came to my mind. There is no more devastating news to someone than learning that they have some type of cancer. The word itself gives chills to many people. People fear it. So I decided to label this scum as cancer because that is what they are. Taking a whole country and just using it at their will, weakening it. Taking any hope out of people's minds in a very sneaky way too. I just wanted to make this very shocking when it came out. Think about your face and having the word « cancer » on your forehead. That is, in my opinion, a very explicit way of labeling someone.

The images included in the artwork were not randomly selected. These compositions involved the faces of politicians and religious leaders in Puerto Rico that are widely perceived as problematic. One of the politi-

cians spent time in jail for corruption. Another came into office despite rumors of his involvement in the death of one of his friends still circulating among the population. A third one was perceived as a strongman who has supported other politicians through scandals of corruption. Finally, the woman included in the artwork was a religious leader known for her lavish economic lifestyle and for preaching the gospel of prosperity, in which divine blessings are measured in one's earthly wealth. She has widely criticized sexual minorities and lobbied against policies that protect them in work scenarios and the educational system. Weslie Negrón described her as follows :

> This woman is the icon of the failure of religious institutions in a conservative country. I come from a very strong religious background myself. I grew up as a Catholic and even served as an altar boy. I still believe there is a God, but I don't force it on anyone. The reason I left the church and, probably, will never go back to one is how people use the name of God to justify their irrational behaviors. Wanda Rolón reminds me of each of the judgmental people I met during my years serving in church. The people that judge you because of your taste in music, the way you dress, the way you behave, your sexual preferences, etc. Also, just like Rolón, most of these people were from the upper class and would judge other people because they did not have the same amount of « blessings » as they did. That always hit me hard, because I came from a humble house that had just enough for us to be able to survive. Rolón has her followers giving her ridiculous amounts of money. The more money they give, the more blessings they get. How is it possible that someone can be so evil and play with the mental state of other people, control them, and benefit from it ? It is frustrating and outrageous that people like this exist.

It should come as no surprise to readers and fans of metal music that this musical genre engages in criticism of religion. It has done so from its very origins. What is interesting in this example for the purposes of this paper is the engagement in a critique that simultaneously addresses religion and party politics. In the case of Puerto Rico this example is important as the Island is still embedded in a colonial political relation with the United States (Meléndez & Meléndez 1993). Puerto Rico is a non-incorporated territory of the United States since the latter won the Spanish-American War in 1898 (Rivera Ramon 2001). It is subject to all United States' powers and its political movements for independence have been persecuted and literally exterminated via political repression. The four individuals depicted in the images developed by the band are politically conservative and are

part of a political party that wishes for the Island to be fully incorporated into the United States as the 51st state of the union. This political status, which is described as a strategy to foster economic prosperity and security, is broadly supported by Protestant Christian religious groups. The idea of integrating Puerto Rico into the United States is seen as a sign of progress, that links up perfectly with the gospel of prosperity that is frequently preached in these churches. It is therefore interesting to see how the band's critique seamlessly merges two areas of importance to understand and challenge coloniality in Puerto Rico.

It is important to note that the linkage between politics and religion depicted in the images echo the historical associations between Protestantism, North American imperialism and intent to Americanize its acquired territories. Authors like Samuel Silva Gotay (1998) have written extensively about the role of Protestant thought in nurturing North American expansion throughout the world and, in our case of interest, the Caribbean. It served as a strategy to justify the civilization of its inhabitants and therefore the process of Americanization. It is no small feat that metal music and its imagery critically echo such an association even today.

3. Discussion

The images of my trip to Mexico and my visit to the Cathedral of the Virgin of Guadalupe stay with me today. Upon leaving the Cathedral I watched men and women walk on their knees towards the building. The heat, dirt, and rocks on the ground did not deter them from their act. People of indigenous descent walked on their knees towards the Christian Cathedral as a way to alleviate their earthly plight. Not withstanding the benefit they may receive out of the perceived connection to the supernatural, it is almost impossible to experience these events and not critically examine how they are connected to coloniality. Coloniality is alive and well in Latin America today, and is manifested in our everyday activities. Just like we cannot fully comprehend the history of Latin America without examining coloniality, it would be equally limiting to examine metal music in the region without understanding the links between religion, politics and music.

The results from our analysis highlight how metal music in Latin America has been used to challenge the colonial history of the region through three specific strategies. Specifically, highlighting the presence of indigenous populations in the region, reframing of religious culture as an

act of resistance, and linking religion to current colonial politics. These strategies position resistance towards coloniality and religion as an event of importance for both the past and the present. The emphasis placed in today's metal music in Latin America evidences that the effects of coloniality are still felt today and that metal serves as a mechanism to critically assess and resist them.

Metal's resistance to coloniality has implications for several fields of academic inquiry that address metal music. We would like to highlight two of them. First, research on the role of music in challenging coloniality (mainly carried out from postcolonial academic perspectives) has neglected to include metal music in this endeavor. Most studies have focused on the role of popular music and hip-hop, to name some examples (Cervantes & Saldaña 2015; McFarland 2018). Although the focus on music is important in and of itself due to the usual emphasis on the study of literature to address the colonial experience (Lovesey 2017), the omission of metal music seems to play into the usual stereotypes ascribed to the genre outside and inside academia. Metal music has more to offer to decolonial critical strategies than people expect, as evidenced by our analysis. Academic scholarship on metal music cannot continue to neglect the issue of coloniality, or it will risk the same omissions present in other scholarly areas.

Second, the case of Puerto Rico (which we highlight in this paper) presents itself as an important case-study scenario to understand metal's role in challenging coloniality. The Island is at this very moment still embedded in a colonial relation with the United States. These challenges to coloniality are not artifacts of the past, but rather events and objects that are present today and used by metal fans and musicians as a strategy of resistance to coloniality in general, and religion in particular. As we stated before in this paper, metal scholarship has addressed the music's link to religion, but rarely has it done so through the lens of coloniality. We would stress that metal links to religion go well beyond questioning Christianity as a stylistic cliché expected of the genre (as many metal artists have done). It encompasses a well-thought out critique taking into consideration the region's history with its past and current implications. It points to a deeper understanding of the intertwined roles of religion and coloniality.

Understanding the role of metal in critically addressing Christianity, as a manifestation of the Latin America's colonial past will surely not go unchallenged. Scholars exploring the link between music and the local (nations in particular) have labeled this endeavor as a « romanticization of the local » and somewhat downplayed its capacity for subversive thought

(Biddle & Knights 2007). Although this may be fitting for some musical productions that may idealize the past as a way to subvert the present, it should not overlook that metal music in the context of Latin America has served another purpose. It has helped establish a dialogue between individuals and communities that have faced colonial oppression (in its many forms). Avoiding the pitfall of romanticism of the past, this dialogue has fostered a profound and critical understanding of their context, history, and mechanisms of oppression. The critical examination of religion and its political dimensions is but one of these endeavors. The expansion of metal studies throughout the region would be greatly benefitted by examining the many ways in which populations in these settings use music to continually challenge coloniality and its many manifestations.

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Résumé

L'histoire de l'Amérique latine est profondément ancrée dans l'expérience du colonialisme. Cependant, son histoire ne peut être dite sans des récits de résistance à son expérience coloniale. Cette résistance prend de nombreuses formes, des arts aux conflits armés, et concerne de nombreux aspects du colonialisme. Nous explorons, dans cet article, comment la musique métal en Amérique latine a été utilisée pour défier le leg colonial dont cette région est imprégnée. Bien que le colonialisme ait eu de nombreuses implications (p. e. politique, économique et environnementale), nous nous concentrons sur le défi qui s'adresse spécifiquement à la religion (chrétienne en particulier) comme stratégie pour évaluer le leg colonial de façon critique. Nous présentons trois exemples thématiques qui révèlent cette approche critique dans le métal latino-américain envers le colonialisme en général. Ceci inclut : 1) mettre en valeur les présences autochtones dans la région ; 2) présenter la culture religieuse comme un acte de résistance ; et 3) relier la religion au politique coloniales actuelles.

Abstract

Latin America's history is deeply embedded in the experience of coloniality. Still, its history cannot be told without stories of resistance to its colonial experience. This resistance takes many shapes, from armed conflict to the use of the arts, and addresses many consequences of coloniality. We aim to explore how metal music in Latin America has been used to challenge the colonial legacy of the region. Although coloniality has had many implications (e.g., political, economical, environmental), we focus on the specific challenge towards religion (Christianity in particular) as a strategy to critically assess this colonial legacy. We present three thematic examples that highlight this critical approach in Latin American metal towards coloniality in general, and Christian religion in particular. These include : 1) highlighting the presence of indigenous populations in the region, 2) reframing of religious culture as an act of resistance, and 3) linking religion to current colonial politics.