BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Réak is the Bandung subregional variant of the "horse trance dances": a popular group of animist performances present throughout and outside Indonesia. During the event, a trance master coordinates a series of spirit possessions with the musical accompaniment of a percussions and shawm ensemble. Like other art forms, including metal, *réak* is described as *ramé* (tangled/interesting/noisy) and *kasar* (coarse) due to its chaotic social ambiance and distorted, fast-paced music.

Indeed, due to geographical proximity and the genre's local relevance, *réak* is experiencing the influence of extreme metal. Although most participants avoid hybridity, a conversation is taking place among participants, debating the aesthetic affinities between the genres, generating a commentary stressing similarity and genealogy. Moreover, while metal bands invite *réak* troupes to open concerts, *réak* practitioners, often familiar with the metal community, appropriate the genre's stylistic elements such as distorted electric guitars and "*Metal Distortion*" pedals.

Despite *réak*'s and metal's resistance to assimilation, stylistic musical and extra-musical cross-fertilisation generated a non-synthetic hybridisation which safeguards genre boundaries. The discussion will be useful in laying the foundation to problematise concepts of hybridity that classic analyses of genre do not grasp.

In association with

"More Metal than Metal": Preliminary Reflections on Imagined Genealogies

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Luigi Monteanni

Sundanese Tecknical Death Metal: introduction

On 25th of July 2015, in "Seni Reak", the official Facebook group of _kasenian réak_ (the _réak_ art): a regional trance performance from Bandung, Indonesia, a user jokingly posted a poll asking people to choose between _réak_ and "beatdown", an extreme metal influenced subgenre characterised by aggressive, screaming vocals, downtuned electric guitars and heavy breakdowns. In the comments section, the first and last user built on the joke, respectively noting that _réak_ is the "Sundanese tecknical death metal [sic.]" and that _réak_ troupes should collaborate: _réak_ music and beatdown dance-movements (Fig.1).
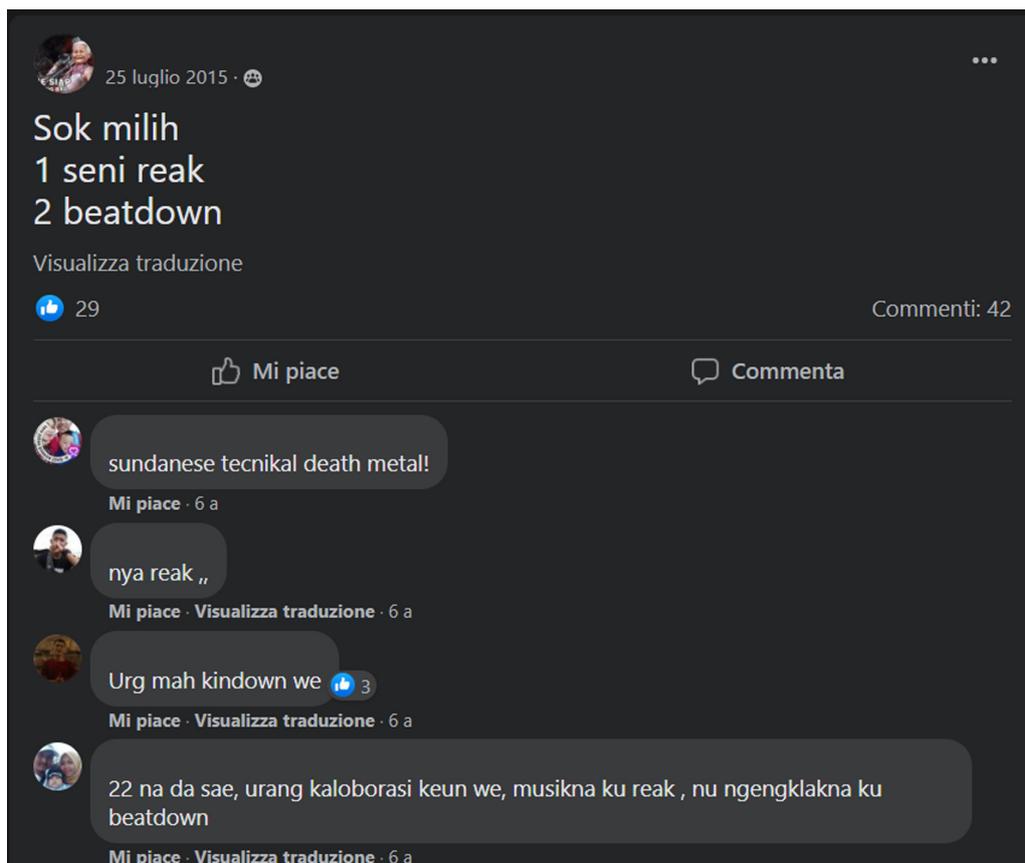

Fig.1. the post highlighting the similarities between metal and _réak._

This post highlights how musical hybridity forms in ways that are not accounted for by classic genre studies, which frame the concept as the act of crossing over between two or

more distinct genres, resulting in a new one.[1] This Facebook thread emphasises how *réak*, a regional performance staged to celebrate life-cycle milestones is influenced by extreme metal, forming continuity between genres without resulting in any new subgenre. *Réak* performers adopt stylistic elements of metal imagery such as monikers and distortion effects, while metalheads invite *réak* troupes to open their shows. Furthermore, both genres follow aesthetic ideologies that resist hybridisation.

In this article I present my concept of imagined genealogy that accounts for the perceived affinity between different music genres by fans and practitioners. Through this notion, I show how discrete aesthetic features of music genres – in this case *ramé* (noisy busyness) and *kasar* (coarseness) – alongside stylistic non-musical elements – visual and linguistic imagery as well as ideologies of class, modernity, spirituality, gender, and self – bridge genres without creating hybridity, emphasising the need to create more complex employments of such terms. To illustrate my points, I employ qualitative ethnographic data gathered in online conversations and collected during my 2017 fieldwork research.

Ceremonial noise: *réak*

Réak is a performance originated in Bandung and a subregional variant of the horse trance dances: a group of pan-indonesian performances known under various names such as *jaranan* and *jathilan*.[2] During the event, a trance master (*ma'alim*) coordinates spirit possessions of performers and audience members with the musical accompaniment of an ensemble of wooden single-head conical drums (dogdog) and a shawm instrument (tarompet). According to interviewees, *réak* originated as a hybrid of *angklung buncis* musical repertoire and the performative possessions of the horse trance dances. *Angklung buncis* is based on sets of pentatonic bamboo rattles called angklung, dogdog, and tarompet and is executed for the yearly harvest celebrations to renew the relationships with the ancestors. However, with the introduction of electronic PAs in the 1960s, the *angklung* has slowly disappeared: made Inaudible by the amplification it was replaced by the tarompet.

Each troupe is composed of fifteen to thirty people, usually mostly men with few female members, as *réak* is believed to be a violent, masculine performance, where practitioners are normally blue-collar workers. During *réak* the stage (the host's backyard)

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[1] Mats Sigvard Johansson, 'Making Sense of Genre and Style in the Age of Transcultural Reproduction', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 47(2016), 45–62 (1), p.47.

[2] David E. Mauricio, *The Jaranan of East Java: An Ancient Tradition in Modern Times*, (Manoa: University of Hawaii, 2002).

is prepared early in the 'morning with offerings for the *Karuhun*: human ancestors' spirits. The performance starts at nine AM with an overture. After a phase of freeform dance, the *ma'alim* indicates that the area has filled with enough power and that spirits are attending. The music's tempo doubles, and the spirits, both *Karuhun* and *Jurig Jarian*, mischievous animal spirits, are invited by the *ma'alim* to take control of the individuals to deliver messages to their relatives, perform dances, or show their powers chewing glass, opening coconuts with bare hands and so on (Fig.2). Subsequently, a dancer is helped to enter the Bangbarongan, an anthropo-zoomorphic costume and tutelary spirit, to "dance it" (Fig.3). Wearing the costume implies the eventuality of possession, thus requiring performative and spiritual preparedness. After a parade around the village and a second performance at the host's house, the event finishes at five o'clock PM.

Fig. 2. two typical moments of a *réak* performance.

Fig. 3. Bangbarongan.

When I asked attendees what they liked about *réak*, they often replied that it is especially for the horror and comedy offered by the spirits, their coarse manners, and the energetic music. Musically, these aspects are conveyed by two of the genre's aesthetic features: *ramé* and *kasar* as, Anggi of originator *réak* troupe *Juarta Putra* explains:

> People like three things: first, they like random people trancing, the fact that they are crazy, that they break tiles with their heads for example, it also has a function; second, the energy of the music, which is the same thing as *ramé*, because of the big sounds [*soara gede*] of the dogdog and the tarompet; and third, the parade.

Ramé has been defined in various ways, all underlining the clamorous noisiness of social life and implying a healthy, lively atmosphere. It has been translated as bustling, complex and busy by Becker,[3] noisy, congested and tangled by Anderson Sutton[4] crowded, sociable and fun by Wallach.[5] *Ramé*, overall, represents 'a magnified aesthetic state of liveliness'.[6] Whereas genres like *jaipongan* are considered *ramé*, something like *tarawangsa* is not.

Conversely, *kasar* means coarse, crude, rough, blatant, sudden[7] and it is often opposed to *alus*: refined, poised, elegant. In Java, the embodied everyday etiquette of *alus* and *kasar* classifies a person's conduct forming a sense of self and other.[8] If someone is described as *alus*, they are delicate and graceful. In comparison, if *kasar*, they are gruff and in emotional turmoil.[9] Musically, court genres such as gamelan music genres are considered *alus*, while *réak* is definitely *kasar* – and so is extreme metal. According to metalhead participants, in *réak*, these two attributes emerge as desirable, qualifying a good performance. They appreciate the unruly, chaotic ambience and the energetic, lively percussion patterns and the tarompet's ear-piercing sound. As Kinoy, singer of popular death metal band *Undergod* explained:

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[3] Alton L. Becker, 'Text-Building, Epistemology, And Aesthetics In Javanese Shadow Theatre', *Dispositio*, 5 (1980), 137–168 (13/14), p. 157.

[4] Richard Anderson Sutton, 'Interpreting Electronic Sound Technology in the Contemporary Javanese Soundscape', *Ethnomusicology*, 40 (1996), 249–268 (2), p. 258.

[5] Jeremy Wallach, *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997–2001*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), p. 162.

[6] David Harnish, *Bridges to the ancestors: Music, myth, and cultural politics at an Indonesian festival*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p.4.

[7] Anne K. Rasmussen, 'The Politicization of Religious Melody In The Indonesian Culture Wars Of 2017'. In *Sounding Out the State Of Indonesian Music*, ed. By Andrew Mcgraw And Christopher J. Miller, (pp. 112–130), (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2022), p. 126; Richard Anderson Sutton, 'Humor, Mischief, and Aesthetics in Javanese Gamelan Music', *The Journal of Musicology*, 15 (1997), 390–415 (3), p. 393.

[8] Sandra Bader and Max M. Richter, '"Dangdut" Beyond the Sex: Creating Intercorporeal Space through "Nyawer" Encounters in West Java, Indonesia', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 23 (2014), 163–183 (2).

[9] Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 50–51; Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960), p. 232.

Yeah, because metal and *réak* are similar when it comes to the rhythmic patterns. People also like the possessions and the loud music [*keras*]. They are energetic [*energik*] and wild [*liar*].

Tradition in the age of metal distortion: extreme metal influences on *réak*

After a first analysis of the performance, let's explain how historical developments alongside *réak*'s aesthetic features have facilitated the influence of extreme metal. Since the 1970s, Indonesia has had a musical avantgarde that combined international experimental music trends with indigenous musical traditions, for which rock music provided new means to reflect on what might constitute a "distinctive" national and regional sensibility. In particular, extreme metal – a group of music genres born in the 1980s and defined by distorted guitars, soaring, raspy, unpitched vocals and fast-paced, energetic grooves[10] – has been extremely relevant in Indonesia since its reception.[11] In West Java and Bandung metal and loud rock have been a vehicle of protest since the 1970s.[12] They voiced discontent and rebellion, fuelling the toppling of President Suharto[13] and offering a language to discuss issues such as folklorisation and tourism.[14]

When it comes to *réak*, albeit not the majority, metalheads are regular attendees of the performance, who sometimes dub the messy and chaotic nature of the show as 'the original metal' or 'more metal than metal'.[15] Coherently with the show's lower-class aesthetics linked to masculinity, the average *réak* enjoyer is a male *rakyat* (the people)[16] blue-collar worker and the same goes for Bandung's metalheads. Furthermore, proximity is not only a matter of ideology but also a geography since both *réak* and metal are especially strong in Ujung Berung,

Proof of this mutual interest is that some of the troupes had tested hybrids between *réak* and metal by introducing more distorted guitar riffs and pieces of western drum sets in their performances, although they have now stopped due to the general preference for "traditional" performances. Moreover, this featuring seems technically

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[10] Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: music and culture on the edge*. (Oxford: Berg, 2006), p. 3.

[11] Jeremy Wallach, Rock Music in Indonesia (2018), *Norient*, <https://norient.com/stories/rock-in-indonesia?user=2585> [accessed 17 December 2022].

[12] David Harnish and Jeremy Wallach, ''Dance to Your Roots': Genre Fusions in the Music of Indonesia's Krakatau', *Asian Music*, 44 (2013), 115–134 (2).

[13] Wallach, Rock Music in Indonesia.

[14] Emma Baulch, 'Creating A Scene', *International Journal Of Cultural Studies*, 5 (2002), 153–177 (2).

[15] The first in Indonesian ("*metal yang asli*"), the second in English.

[16] Andrew N. Weintraub, *Dangdut stories: a social and musical history of Indonesia's most popular music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

complicated to obtain since for example, as Kinoy has stated, «It's difficult to implement the tarompet in the metal style.» As ethnomusicologist Jeremy Wallach noted,[17] since the inception of metal in Indonesia, creating regional hybrids has often resulted in being defined "*kampungan*" (backwards). These experiments are often avoided, asserting independence from clichés depicting Indonesian bands as incapable of being good at canonical metal.[18] Furthermore, Wallach noted how "inertial" genre expectations in Java prevent such innovations to succeed commercially, limiting their cultural impact.[19]

Nevertheless, as the vignette at the beginning hints, a conversation is taking place in the official *réak* Facebook group debating the affinities between the genres. While most of the fans deny identification – for it would bring the performance away from its "traditional" core – fans' comparisons online are explicit, and the metal imagery occasionally takes over. While metal bands such as *Undergod* invite groups to perform at metal concerts (Fig.4), *réak* practitioners sometimes employ death metal monikers (Fig.5) and timidly integrate some of the genre's stylistic elements such as *Boss' Metal Distortion* pedals (Fig.6). Furthermore, far from the public eye, during rehearsals and informal hangouts, where, for instance, performers execute metal covers with electric guitar and dogdog, tongue-in-cheek metal experimentation is pursued. These kinds of experimentations are defined by Indonesians at large as '*kollaborasi*': «the mixing of instruments, genres but also environments and contexts».[20]

Fig. 4. Death Metal Syndicate and Undergod invite *réak* troupes to open concerts.

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[17] Wallach, *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres,* p. 267.

[18] Baulch, p. 211.

[19] Wallach, *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres*, p. 120.

[20] Teguh Permana, Tarawangsawelas.

Fig. 5. the *réak* troupe's UDM advertising their clothing.

Fig. 6. posts searching for "*Metal Distortion*" guitar pedals.

Imaginary genealogies: problematising hybridity

Genre and style are a crucial topic of inquiry for music studies and a critical theme for this paper. Although genre and style have often been treated as synonyms,[21] successive analyses by postulated separation between terms.

Fabbri was among the firsts to frame musical genre as 'a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules',[22] including extra-aural characteristics. By comparison, for Roy Shuker genre is a non-aural

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[21] Roy Shuker, *Understanding popular music culture, 3rd edition* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 119.

[22] Franco Fabbri, 'A theory of musical genres: two applications', in *Popular music perspectives*, ed. by David Horn and Phillip Tagg (Göteborg and London: IASPM, 1982), 52–81.Fabbri, p. 52.

construct imposed on the musical artefact.[23] These definitions considering (1) inherent music qualities and (2) properties assigned to music were partially brought together by Frith, who determined genre as a top-down marketing tool and a taxonomical instrument employed by fans.[24]

On the contrary, whereas genre permits a broad grouping of many different aspects, style encapsulates genre when it comes to certain aural, visual, and linguistic characteristics. When someone defines harsh, unpitched vocals as metal vocals, for example, they are describing a specific form of vocal delivery while also referring to a broad idea of genre. The relationship between concepts, on the other hand, does not have to be viewed as one subordinate to the other. Since according to Brackett musical style refers to a set of features distinguishing a socially acknowledged musical genre or category,[25] discussing style can be thought of as a technique to speak specifically of certain music phenomena while also acknowledging non-musical elements. Style, then, permits us to limit the examination of certain components in a way that is separate from wider genre narratives. This is a good perspective to deal with contradictions between recognised genre norms and individual cases of those rules being questioned such as for this case study.

Yet, such strategy remains unsatisfactory: analysing stylistic elements such as distortion and imagery alone tells us little about the perceived continuity between *réak* and metal. These genres' repertoire, choice of instruments and compositional techniques work as boundaries promoting different ideologies: *réak* celebrates regional tradition while metal celebrates transnational cosmopolitanism. Hence, appropriation of stylistic elements is restricted to visual imagery and analogous aesthetic relationships: e.g. distortion instead of distorted guitars and fast-paced drumming instead of dogdog rhythmic patterns.

A useful concept to understand this specific continuity is what Pierre Alexandre Tremblay conceived as the 'inbetween-ness' of music genres, which he used to refer to music practices that combined aesthetic features of different genres without generating new subgenres.[26] It is a similar 'inbetween-ness' undefined by the genre-style framework that *rèak* and metal fans are dwelling in their '*kollaborasi*': a space where anything from

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[23] Shuker, p. 119.

[24] Simon Frith, Performing rites: on the value of popular music (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996)., p. 76.

[25] David Brackett, *Categorizing sound: genre and twentieth-century popular music* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), p. 66.

[26] Georgina Born, 'The dynamics of pluralism in contemporary digital art music', in *Music and Digital Media: A planetary anthropology*, ed. by Georgina Born (London: UCL Press, 2022), pp. 305–377 (p. 356).

the context to the sound to the meaning can become a terrain of experimentation without necessarily aiming at genre hybridity.

Analysing the perceived 'imagined genealogy' between *réak* and metal as this inbetween-ness, we can understand them as related without having to think them through combination thanks to their shared musical and non-musical aesthetic features. Although both *réak* and metal are refractory to assimilation, an overlap is noticed by participants. By exploring tongue-in-cheek experiments through stylistic musical (distortion, fast-paced grooves) and extra-musical (imagery, metacommentary) features, influence is possible while maintaining genre boundaries intact.

I argue that we are witnessing a phenomenon of imagined genealogy based on perceived aesthetic and ideological affinity between *réak* and metal, allowing fans to assert continuity instead of separation between genres. This process works in two ways: on the one hand, metalheads appropriate the practice becoming an integral audience for the performance 'where people come because [...] the event is of special significance to them'[27] because it promotes the same kinds of sonic experiences. As Glenn, singer of Ujungberung black metal band Warkvlt has told me once: «*réak* is still underground, much like black metal in Bandung [...] It's also faster (*gancang*) and rougher (*keras*)». As we have seen in the quotes, this significance is explained as the performance's entangled chaos and similar musical aesthetics (*kasar*, *ramé*) expressed by noise and distortion[28] alongside geographic proximity and ideologic background.[29]

While I admit that more ethnographic inquiry is required to confirm these hunches, following Moshe Morad's employment of the notion of 'integral audience'[30] to frame LGBTQA+ participation in Cuban Santeria and considering my conversations with this case study's participants, I argue that *réak*'s aural perception and unruly social ambience expressed by music, dance and possessions resonate with metalheads creating a space bound to social concepts about the masculine, lower-class bravado, and musical performativity.

This analysis points at how 'perceptions of genre connect sounds with particular meanings, and preoccupations with the maintenance or transgression of genre boundaries play a vital role in everyday understandings of popular music,'[31] where, 'music

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[27] Richard Schechner, *Performance theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 220.

[28] Sutton, 'Interpreting Electronic Sound Technology'.

[29] Jeremy Wallach, East of Hell: Black Metal in Indonesia (2016), *Norient*, <https://norient.com/blog/black-metal-in-indonesia?user=2585> [accessed 17 December 2022].

[30] Moshe Morad, *Fiesta de diez pesos: music and gay identity in special period Cuba*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 180.

[31] Wallach, *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres,* p. 5.

genres are discursively linked in complex ways to particular social categories, including class, gender, and ethnicity, and their arrival among Indonesians from different walks of life can reveal a great deal about how they view themselves and others in their society'.[32]

The missing genre: approximate conclusions

In this paper I demonstrated how the tension and influence developing between metal and *réak* can't be accounted for and analysed using the regular concepts used by genre studies, while it is on the other hand explained by participants as *kollaborasi*. While hybridity is often conceived as the act of crossing over between two or more distinct styles/genres, resulting in new style/genre,[33] *réak* and metal are two genres strongly defined by their respective aesthetic ideologies and nonetheless they find ways around their musical orthodoxy to nurture cross-fertilisation.

Differently from the overly prescriptive relationships subsumed within the notions of genre, style and hybridity, the concept of imagined genealogy accounts for this special type of 'inbetween-ness' expressed by the indigenous notion of *kollaborasi* and based on common aesthetic features (*ramé*, *kasar*) and similar social ambiences laden with blue-collar, spiritually heterodox, masculine significance, explaining how, despite maintaining their structural features, aficionados of both genres value continuity and genealogy over separation and independence.

Such a concept not only offers a new way to look at peculiar relationships between genres, but also helps us exploring performers' and fans' priorities in practices of listening and participation which generate such relationships; practices underlying interplaying narratives regarding class, modernity, spirituality, gender and self.

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[32] ibid.

[33] Johansson, p. 47.

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Short Bio

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