



## UWS Academic Portal

### Religion and heavy metal music in Indonesia

James, Kieran; Walsh, Rex

*Published in:*  
Popular Music

*DOI:*  
[10.1017/S0261143019000102](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143019000102)

Published: 01/05/2019

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

James, K., & Walsh, R. (2019). Religion and heavy metal music in Indonesia. *Popular Music*, 38(2), 276-297. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143019000102>

#### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UWS Academic Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

#### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [pure@uws.ac.uk](mailto:pure@uws.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# Religion and Heavy Metal Music in Indonesia: Preliminary Findings

**Kieran James\***

*University of the West of Scotland*  
School of Business and Enterprise,  
University of the West of Scotland,  
Paisley Campus, Paisley PA1 2BE,  
Renfrewshire, Scotland.  
tel: +44 (0)141 848 3350

*Kieran.James@uws.ac.uk and Kieran.james99@yahoo.co.uk*

**And**

*University of Fiji*

**And**

**Rex Walsh**

*Notre Dame University, Australia*  
Notre Dame University,  
Broadway (Sydney) Campus,  
140 Broadway, Chippendale, NSW, 2008,  
P.O. Box 944, Broadway, NSW, 2007,  
Australia.

*Rex.john.walsh@gmail.com*

## **Abstract**

We trace the history of Indonesian Islamic metal bands, including Purgatory, Tengkorak and Kodusa, and the One Finger Movement which revolved around these bands (centred mainly on Jakarta). We look at the differences in symbols, heroes, rituals, and values between One Finger Movement bands and the Bandung (Indonesia) secular Death Metal scene. We also study Bandung Death Metal band Saffar which was known for its Islamic lyrics on its debut album but which has been for a few years in something of a limbo due to the departure of vocalist and lyricist Parjo. We also look at Saffar's positioning of itself as a "secular" band with Islamic and Anti-Zionist lyrical themes rather than as an Islamic band *per se*. This dichotomy can be best explained perhaps by the phrase "a band of Muslims rather than a Muslim band". The secular Bandung scene context is a significant explanatory factor here.

**Keywords:** *Bandung; Death Metal music; Heavy Metal music; Indonesia; Indonesian Islam; Indonesian popular music; One Finger Movement; Jakarta.*

**Acknowledgements:** We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for the present journal for their helpful and insightful comments.

## Religion and Heavy Metal Music in Indonesia: Preliminary Findings

*Lo! The friends of Allah have no fear, nor shall they grieve.  
(QS. Yunus: 62-63)*

### Introduction

This article explores a topic which is considered controversial both inside and outside of Indonesia (most likely for different reasons) and also within the Indonesian Heavy Metal music scenes themselves.<sup>1</sup> We trace the history of Indonesian Islamic metal bands, including Purgatory, Tengkorak, and Kodusa, and the unofficial One Finger Movement which revolved around these bands (centred mainly on Jakarta). We introduce the skirmish between One Finger Movement and bands with a more secular and / or Satanic mind-set such as Funeral Inception (East Jakarta). We look at the differences in symbols, heroes, rituals, and values between One Finger Movement bands and the Bandung secular Death Metal scene. We also study Bandung Death Metal band Saffar which was known for its Islamic lyrics on its debut full-length studio album *Mandatory El Arshy* (Extreme Souls Production (ESP), 2013) but which is now in something of a limbo due to the departure of vocalist and lyricist Parjo.

We also look at Saffar's positioning of itself as a "secular" band with Islamic Religion and Anti-Zionist lyrical themes rather than as an Islamic band *per se*. This dichotomy can be best explained perhaps by the phrase "a band of Muslims rather than a Muslim band" although "band of Muslims" applies to many acts without religious lyrics. The secular Bandung scene context is significant as an explanatory factor here since there has never been an identifiable One Finger Movement or Islamic Metal scene in that city. Because of this, Saffar's success and its ability to maintain a profile and respect after several years of near non-activity from 2014-

---

<sup>1</sup> As van Zanten (2007, p. 1) makes clear, Indonesia is the country with the largest number of Muslims (around 228 million) but it is not an Islamic state. There are no special privileges for adherents to any particular religion. However, ID cards make mandatory the inclusion of the card-holder's religion and the listed religion must come from an approved list of six (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism). The main religions are Islam 87.2%, Protestantism 7.0%, and Roman Catholicism 2.9% (i.e. Christianity 9.9%).

16 has been a function of its band members' abilities to build and maintain strong relationships with key identities in the secular scene; as well as their humility and obvious and demonstrated respect for the Bandung scene's symbols, heroes, rituals, and values (Hofstede et al., 1990).

As mentioned above, the topic of religion and metal music in Indonesia is not perceived as something which most Indonesian metalheads want to focus on or discuss.<sup>2</sup> This has made data collection difficult despite our extensive contacts within the Indonesian scene. The only partial (not total) exception to this would be Islamic metal bands Purgatory, Tengkorak, and Kodusa. Their interview responses will be studied in depth later in this article. Most Indonesian metalheads think that religion is a private matter to be practised in private and that a person's faith (or lack of one) is irrelevant when she / he participates in the metal scene. In some ways this is a reaction to the fact that Islamic belief and practice is actually a very public and hegemonic aspect of Indonesian life (albeit not to the extent of the Middle East). Metalheads want a safe place to pursue their subcultural interests and practices free from outside influences from the broader society. As Wallach et al. (2011, p. 17, emphasis added) write: "metal comes to function as a unique and appealing vehicle of youth identities ... *not burdened by religious ... pressure*". Local metalheads also want to fight the perception they have that westerners find Indonesian metal interesting because it (Indonesia) is a Muslim country.<sup>3</sup> They justifiably feel that this reductionism oversimplifies the complex influences which metal musicians have and the complex set of meanings, discourse, and practices which constitute the Indonesian scenes. The opposition of secular metalheads, especially in the provincial city of Bandung (located 147 kilometres<sup>4</sup> south-east of Jakarta), to the One Finger Movement springs from similar ideas and ideals which hold that religion should be relegated to the private realm and to one's life outside

---

<sup>2</sup> This was pointed out to me (the first-mentioned author) directly one night in a Bandung (West Java) pub in July 2016 by the female Demons Damn vocalist Popo Puji Apriantikasari. Also present were her husband Bobby Rock (ex-vocalist of Bleeding Corpse / current vocalist of Turbidity); Arief Budiman (metal scene identity and Persib Bandung Football Club employee); and one member of the band Auticed.

<sup>3</sup> This point was also made to me directly by Popo on the same evening (see previous footnote).

<sup>4</sup> This is the distance by road according to Google Maps. The distance by air is 115 kilometres.

of the metal scene. Tengkorak is sometimes disliked because it is perceived as breaking the unwritten rule that religion should not be brought into the metal scene but should be relegated to one's private life outside of the scene.

Note that the attitude of Indonesian metalheads is usually not the generalized “antagonism” (Moberg, 2011, p. 31) or “calculated antipathy” (Mørk, 2011, p. 125) which is common in western scenes.<sup>5</sup> The majority of Indonesian metal musicians are practising and believing Muslims and there is a minority of practising and believing Protestants and Catholics, including Josh from Asphyxiate (Bekasi); Oki Haribowo from Death Vomit (Jogjakarta); Andre Tiranda from Siksa Kubur (Jakarta); and Yahnes from Tenggorokan (Kediri) who was previously part of the now defunct Christian metal band Pentekosta (an approximate contemporary band of the far more famous Kekal). Most Indonesian musicians thank “Allah S.W.T.” and “Nabi Muhammad S.A.W.” at the beginning of thank-you listings inside CD booklets (see, for example, the booklet for Saffar, *Mandatory El Arshy*). Somewhat ridiculously these thank-you notes also appear in the booklets of bands with Satanic or occult lyrics and imagery. Many Indonesian metalheads would see no obvious contradiction between the dedications and the lyrical themes although some musicians who do make such distinctions would see them as impacting negatively upon the integrity of these bands' overall projects.<sup>6</sup> Performing religious activities in private and / or outside of one's life in the metal scene is generally not viewed negatively. The only comparison the authors can think of is the case in Western Europe (including the UK) and in Australia up to around 1970 (before attacks on

---

<sup>5</sup> A more complex analysis might suggest that what is frequently present in the west is actually a religiously framed rebellion against monotheistic moral norms through either the invocation of satanic imagery or neo-pagan material (Granholm, 2011, pp. 528-9, 534-8; Hagen, 2011, pp. 190-1, 193-4; Moberg, 2012, p. 125).

<sup>6</sup> The Singapore-based Indonesian Black Metal identity Hans Yamin cites the murder of Thai metal musician Avaejee (from Surrender of Divinity) as an example of someone who was killed because of the lack of harmony between his Satanic metal scene persona and his real-life, a lack of harmony which to some people revealed a lack of existential integrity (source: author's online conversation with Hans Yamin, 8 May 2017).

religious beliefs and especially Christianity became commonplace and fashionable) and the situation today in the Eastern Orthodox countries.

Very few or zero Indonesian bands directly attack Islamic belief or practices because to do so would run contrary to if not their own belief systems and ethical norms then those of the broader society (which Indonesian metalheads do not want to antagonize). Furthermore, sentiments against any given religion do not appear to be strong in Indonesia and this is another reason why anti-Islamic lyrical themes are uncommon. Many Indonesians would agree with Indonesian metal-music promoter Jason Hutagalung and his Australian wife Lauren that: “religion has never been the problem in Indonesia”<sup>7</sup> (author’s first interview with Jason Hutagalung and Lauren Wilson, Xenophobic Records, 11 January 2011) and hence it is simply seen as *superfluous* and a *distraction* to discuss (or to criticize) religion within the metal scene. Supporting the view that “religion has never been the problem”, senior bands Asphyxiate, Death Vomit, Siksa Kubur, and Tenggorokan have existed for a long time with both Muslim and Protestant or Catholic band members working amicably together. This fact supports Wallach’s (2011, p. 88) assertion that “in Indonesia the national metal movement forges ties across ... religion[s]”.

This article poses and attempts to satisfactorily answer the following research questions:

- (a) What are the histories, motivations, and worldviews of the Indonesian Islamic metal bands which made up the One Finger Movement?
- (b) What are the symbols, heroes, rituals, and values of the Islamic bands?
- (c) What has been the response of Indonesian metalheads to the Islamic bands?
- (d) What are the symbols, heroes, rituals, and values of the secular Bandung Death Metal scene and what explains the commitment of its members?

---

<sup>7</sup> This is not apparently the case in Nepal where the metalheads interviewed by Greene (2011, pp. 124-8) complain bitterly about Hindu religious obligations and customs in the local setting.

(e) What is the history and perspective of the band Saffar and why is Bandung scene location significant in explaining its members' attitudes towards the Islamic bands?

(f) Why are Saffar's members keen to present themselves as a "band of Muslims" rather than as a "Muslim band"?

The present article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides background information about the Indonesian metal scene and One Finger Movement; Section 3 provides a theoretical framework; Section 4 discusses research method; Section 5 provides analysis of interview data; Section 6 analyses the Bandung secular Death Metal scene and the band Saffar; while Section 7 concludes.

## **Background**

### *Indonesian Metal Scene*

The Indonesian scene has become well-known worldwide due to its size and passion (Wallach, 2011).<sup>8</sup> It is also known for being characterized by Indonesian cultural values of respect, politeness, tolerance, and patience, to a large extent, as well as unwillingness to directly criticize others (*ibid.*, p. 89).<sup>9</sup> Most of its members are socially conservative and respectful members of a pluralistic and diverse but hierarchical Indonesian society. Although Yuli of Jasad dates the scene back to 1975<sup>10</sup> (a plausible hypothesis given the crowds which lined the streets of Jakarta to welcome the British rock-band Deep Purple in that year<sup>11</sup>), the scene's foundation bands were mostly formed in the mid- to late-nineties and the scene had grown to approximately its present size by 2011.<sup>12</sup> Addy Gembel, Forgotten vocalist, views the

---

<sup>8</sup> In Bandung long-term members of the senior bands, such as the classic Jasad line-up of Man, Ferly, Yuli, and Papap, are now aged in their late-thirties; and metalheads older than 45 are rare.

<sup>9</sup> According to Molinero (2011, pp. 114-5), these are all Islamic values.

<sup>10</sup> Source: author's second interview with Jasad, 10 October 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Weinstein (2011, p. 48) refers to Deep Purple's 1975 tour of Jakarta as a significant early landmark event in Heavy Metal history.

<sup>12</sup> The legendary Bandung bands were formed in the following years: Jasad 1990; Forgotten 1994; Burgerkill 1995; Injected Sufferage 1995; Disinfected 1997; Jihad 1999; Undergod 2004; and Bleeding Corpse 2006.

foundation of the Ujung Berung scene in East Bandung as occurring simultaneously with the coming of industrialization to this semi-rural farming community on Bandung's eastern fringe (and the anger of the music reflected the anxiety which this historical development generated) (source: author's interview with Addy Gembel, 29 November 2012; see also Avelar, 2001, p. 132; Wallach, 2011, p. 92; Wallach et al., 2011, pp. 17, 26, n. 11, p. 30, n. 17, p. 32; Weinstein, 2011, pp. 41, 52, 54).

Each city of Indonesia is known for its unique sub-genre mix. For example, the hegemonic leader of Indonesian metal is the Bandung scene, known for its many bands playing in the Suffocation / Disgorge USA style of Brutal Death Metal; Surabaya is known for Power Metal, Black Metal, and War Metal; Jogjakarta is known for Death Metal across a variety of sub-sub-genres ranging from slamming to brutal to math-based; while the mountainous provincial city of Kediri is known for (believe it or not) Technical Death Metal. In East Java, especially, Black and War Metal draw upon centuries-old local traditions (Wallach et al., 2011, p. 17, n. 11, p. 30; Weinstein, 2011, pp. 41, 54-55) of occultism, black-magic, witchcraft, legend, and superstition as much as they do on Western Satanic themes. However, band members also function in conservative civil-society where there is minimal or zero welfare provision and they must adhere to accepted social norms to keep extended-family, workplace, and university relationships functioning smoothly. Respect and politeness trump most other values. Metalheads often marry and have families in their early-twenties so very few of the women (or men) you might see at shows should be viewed as being "available". Many people tend to mix metal scene practices with traditional religious customs and this creates some discontent among those (usually Black Metal-oriented) metalheads who like to see everything in (pun unintended) black-and-white terms.

Overall, the Indonesian scene must be viewed and understood primarily on a city-by-city basis and not as a large homogenous undifferentiated mass. Understanding tensions between



the Bandung and Jakarta scenes and the Bandung and Surabaya scenes are fundamental to understanding the history and contemporary dynamics of Indonesian metal.

### *One Finger Movement*

The One Finger Movement (Anonymous, 2015; Saefullah, 2017, pp. 270-1, 273-4) was a community organization or collective of bands, fans, and gigs, which had an ethos of being pro-Islamic and anti-Zionist rather than being secular in the spirit of the Bandung scene and most overseas scenes (Anonymous, 2015). It can be viewed as roughly equivalent to the Christian Metal scenes of the west and of South America but only in that it aims to spiritually nourish and encourage religious people who already have an active interest in metal music.<sup>13</sup> It was based mainly in Jakarta in the 2000s and early-2010s and it also had some influence in Malang (East Java) and Medan (Sumatra). Jason Hutagalung, Australian-based Indonesian music promoter and tattoo-artist, estimated that the One Finger Movement comprised at its peak about 20% of the Jakarta scene (personal interview, 11 January 2011).

The movement has had its supporters and opponents, the main figures for each camp being Ombat and Samier of Tengkorak for the Islamic bands and Doni “Iblis” Herdaru (the vocalist of Funeral Inception) for the Satanic or hell-raiser bands.<sup>14</sup> The movement was named after the one finger sign (meaning “one God”) used by its proponents and supporters in place of the generally accepted worldwide devil’s horns symbol which they viewed as unacceptable (Saefullah, 2017, p. 270). This one finger sign involves metalheads touching each other’s extended forefingers tip-to-tip. The major bands of the One Finger Movement were Purgatory (formed 1991); Tengkorak (formed 1993); and Kodusa (formed 1998); and the movement was

---

<sup>13</sup> This is also the way that Moberg (2011, pp. 46, 48) characterizes the Finnish Christian metal scene (see also Bossius, 2011, p. 59). Moberg (2011, p. 46) writes that the scene provides a “distinct cultural space” where people “can share their passion for metal ... with like-minded people who ... share their Christian beliefs”.

<sup>14</sup> There seems to be a similar gap or tension in France between committed French-Muslim rappers and those audience members and critics who prefer a more secular outlook (Molinero, 2011, p. 123).

also associated with Al Azhar Mosque in Jakarta attended by Ombat (Anonymous, 2015). While the name of the movement may have outlived its usefulness, all three bands remain active today and continue with the same Islamic ethos and worldview.

Jason says that the consensus among secular metalheads was not to give the One Finger Movement any attention or air to breathe. The following conversation with Jason introduces the context and the main players:

“Author: How many bands were involved in this skirmish or disagreement?”

Jason: There are only a handful of bands involved [in the skirmish] – Funeral Inception leader Doni Iblis and, on the Muslim side, Tengkorak, meaning “skull”.

Author: What does this Muslim band sing about?

Jason: The band preaches about going to the mosque and praying. They are connected to Islamic [Defenders] Front [*Front Pembela Islam*, FPI]. These people want the country to become a Muslim country; they have their own publication, magazine.

Author: What percentage of the scene do you think is fundamentalist and where is it strongest?

Jason: About 20% of hard-core metal people [would support One Finger Movement] mostly in Jakarta, Malang and Medan. We had an agreement to ignore them and not give them publicity. We have not heard from them much but they are around in the Indo metal community” [author’s first interview with Jason Hutagalung, Xenophobic Records, 11 January 2011].

The Indonesian militant Islamist organization FPI (*Front Pembala Islam* or in English *Islamic Defenders’ Front*) is beyond the scope of the present article.<sup>15</sup>

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Hofstede’s Theory of Culture as Symbols, Heroes, Rituals, and Values*

Hofstede et al. (1990) argue that what we know about culture is that it is: (a) holistic; (b) historically determined; (c) related to anthropological concepts; (d) socially constructed; (e) soft; and (f) difficult to change. Hofstede’s theory maintains that it is easier to change an organization’s symbols, heroes, and rituals, rather than its values (Hofstede et al., 1990). They

---

<sup>15</sup> FPI has a detailed Wikipedia entry and interested readers can refer there for more information. FPI page on Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_Defenders\\_Front](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Defenders_Front) [accessed 29 January 2018].

conclude based on their 20 case studies and quantitative survey of employees of Dutch and Danish organizations that values are inculcated through childhood socialization in the family and at school, and are largely absorbed by the age of ten (*ibid.*, p. 312). They vary relatively little across organizations as compared to practices (which incorporate and are reflected in symbols, heroes, and rituals). What variation which does occur is due in part to cross-national variations in values. By contrast, practices are only taught and modelled later when a person joins an organization as an adult employee. Practices are based on the values of the founders; they are the regular acting out of values (*ibid.*, p. 311). Practices are defined as being part of a culture, based on a classic early definition of culture by Tylor (1924, p. 1): “Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man [*sic*] as a member of society”.

Hofstede et al. (1990, p. 291) define symbols as “words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning within a culture”. They define heroes as “persons, alive or dead, real or imaginary, who possess characteristics highly prized in the culture and who serve as models for behavior (Wilkins, 1984)” (*ibid.*, p. 291). They define rituals as “collective activities that are technically superfluous but are socially essential within a culture – they are therefore carried out for their own sake” (*ibid.*, p. 291). However, later discussion and examples in their article suggest that the authors do not regard *all* rituals as being technically superfluous or unnecessary. Symbols, heroes, and rituals are “subsumed” under the category of practices, which are “visible to an observer although their cultural meaning lies in the way they are perceived by insiders” (*ibid.*, p. 291). The core of culture is values, defined as “broad, nonspecific feelings of good and evil, beautiful and ugly, normal and abnormal, rational and irrational – feelings that are often unconscious and rarely discussable, that cannot be observed as such but are manifested in alternatives of behavior”.

## **Research Method**

This article is a small part of a larger research project into the Indonesian Death Metal scene and issues of ethics, values, meaning, power, networks, culture, and resistance. The broader research project began on 24 February 2011 when we interviewed Bandung's most famous Death Metal export, Jasad, which has released CDs through Sevared Records USA and later played at the *Obscene Extreme Fest* in Czech Republic and *Bloodstock Open Air* in England. In Bandung our hosts from our second trip onwards were Popo Puji Apriantikasari of Demons Damn and her husband Bobby Rock, then the vocalist of Bleeding Corpse. Altogether we conducted over 58 band and / or musician interviews face-to-face and many more online over the period 2011-17. We travelled on the band tour-bus with Bleeding Corpse on its overnight trip to Cibinong on 8-9 October 2011; with Bloodgush from Bandung to Cililin on 26 February 2011; and with Jagal from Surabaya to Jombang, East Java on 7 December 2014. We visited the major centres of Death Metal in Indonesia including Bandung; Jogjakarta; Jakarta; South Jakarta; Surabaya; Kediri; Malang; Madura Island; Balikpapan; and Samarinda.

We became aware of the One Finger Movement and its Islamic bands during the course of the research and decided to write an article on the topic, contrasting it with the secular Bandung scene which is the scene we are most familiar with. Our data is limited in quantity but we think it is rich and illuminating. If possible we might revisit this research topic further down the track if we can obtain more data. Our data includes one personal interview in Surabaya with Samier, the guitarist of Tengkorak; and one with Acil from Saffar, a young Bandung band which does not self-identify with the One Finger Movement but which has released an album featuring Islamic religious lyrics. We also use data from the online interviews we did with Ombat of Tengkorak; Lutfi of Purgatory; and Kodusa band, which are the three principal Jakarta-based bands of today's Islamic scene. Unfortunately these interviews are not very revealing (other than the Kodusa interview) and responses were guarded

and brief because there was no mutual contact or friend and we did not meet these bands in person. Furthermore, the question-answer survey format, where our questions were translated into Indonesian and then answers translated back into English, did not allow for the interviewer or interviewee(s) to respond to comments or probe for more details.

We spent three weeks in Surabaya (East Java province) during two 2014 field-trips (January 2014 and December 2014) where we were hosted by Dimas Bramantyo, the guitarist of local band Valerian. This hosting allowed us to meet and interview Samier from Tengkorak band. We visited Surabaya radio station Colors Radio 87.8FM, where Samier works; watched Samier play guitar at an Anthrax tribute night hosted by the associated Colors Pub (address: Jl. Sumatera No 81; Surabaya 60281); and interviewed Samier about Tengkorak and his other band, the new Surabaya-based political grindcore act G.A.S.

### **Interview Findings**

I (the first-mentioned author) conducted two interviews with Tengkorak band members. The first, which provided by far the most interesting data, was conducted in person with guitarist Samier at his recording studio Inferno Music Studio & Rock Shop (address: Jl. Dharmahusada 178, Surabaya). In the section below we discuss first the interview with Samier and secondly the online band interview with Kodusa.

#### *Samier Interview (Tengkorak)*

The author asked the Surabaya-based Tengkorak guitarist Samier to explain the vision and philosophy of his band Tengkorak. Samier answered as follows:

“Samier: It comes from our [personal] philosophy itself. We have faith in Allah, we believe Islam; it’s a good religion, not a terrorist. We should tell about the truth. A lot of kids in Indonesia, especially in Jakarta, at that time were starting to doubt their beliefs so we counter that. A lot of bands say they don’t believe in God; some of them are fake [hypocritical] you know. If they don’t believe [in] God they don’t [i.e. can’t, theologically speaking] believe [in] Satan. If they believe Satan but don’t believe God, it’s ridiculous, man! So we tell the truth. We want the kids who

watch us to continue to believe their religion. Although they like metal they should not accept the lifestyle” [source: author’s interview with Samier, Surabaya, 26 January 2014].

Samier asks why God cannot be discussed in the metal scene whereas Satan can be discussed, claiming that this is “ridiculous” (source: author’s interview with Samier, 26 January 2014). As Samier argues, if you do not accept and honour God how can you accept and honour Satan since they are both key elements of Christian and Islamic theology with God having a nobler character and also being more powerful (Häger, 2011, p. 18)? Satan is a created being (a fallen angel) whereas God is Eternal (*ibid.*). The situation of accepting Satan but not God in your discourses and practices is labelled as “ridiculous” by Samier presumably because these metal scene discourses and practices run contrary to Samier’s previously-held worldview (held since early childhood) that God is greater, mightier, and worthier than Satan. The assumption is that, for most Muslims in Indonesia, they were socialized into Islamic religion at a very young age by parents; nuclear and extended family; mosque; school; and community; and this socialization for most people would predate chronologically their first involvement in the metal scene. This might not be true in all cases but, in the Indonesian context, it is probably a reasonable assumption. The issue is then crafted in terms of where one’s primary loyal and identification should lie. Islamic devotion to God / Allah should take priority in one’s heart and actions over one’s involvement in metal scene discourses and practices according to Samier. As we shall soon see, this assumption implies for Samier (but not for those who want to keep the scene secular and / or satanic) that it is right and natural that Islam can “enter” legitimately into the metal world; *and* it should enter from the viewpoint that it is deeper and superior.

That Islam is worthier of deeper devotion than metal scene discourses and practices is uncritically accepted by Samier and this assumption or conclusion has a complex relationship with the other assumption that most Indonesians’ socialization into Islam occurs *chronologically prior* to their socialization in the metal scene. Samier couches this connection not only in terms of the need for respect for and devotion to your earliest religious teachers;

but also the *presumption* that Indonesian society has “got it right” by socializing young children into Islamic belief and practices early on. Samier expressed privately his fear that Islam may become less important in Indonesia in the future so that it will no longer play such a vital role in most children’s earliest socialization experiences as it does today. He cites the declining role of the Church and Christian belief in European countries (Bossius et al., 2011, p. 7; Moberg, 2011, pp. 33, 39-44, 2012, p. 121) as providing a rational basis for his fears but there is the *unstated implication* left hanging in the air that this decline in the west *might be* due to Christianity being false or incomplete whereas Islam is true.

The author’s interview with Samier, after a promising start, then appears to get dragged down by the usual clichéd discussion of which aspects of metal scene symbols, heroes, and rituals (together termed practices) (Hofstede et al., 1990) are acceptable to Samier and which are not. This list of acceptable and unacceptable practices became the humorous highlight of the Swedish documentary-making brother-and-sister Resborn team’s interview with Ombat from Tengkorak in their coffee-table book *Labour of Love & Hate* (2012, pp. 127-30) where the terms *halal* and *haram* are used in jokey fashion (at least by the Resborns) to classify scene practices.<sup>16</sup> However, we note here in the interview responses, that Samier does add some important content to the discussion (before it is again dragged down into a list of dos and don’ts by the present author!)

“Author: What are the things wrong with metal lifestyle and what things are OK?”

Samier: A lot of metal fans here say that you are not metal if you are not drunk; you are not metal if you are not tattooed; it happens over the years. If you live in Indo you don’t have to take that lifestyle if you like metal. You have your own lifestyle. As a child you studied your religion, you prayed, it was like that. If you like metal you should not leave what you believe. If you believe it is not correlated with your music. Music is just entertainment. If you like horror movie it does not mean you are a killer or something like that. Don’t adopt the western lifestyle. If the lifestyle doesn’t match with your religion don’t take it.

---

<sup>16</sup> The Tengkorak interview in *Labour of Love & Hate* does not actually feature any of the actual words of Ombat. It involves a telephone conversation with Ombat’s brother Ucuk where Ombat’s views are explained by his brother (which simultaneously results in an English version of Ombat’s views being created by Ucuk).

Author: What about black tee-shirt and long hair?

Samier: It's OK for me; it's not OK for some. In the end we realize the music has power to state our message. If people have a bad message in their music the metal fans think it's OK. Why then is the good music [i.e. the message of the good music] not OK? In Indonesia it's different to other [western] nations, you still have religion" [source: author's interview with Samier, 26 January 2014].

In the first response Samier first notes that the worldview that a certain image and set of subcultural practices are deemed part and parcel of taking on a metalhead identity has become a part of the metal scene culture in Indonesia and these influences have slowly accumulated and crystallized over the years. Here we see Samier refer again to the importance of the *assumption* that one's early childhood socialization into religion occurred *chronologically prior* to one's becoming part of the metal scene. It is hard to be sure whether Samier here is referring only to Muslims or also to Protestants, Catholics, Taoists, and Buddhists (such as Bodas, the vocalist of Surabaya hardcore band Devadata). Then we get the injunction from Samier which relies upon this crucial assumption: "If you live in Indo you don't have to take that lifestyle if you like metal. You have your own lifestyle". This injunction or instruction is straight-forward in theory but in practice it is sure to be complicated to apply. Clearly someone rejecting the moral worth of this injunction *not* to "take the metal lifestyle" might then have issues with the entire philosophy and purpose of Samier. It would depend upon which aspects of the lifestyle are being referred to and to what extent the metalhead views these aspects as being important compared to that person's own religious beliefs. Tengkorak has proved to be a divisive band in large part because of how people *outside the band* have interpreted the band's public statements and philosophy. It is easy to be caught up in the never-ending cycle of arguing about the dos and don'ts.

Samier then puts forward his belief or goal that music should be seen only as "entertainment"<sup>17</sup> (Samier's word) which ignores the fact that metal music to many of its

---

<sup>17</sup> Consistent with Samier, Cronos of Venom is quoted as saying that "rock and roll" and presumably his band should be seen as "basically entertainment" and nothing more (cited in Olson, 2008, p. 14).



adherents has meanings and values which go beyond “mere entertainment” as indicated by most metalheads’ loyalty to their preferred bands and disdain for “superficial” pop-music (Avelar, 2011, p. 137; Greene, 2011, p. 117; Wallach et al., 2011, pp. 8, 13). Samier says: “As a child you studied your religion, you prayed, it was like that. If you like metal you should not leave what you believe. If you believe it is not correlated with your music [because music should only be viewed as entertainment]”. Lastly, the injunction is stated in more direct form: “If the lifestyle doesn’t match with your religion don’t take it”. As mentioned, we can conclude that the message is to not let metal scene practices enter into the deepest parts of your loyalties or values system without them being interrogated first (and probably not even then). It is *not* at all the case that Samier hopes that you will view metal music as something superficial or unimportant since Samier’s lifelong devotion and commitment to metal music would seem to run contrary to that presumption. It is about the ordering of priorities and what you give your heart to (which is a very religious worldview). This is not to say that this worldview is impossible since in our many daily interactions we habitually bring some friends and contacts into our inner circle and keep others outside of that. The injunction is to treat metal scene discourses and practices in the same way as we treat individuals. It is implied that this is easier because we had an assumed (religious) worldview and lifestyle prior to our involvement in the metal scene. It also *assumes* that our involvement in the metal scene marked our first exposure to western practices which for many people is unlikely to be the case.

Samier then refers to an oft-repeated theme when metal ethics are debated: metal lyrics about serial-killing are rarely acted out in practice and he uses this example to reinforce his point that we do not need to take literally or take into our heart all metal scene practices. However, there is a tension here with his earlier stated view that even trivial practices (alcohol and tattoos are the examples he mentions but devil’s horns in pictures and 666 and inverted cross signs in band logos and on website pages could be added), by their very repetition, attain

a deeper level of significance over time as they crystallize and become regarded as synonymous with metal. Within Samier's worldview we may just have to live with such existential tension. The tension remains of being torn in various directions by your varied influences, which is sometimes referred to metaphorically, within Christian Metal circles, as being too worldly for the church and too holy for the world.<sup>18</sup> Why should there be an easy way out? The easy way would be simply to leave the metal scene altogether, a path chosen by Niza, the female hijab-wearing Surabaya-based ex-vocalist for Death Metal bands Climaxeth and Osiris. This path is not directly encouraged (or discouraged) by the Tengkorak band members since it is not a path which they have chosen. If we look at the case of Niza, her bandmates and other metal scene members were saddened by her departure from the Surabaya and Sidoarjo metal scenes around 2014. The fact that she has been missed suggests that, in hindsight, committedly religious metalheads are able to contribute something significant and positive to a secular scene during periods of sustained involvement.

In the second response (above), Samier states that long hair and black metal band tee-shirts are OK for him but possibly not for others. (Obviously they are OK for him as he is usually seen around Surabaya with long hair and wearing his black metal band tee-shirts. He was wearing an Arch Enemy tee-shirt on the first day we met.) However, he covers this statement with the interesting conclusion that "we realize the music has power to state our message" which can be interpreted to include at least some of the following propositions: (a) metal is a powerful visual and aural medium (Larsson, 2011, p. 95) so that most messages can be conveyed powerfully through metal; (b) the long-term popularity of metal in Indonesia means that there will always be a sizeable audience; and possibly also (c) the vulnerability of metal youth to negative influences suggests that the message of Tengkorak will always be

---

<sup>18</sup> The new negative perception towards Christian metalheads' long hair and other lifestyle choices at Livets Ord (Word of Life) congregation in Uppsala, Sweden around 1992-1993 is recounted by Häger (2011, pp. 18-24).

needed. In interview with the Resborns, Purgatory band members recall the Napalm Death concert in Jakarta when the frontman said: “Religion is a myth – it only creates conflicts & bloodshed bla bla bla...” and the Indonesian audience responded: “Yeeeeeeaaaaahh” (cited in Resborn and Resborn, 2012, p. 124). Purgatory admits to being “stunned” as these people are meant to be a Muslim audience and most would probably confess to Muslim identity in non-metal contexts (such as Indonesian identity cards where one of six approved religions must be stated). Clearly it is conflicted and confused metal audiences like these, which treat the utterances of western metal musicians with the utmost respect as part of receiving “gestures [from] elsewhere” (Baulch, 2003, 2007), which Tengkorak and Purgatory wish to bring back to committed religious faith and practice. As the radical theologian Jeffrey W. Robbins (2014, p. 88) writes about St Augustine: “It is knowledge of God that anchors self-knowledge [from the perspective of the Abrahamic religions]”.

The closing section of Samier’s second response is as follows: “If people have a bad message in their music the metal fans think it’s OK. Why then is the good music not OK? In Indonesia it’s different to other [western] nations, you still have religion”. This is essentially a restatement of the proposition featured in the first quote we used in this section. The good music (meaning here the music with the “good message”) should be allowed entry into the metal scene and not be derided or excluded. Then there is another reference to Indonesia being more religious than the west and “you still have religion” in Indonesia, referring to its strength and influence but also perhaps being another reference to its eternal presence in a person’s life and in society where it was there before a person’s involvement in the metal scene and is there after it. However, it is this latter presence which the metalhead would have to learn to embrace and not to mock or push away. If a hybrid identity is formed (there really cannot be non-hybrids) then religious values and practices would have to be a priority so that they are emphasized while religiously unacceptable or ambiguous practices could be de-emphasized

and perhaps eventually drop off or fade away. To quote Samier from later in the same interview: “If they are Christian or Muslim they should talk about their religion, it becomes about responsibility. Indonesia is not western; we have a religion; stay true to your religion”. It would be a fairly simple thing, for example, to make a committed personal decision to not include a pentagram or inverted cross in a band logo and / or not to make devil’s horns in group pictures taken in metal-scene contexts. However, the subtler influences may be harder to protect oneself from. Purgatory band members, in interview with the Resborns (2012, p. 123), refer to Indonesian Islamic metalheads being ashamed or embarrassed to confess or practice their religion within the metal scene. For example, a male musician might pretend to be gay in order to avoid seduction after a concert (when the real reason is religious) and metalheads might make acceptable excuses in order to head off for prayers. Christian metalheads obviously face the same internal dilemmas and struggles.

The positivity and good values and ethics of the American hardcore scene (Agnostic Front, Biohazard, Madball, Sick of it All, etc.) was perhaps partially a collective response to the increasing trend towards dark (Moberg, 2012, pp. 114, 116, 122-4) and evil (Phillipov, 2011, pp. 153-4, 157-8, 160, 162) metalhead discourse and practices which occurred in Europe and North America around 1992-1994 with the rise of Norwegian Black Metal (with its church-burnings, blasphemies, and murders) (Bennett, 2009; Bossius et al., 2011, p. 8; Granholm, 2011, p. 529; Hagen, 2011, pp. 180-1; James and Tolliday, 2009, p. 151; Kahn-Harris, 2011, pp. 202-3, 215; Mørk, 2011, pp. 124-5; Moynihan and Söderlind, 2003; Mudrian, 2009; Phillipov, 2011, pp. 152-6) and Floridian Death Metal (with its first-person lyrics of rape, torture, murder, and mutilation) (Dick, 2009; James, 2009; James and Tolliday, 2009, p. 151; Kahn-Harris, 2007, pp. 36, 43, 76; McIver, 2014; Phillipov, 2006; Purcell, 2003, pp. 43-4). Norwegian Black Metal took literally and to its ultimate “logical” (Phillipov, 2011, p. 152)

conclusion what the earlier Heavy Metal and Thrash Metal scenes had managed to largely relegate to the symbolic realm.

Towards the end of the interview the author asked Samier what he thought of the global hardcore culture (as opposed to the global metal scene culture) expecting him to praise it for its positivity and good values. It is good that hardcore culture emphasizes family and respect but Samier says that the source of these good values is ultimately religion rather than hardcore. Therefore, inspiration should be sought in the Al-Quran rather than in hardcore lyrics despite their positivity. (This is literally what Samier said to the Muslim music journalist Wendi of *Rolling Stone* magazine.) This statement suggests Samier believes that hardcore and metal scenes can only mirror and replicate positive things which existed in other contexts first and especially in religious contexts. We can read Samier's response here:

“Author: What do you think of the culture of hardcore genre?

Samier: I think it's good because if we learn religion you will find that you should respect family, parents, mother, sister, etc. All the good things come from our religion, your religion ...I think a hardcore band should say about religion. Our culture came from religion. If they don't say that a lot of people think hardcore is a religion. I read that it says metal has become a religion. Wendi of *Rolling Stone* magazine said hardcore lyrics are inspiring. Wendi is a Muslim. I told [Wendi] that if you want inspiration you should read Al-Quran” [source: interview with Samier, 26 January 2014].

As the above quote indicates, Samier is concerned about the apparent lack of devotion to Islam and the abandoning of religious fervour and sincerity by some young people after they begin their participation in the metal scene. The goal of Samier is to counter this perceived negative influence so that metalheads may enjoy their participation in the scene (as Samier does by releasing albums and touring with Tengkorak and his grindcore band G.A.S.; playing guitar at an Anthrax tribute night held at Colors Pub; and by working at Colors 87.8FM radio station) whilst keeping their earlier religious fervour and devotion intact.

*Kodusa band interview*

Kodusa band members also speak about the need to produce positive (and polite) messages for the band's audience of religious metalheads as follows:

“Our lyrics have some themes ranging from social matters, peace, justice, and some of them are religious. Religious in this context was some of story and legend based on our holy Quran. The point is we are trying to deliver the positive messages from it through our lyrics and music. We are also trying to pass the message by using appropriate words, as polite as possible” [source: author's online interview with Kodusa, 27 November 2015].

Kodusa puts forward a view that not only the One Finger Movement but the term as well both continue to exist. We are not able to verify this because we did most of our field-work in Bandung, Jogjakarta, East Java, and Madura rather than in the capital-city:

“As far as we know, One Finger Movement still exists. At the beginning, this movement was ignited by Ombat from ... Tengkorak. But, generally speaking, metal bands such as Purgatory, Kodusa, and some local bands have been applying sort of Islamic metal far before terms like 'Islamic Metal' or 'Metal Tauhid' or 'One Finger Metal' [became] popular. This could happen because, in addition to the majority of population being Muslims, there were actually a lot of metal fans here in Indonesia. One interesting example was during the concert we could have a break until *adzan* is finished. (*Adzan* is the Muslim call to ritual prayer.) Even after *adzan*, everyone goes to mosque for praying” [source: *ibid.*].

The band also believes that the future of Islamic metal in Indonesia is bright, although we personally don't know of any new bands publicly aligning themselves with the One Finger Movement or (other than Saffar) utilizing primarily Islamic religious themes in lyrics and imagery: “Yet, we are still confident with our identity. There are many local metal bands that have same ideology as us and they are also still proud of their Islamic values” (source: *ibid.*).

## **The Bandung Death Metal Scene and Saffar**

### *Bandung Death Metal scene*

The Bandung scene is known for its size; dedication and commitment<sup>19</sup> (to the Death Metal sub-genre in particular (James and Walsh, 2015)); extreme self-confidence; professionalism;

---

<sup>19</sup> Regarding the commitment of metalheads to their local scene in Malta see Bell (2011).

hierarchical nature; strong and cohesive networks of merchandise shops, recording studios, record labels, artists, and tattoo stores; large number of talented and motivated underground musicians; and high levels of organization (Baulch, 2007; James and Walsh, 2015; Wallach, 2008). It is famous for its penetration into spheres of society not yet reached in other parts of Indonesia including popularity of the genre even among primary-school students and widespread familiarity with the names and even the music of the leading local bands (James and Walsh, 2015). It is associated with a lower middle-class / working-class district in the outer-eastern suburbs called Ujung Berung (or informally “Ujungbronx”) where most of the foundation bands originated from in the nineties (*ibid.*).

We get a situation in Bandung where the leading bands (Burgerkill and Jasad in particular) have the profile and brand-name recognition value of mainstream rock bands (or approaching such levels) but they still self-identify with the underground scene and play underground festivals (always headlining) for marketing purposes and to retain their hard-won subcultural reputational capital (Bell, 2011, pp. 287-9; Bourdieu, 1979, 1993; Kahn-Harris, 2007, pp. 7, 121, 122-7, 128-31, 132-3, 136-7, 138-9, 2011, pp. 210-15; Thornton, 1995). It is a city where competition is fierce; and festival and gig bills are rigidly controlled and reflect a religiously-observed pecking-order of seniority. Man of Jasad told the first-mentioned author on 24 February 2011 that there were 128 active Death Metal bands in Bandung alone which surely makes Bandung the biggest metal scene in Asia and probably the world. Baulch (2007, pp. 115, 156) refers to Bandung as “the heart” of the Indonesian “underground scene” while Wallach (2008, p. 7) writes that Bandung is “home [to] a remarkably disproportionate number of ... musicians”.

*Bandung Death Metal scene – secular orientation*

The Bandung scene is also known for its secular orientation whereby religion and religious belief are viewed as private matters which should be restricted to the private realm. Metalheads may freely go the mosque or church but in their capacities as private citizens only; religious identification and activity is not permitted to infringe upon the scene's symbols, heroes, rituals, and values.

Although Bandung is no less religious than any other Indonesian city, its rich history of arts, culture, and music (van Zanten, 2007, p. 11), going back decades<sup>20</sup>, also tends to create an artistic and music community today which feels somewhat empowered and more likely to follow an art-for-art's-sake philosophy (Bossius et al., 2011, p. 4) while also keeping a quiet and regular eye on how to make money from art and music. The art-for-art's-sake philosophy tends to encourage a more professional and secular orientation whereby people expect religion to be relegated to the private sphere. The secular orientation was reinforced and people exerted more effort to defend it after high-profile Death Metal band Forgotten was condemned by Islamic hardliners from outside of the scene because of the title of its third-album *Tuhan Telah Mati* (Rock Records, 2001) (meaning: God is Dead) which was inspired by Nietzschean philosophy. Addy Gembel (Forgotten vocalist) offered to show the first-mentioned author a threatening text message allegedly sent to him by an FPI member or supporter when we met in Bandung on 29 November 2012.

*Application of the theory of Hofstede et al. (1990) – symbols, heroes, rituals, and values*

The symbols of the Bandung scene are: spiky indecipherable band logos (Bell, 2011, p. 282; Hagen, 2011, p. 189) and the logo of the Bandung Death Metal Syndicate (BDMS) community organization; the devil's horn sign; the inverted cross; the pentagram; Baphomet; the number 666; the hammer-and-sickle (still a banned symbol in Indonesia); black band tee-shirts; tattoos;

---

<sup>20</sup> For example, the Bandung-based Bimbo group, one of the oldest popular music groups in Indonesia, was formed as long ago as 1967 (van Zanten, 2007, p. 9). It remained active some 40 years later (*ibid.*).



and long hair. Only the inverted cross; pentagram; Baphomet; 666 symbols; and tattoos would appear to be unacceptable symbols for the One Finger Movement.

The rituals of the Bandung Death Metal scene include the following: *Nongkrong* (hanging-out) (James and Walsh, 2015; Wallach, 2011, p. 95); drinking beer or arak wine in conjunction with *nongkrong*; smoking and drinking potent and sweet Indonesian coffee in conjunction with *nongkrong*; group lunches and dinners (low-priced Indonesian food); visiting and showing support for small independent merchandise stores (such as Bleeding Corpse drummer Ari Bejo's SERAK store on Jalan Cihampelas); growing and maintaining one's hair and music and music memorabilia collections; and animal sacrifices on stage (for certain Black Metal bands). Only drinking alcohol and animal sacrifices would be obviously unacceptable rituals for the One Finger Movement. One additional ritual of the Islamic bands, as we have seen, is having a break during a gig until *adzan* is finished.

The heroes of the Bandung Death Metal scene include the following: Man and Ferly of Jasad; Man's brother Iwan of the ESP record label; Dani aka Papap of Dismemberment Torture (the former Jasad drummer); Addy Gembel of Forgotten; Bandung scene history book author Kimung (ex-Burgerkill bassist)<sup>21</sup>; Amenk of Disinfected; Kancil of Jihad; Ari Bejo of Bleeding Corpse and Injected Suffrage; Kinoy and Said bin Zabid of Undergod; and the various past and present members of Burgerkill. These people can be often found relaxing at Papap's house in Ujung Berung in the evenings or at Extend Studio in the same district. Their values influenced the current practices of the Bandung Death Metal scene (Hagen, 2011, p. 182; Hofstede et al., 1990). By contrast, the heroes of the One Finger Movement have been primarily the band members of Purgatory and Tengkorak (especially Ombat and Samier). However, the heroes in this scene are not presented or viewed as ultimate icon figures in the same way that

---

<sup>21</sup> The present authors cannot read these history books because they have only ever been published in Indonesian. We have seen at least two of them and they are definitely not short books. A translation project (although desirable) would take up time and money which we presently don't have.

the Bandung scene figures are because there is also the awareness that they are pointing beyond themselves to Allah and Islamic faith (see also Bossius, 2011, pp. 62-3, 70).

### *Introducing Saffar*

One of the more interesting Bandung Death Metal bands is the relatively young Saffar which is in the second-tier or third-tier of the Ujung Berung / ESP hierarchy and is generally widely respected without being a household name outside of the metal underground unlike Burgerkill or Jasad or Forgotten. Saffar was formed in either 2007 (according to Metal Archives) or 2009 (according to Ramon, Saffar bassist, author's first Saffar band interview, 3 April 2012). The first line-up was: Ezot (vocals); Acil (guitar); Faris (bassist from Lumpur); and Andris (drummer from Desire) (source: *ibid.*). Only band spokesman Acil (pronounced "Ah-chill") has remained with the band up until today. The band released two demos in 2011 *Promo 2011* and *You Fear Your Enemy*; and participated in a 2011 split-album with one Filipino and two Indonesian bands titled *Philippines to Indonesia 4-Way Split of Brutality*.

Following this, Saffar released its ten-track debut full-length album *Mandatory El Arshy* on 9 September 2013 on the high-profile Ujung Berung label ESP (source: band's Metal Archives page). One thousand copies were released of the debut album (*ibid.*) which is a typical size production run for an established mid-tier band in Bandung. The *Mandatory El Arshy* line-up was: Parjo (vocals); Acil (guitar); Ramon (bass); and Iyenk (drums) (see Figures 1 and 2). Parjo is pictured wearing a Tengkorak tee-shirt inside the album booklet which certainly nails his Islamic colours to the mast. The band's lyrical themes are listed on Metal Archives as being Islam Religion and Anti-Zionist.

### **Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here**

Saffar is one of the best examples of the regeneration of the Ujung Berung / Bandung scene from within. Saffar is on many people's lips as their favourite young or new Bandung

band (see author's interview with Dada, ex-Turbidity vocalist, 30 November 2012; author's interview with Addy Gembel of Forgotten, 29 November 2012; comments by Butche of The Cruel in author's interview with Acil from Saffar, 18 July 2016). The *Mandatory El Arshy* album benefits from a crisp, clear, modern production unlike the muddy production and residual Thrash Metal influences which early Ujung Berung albums are known for.

Despite the Saffar band members being very well-connected and good socialisers who pay their dues, the band has not reached the next level of popularity and recognition partly because it tends to do much less marketing and self-promotion compared to other bands; and partly because it has been losing members since the debut album with the only two permanent members from 2014-16 being Acil on guitar and Iyenk on drums. The very talented bassist Ramon was sick for a long time and vocalist Parjo left the band in 2013 to concentrate on helping his parents in their doctors' clinics and his continuing university studies (source: Acil's interview with the author, 18 July 2016). In 2017 Evan, from Bloodgush and Dismemberment Torture (live band only), became the new Saffar bassist replacing Ramon (source: band's Metal Archives page). The band has no permanent vocalist as at 27 March 2018. Acil comments about Parjo's situation as follows:

“Acil: Parjo left the band because he wanted to work in his family's doctors' clinic. He will continue what his parents built. Parjo is still continuing his study in college. He also got married and is more focused on work and family. He had a [further] problem because he lives far from Bandung so it was difficult for him to meet with the other band members” [source: Acil's interview with the author, 18 July 2016].

Acil also explained that he does not want to ask Parjo to write lyrics for the next album because “it would be hard for [him] to explain the meaning of the lyrics to the fans [because] only Parjo knows the meaning of his deep [Islamic] lyrics”.

Saffar's inability to break into the next tier of popularity in Bandung (as Gore Infamous and Digging Up have done) may, although this is unproven and unprovable, be due in part to

the Islamic religious imagery used in Saffar's lyrics, videos, and band merchandise such as valiant Islamic warriors featured on tee-shirts and hoodies.

The album title *El Arshy* means “the sky” or “coming from the sky” literally in Arabic (source: Acil's interview with the author, 18 July 2016) or colloquially we can say that the reference is to Allah. Acil explained further as follows with interpretation from Indonesian to English being provided by Butche from The Cruel<sup>22</sup>:

“Acil: Coming from the God, you know? The people say: God lives in the sky, God is everywhere. That is why the people say: God is coming from the sky. The sky is the highest place on this planet. We just say “in the sky” meaning God because the sky is the highest place in this planet” [source: Acil's interview with the author, 18 July 2016].

The use of the English word “mandatory” in front of *El Arshy*, from a band of non-native English speakers who prefer lyrics in Sundanese and Indonesian, has a vaguely threatening import and Acil did not refer to this word when he explained to the author what the album title meant. It probably refers simply to those actions mandatory within Islam, i.e. the five pillars of Islam (van Zanten, 2007, p. 14), but the vaguely threatening nature of the title remains an unresolved issue. Jason Hutagalung has described Saffar as being “too religious” for his tastes (source: author's second interview with Jason, 12 January 2015) whereas Jason confusingly accepts the beer-drinking members of Bandung / Cimahi band Jihad as “not too religious”. However, showing the subjectivity inherent in Jason's own very personal demarcation line, all of Jihad's members are confessed Muslims; they write lyrics about Islamic theology and philosophy; and their ambition is to go on *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca with their wives and families (the *Hajj* pilgrimage being the fifth pillar of Islam (van Zanten, 2007, p. 14)) (source: author's interview with Jihad, 30 November 2012). Kancil, vocalist of Jihad, explains the lyrical themes for the second Jihad album *Strategi Setan* (Recluse Production, Singapore, 2005) as follows:

---

<sup>22</sup> In more recent times Butche from The Cruel and some of the more radical punkers and other underground people have been spending evenings socializing in the dormitory corridors at the Bandung Islamic University.

“The lyrics mostly tell about the description of one of the most evil creatures from when he was born until the end of his days. In Islam the evil one can create chaos between humans and is a sign in the Al-Qu’ran for the end of the world. The nickname is ‘Dajjal’, the real name is ‘Samiri’, and he has three eyes in his face. We call America or USA ‘Uncle Sam’, it means the shortened form of Samiri” [source: author’s interview with Jihad, 30 November 2012].

Acil has suggested that, with Parjo having departed, Saffar’s lyrical themes will expand to include social and historical themes (source: Acil’s interview with the author, 18 July 2016) because Parjo wrote all the religious lyrics on the debut album and no-one in the current band has the same skill at or perhaps the same interest in writing lyrics on this topic.

Acil’s message to the fans on 18 July 2016 was as follows: “We still exist and our new songs will be different to other bands. Our style is always different from other bands” (source: *ibid.*). With humility and a touch of anxiety he added to the author: “I hope that Saffar will continue to exist” (source: *ibid.*). Popo, vocalist of Demons Damn, made the following supportive comments: “This is why I do not agree with what they say in other cities that all bands in Bandung follow the style of Jasad. Identity is made through both lyrics and music and Saffar has a unique identity” (source: *ibid.*). Keeping the unique identity of Saffar without the unique lyrics of Parjo will be a continuing challenge in the years to come.

Saffar has been able to stay under the radar and avoid too much controversy by not publicly aligning itself with the One Finger Movement or the Jakarta scene; by avoiding preaching or the appearance of preaching; by building and maintaining strong relationships with Ujung Berung scene insiders; by having consistently self-identified with the Ujung Berung / Bandung scene since the band’s foundation; and by a patient and humble attitude from the band members. In regards to this last point, band spokesman Acil is notoriously soft-spoken and shy and is sometimes seen literally sitting on the ground at the feet of other scene members who are seated on chairs.<sup>23</sup> As Wallach (2008, pp. 135-6, emphasis added) points out: “paying

---

<sup>23</sup> This gesture is read as humility in Indonesia whereas in the west it would probably be read as eccentric, peculiar or confusing, but not specifically as submissive or self-abasing.

attention to basic habits of sociality *and to fundamental orientations toward physical space, the presence of others*, and the burden of responsibility [are] part of an ethnographic perspective that is frequently missing from [popular music] studies”.

When asked about Saffar, Rozi (bassist of Jihad) said: “I don’t know but they are very polite guys”; while Jihad vocalist Kancil added: “very religious” (source: author’s interview with Jihad, 30 November 2012). Acil has stated to the author he sees himself as a musician and he feels no connection to or affinity with the One Finger Movement which has never had anywhere near the influence or popularity in Bandung as it once did in Jakarta.

“Author: Are you part of One Finger Movement and if not do you support One Finger Movement?

Acil: Personally I try to be natural. I play Death Metal first and foremost and am not oriented towards One Finger Movement” [source: Acil’s interview with the author, 18 July 2016].

Acil was reluctant to discuss religious matters or the One Finger Movement further with the author, preferring to focus on the band’s music and lyrics; the band line-up; and the band’s future plans. Such an attitude makes perfect sense within the secular Bandung scene.

## **Conclusion**

Christian and Islamic Metal are frequently criticized, by secular metalheads, on the tenuous basis that their proponents are “really” and first and foremost religious evangelists and hence they are not “really” “sincere” metalheads who love and play metal-music for its own sake. According to this criticism, these people are just cynically “using” the metal scene to promote their own private (religious) beliefs and agendas and to convert people. Quite clearly this is a strawman argument in that it fails to reflect the complexity of Islamic and Christian Metal discourses and practices and in particular how individuals in these scenes mix, harmonize, balance, sort, and classify their religious- and metal-oriented behaviours so that the resultant mix of practices (symbols, heroes, and rituals) reflects closely enough their own values and preferences. Indonesian metalheads’ reactions to the Islamic bands Purgatory and Tengkorak

tend to vary from strong support to real indifference to pretend indifference to directly expressed dislike. The latter would usually be expressed quietly one-to-one in private conversations with trusted others. There is also confusion as metalheads do not know whether to view and categorize the individuals in the Islamic bands as metalheads or as religious people. Confusion can then lead to ignoring of these bands as they are put into the too-hard basket. The percentage of metalheads in each category on the spectrum ranging from strong support to dislike is almost impossible to ascertain with any precision due to the disinterest or antipathy or nervousness which the topic of religion generates when raised in conversations.

No-one could argue that Samier of Tengkorak, for example, does not genuinely love metal-music and he certainly enjoys being part of the Surabaya scene. He is aged around 35-years-old and is now a senior statesman of the metal scene in Surabaya. He has strong relationships, for example, with the members of Surabaya Power Metal band Valerian. He is widely respected by younger musicians and metalheads and this feel-good factor has allowed Tengkorak, in recent years and at least in Surabaya (all the other band members are based in Jakarta), to turn some negative opinions about the band into positive opinions. Samier does not go to the other extreme either; he sometimes wants to bring our interview away from discussion of religion to discussion of actual music. On the other hand, the guitarist of a well-known Jakarta Power Metal band has told the author that he does not want to attend social meetings where any One Finger Movement people might be present. This guitarist sees the One Finger Movement partly in terms of its anti-Zionist politics and, as an Indonesian-Chinese, he is wary of any racist aspects of the One Finger Movement's position given the anti-Chinese riots which occurred in Jakarta in the nineties. He also has an interest in Satanism, Chinese mythology, the occult, and ghosts and he does not view kindly the perceived preachiness and moralism of the Islamic bands. The arms-length atmosphere in Jakarta remains different from the collegial and fraternal mood in Surabaya.





## References

- Anonymous. (2015), “Dakwah anti mainstream: One Finger Movement”, 6 August, available online at: <https://sehatisme.com/one-finger-movement-salam-satu-jari/> [accessed 23 February 2018].
- Avelar, I. (2001), “Defeated rallies, mournful anthems, and the origins of Brazilian Heavy Metal”, in C. Dunn and C. Perrone (Eds.), *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press), pp. 123-135.
- Avelar, I. (2011), “Otherwise national: Locality and power in the art of Sepultura”, in J. Wallach, H.M. Berger and P.D. Greene (Eds.), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press), Chapter 6, pp. 135-158.
- Baulch, E. (2003), “Gesturing elsewhere? The identity politics of the Balinese death/thrash metal scene”, *Popular Music*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 195-215.
- Baulch, E. (2007), *Making Scenes: Reggae, Punk, and Death Metal in 1990s Bali* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).
- Bell, A. (2011), “Metal in a micro island state: An insider’s perspective”, in J. Wallach, H.M. Berger and P.D. Greene (Eds.), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press), Chapter 12, pp. 271-293.
- Bennett, J. (2009), “The making of Emperor’s In the Nightside Eclipse”, in A. Mudrian (Ed.), *Precious Metal: 25 Extreme Metal Masterpieces* (Philadelphia, PA: De Capo Press), Chapter 21, pp. 280-291.
- Bossius, T. (2011), “Shout to the Lord: Christian worship music as popular culture, church music, and lifestyle”, in T. Bossius, A. Häger and K. Kahn-Harris (Eds.), *Religion and Popular Music in Europe: New Expressions of Sacred and Secular Identity* (London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris), Chapter 3, pp. 51-70.
- Bossius, T., Häger, A. and Kahn-Harris, K. (2011), “Introduction: Religion and popular music in Europe”, in T. Bossius, A. Häger and K. Kahn-Harris (Eds.), *Religion and Popular Music in Europe: New Expressions of Sacred and Secular Identity* (London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris), pp. 1-10.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge).
- Bourdieu, P. (1993), *The Field of Cultural Production* (Oxford: Polity Press).
- Dick, C. (2009), “The making of Cannibal Corpse’s Tomb of the Mutilated”, in A. Mudrian (Ed.), *Precious Metal: 25 Extreme Metal Masterpieces* (Philadelphia, PA: De Capo Press), Chapter 12, pp. 142-164.
- Granholt, K. (2011), “‘Sons of Northern Darkness’: Heathen influences in black metal and neo-folk music”, *Numen*, Vol. 58, No. 4, pp. 514-544.
- Greene, P.D. (2011), “Electronic and affective overdrive: Tropes of transgression in Nepal’s heavy metal scene”, in J. Wallach, H.M. Berger and P.D. Greene (Eds.), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press), Chapter 5, pp. 109-134.
- Hagen, R. (2011), “Musical style, ideology, and mythology in Norwegian Black Metal”, in J. Wallach, H.M. Berger and P.D. Greene (Eds.), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press), Chapter 8, pp. 180-199.
- Häger, A. (2011), “Jerusalem in Uppsala: Some accounts of the relationship between a Christian rock group and its congregation”, in T. Bossius, A. Häger and K. Kahn-Harris (Eds.), *Religion and Popular Music in Europe: New Expressions of Sacred and Secular Identity* (London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris), Chapter 1, pp. 11-30.

- Hofstede, G., Neuijen, B., Ohayv, D.D. and Sanders, G. (1990), "Measuring organisational cultures: A qualitative and quantitative study across twenty cases", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 286-316.
- James, K. (2009), "From 'The Undead will Feast' to 'The Time to Kill is Now': Frankfurt School and Freudian perspectives on death-metal", *Musicology Australia*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2009, pp. 17-39.
- James, K. and Tolliday, C. (2009), "Structural change in the music industry: a Marxist critique of public statements made by members of Metallica during the lawsuit against Napster", *International Journal of Critical Accounting*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1-2, pp. 144-176.
- James, K. and Walsh, R. (2015), "Bandung Rocks, Cibinong Shakes: Economics and applied ethics within the Indonesian death-metal community", *Musicology Australia*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 27-46.
- Kahn-Harris, K. (2007), *Extreme Metal – Music and Culture on the Edge* (London and New York, NY: Berg).
- Kahn-Harris, K. (2011), "'You are from Israel and that is enough to hate you forever': Racism, globalization, and play within the global extreme metal scene", in J. Wallach, H.M. Berger and P.D. Greene (Eds.), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press), Chapter 9, pp. 200-223.
- Larsson, G. (2011), "The return of Ziryab: Yusuf Islam on music", in T. Bossius, A. Häger and K. Kahn-Harris (Eds.), *Religion and Popular Music in Europe: New Expressions of Sacred and Secular Identity* (London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris), Chapter 5, pp. 92-104.
- McIver, J. (2014), *Bible of Butchery: Cannibal Corpse: The Official Biography* (Los Angeles, CA: Metal Blade Records).
- Moberg, M. (2011), "Christian metal in Finland: Institutional religion and popular music in the midst of religious change", in T. Bossius, A. Häger and K. Kahn-Harris (Eds.), *Religion and Popular Music in Europe: New Expressions of Sacred and Secular Identity* (London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris), Chapter 2, pp. 31-50.
- Moberg, M. (2012), "Religion in popular music or popular music as religion? A critical review of scholarly writing on the place of religion in metal music and culture", *Popular Music and Society*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 113-130.
- Mørk, G. (2011), "Why didn't the churches begin to burn a thousand years earlier?" in T. Bossius, A. Häger and K. Kahn-Harris (Eds.), *Religion and Popular Music in Europe: New Expressions of Sacred and Secular Identity* (London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris), Chapter 7, pp. 124-144.
- Molinero, S. (2011), "The meanings of the religious talk in French rap music", in T. Bossius, A. Häger and K. Kahn-Harris (Eds.), *Religion and Popular Music in Europe: New Expressions of Sacred and Secular Identity* (London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris), Chapter 6, pp. 105-123.
- Moynihan, M. and Søderlind, D. (2003), *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, Revised and expanded edition (Venice, CA: Feral House).
- Mudrian, A. (2009), "The making of Darkthrone's Transilvanian Hunger", in A. Mudrian (Ed.), *Precious Metal: 25 Extreme Metal Masterpieces* (Philadelphia, PA: De Capo Press), Chapter 14, pp. 179-195.
- Olson, B.H. (2008), *I am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture*, unpublished Master of Arts thesis, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, May 2008, available online at: [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send\\_file?accession=bgisu1206132032&disposition=inline](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=bgisu1206132032&disposition=inline) [accessed 12 February 2018].

- Phillipov, M. (2006), “‘None so vile?’ Towards an ethics of death metal”, *Southern Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 74-85.
- Phillipov, M. (2011), “Extreme music for extreme people? Norwegian black metal and transcendent violence”, *Popular Music History*, Vol. 6, Nos. 1-2, pp. 150-163.
- Purcell, N.J. (2003), *Death Metal Music – The Passion and Politics of a Sub-culture* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Company).
- Resborn, L. and Resborn, J. (2012), *Labour of Love & Hate: An Underground Musical Journey through Southeast Asia* (Malmö, Sweden: Bullseye).
- Robbins, J.W. (2014), “Louis Armstrong: A rhapsody on repetition and time”, in M. Grimshaw (Ed.), *The Counter-narratives of Radical Theology and Popular Music: Songs of Fear and Trembling* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan), Chapter 7, pp. 81-94.
- Saefullah, H. (2017), “‘Nevermind the *jahiliyyah*, here’s the *hijrah*’: Punk and the religious turn in the contemporary Indonesian underground scene”, *Punk & Post-Punk*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 263-289.
- Thornton, S. (1995), *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Sub-cultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
- Van Zanten W. (2007), “God is not only in the Holy Scriptures but also in the arts: Music, cultural policies and Islam in West Java, Indonesia”, paper presented at Conference on Music in the World of Islam, Assilah, Morocco, 8-13 August, 2007, available online at: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/33434174/van\\_zanten-2007.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1518108098&Signature=dNT3ItMUUtxY0iW6RWtzTQvLpso%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DGod\\_is\\_not\\_only\\_in\\_the\\_holy\\_scriptures.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/33434174/van_zanten-2007.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1518108098&Signature=dNT3ItMUUtxY0iW6RWtzTQvLpso%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DGod_is_not_only_in_the_holy_scriptures.pdf) [accessed 8 February 2018].
- Wallach, J. (2008), *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997-2001* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press).
- Wallach, J. (2011), “Unleashed in the east: Metal music, masculinity, and ‘Malayness’ in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore”, in J. Wallach, H.M. Berger and P.D. Greene (Eds.), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press), Chapter 4, pp. 86-105.
- Wallach, J., Berger, H.M. and Greene, P.D. (2011), “Affective overdrive, scene dynamics, and identity in the global metal scene”, in J. Wallach, H.M. Berger and P.D. Greene (Eds.), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press), Chapter 1, pp. 3-33.
- Weinstein, D. (2011), “The globalization of metal”, in J. Wallach, H.M. Berger and P.D. Greene (Eds.), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press), Chapter 2, pp. 34-59.