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Emma BAULCH, *Making Scenes: Reggae, Punk, and Death Metal in 1990s Bali*

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Emma Baulch, *Making Scenes: Reggae, Punk, and Death Metal in 1990s Bali*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 226 p.

I SHOULD START this review with a caveat: I am not an expert on the music of Bali or of Southeast Asia more generally. My review of Emma Baulch's *Making Scenes*, then, is written from the point of view of a reader less interested in the area studies component of the book than in its usefulness as a case study concerning the musical genres under discussion, especially death metal and punk. On this score, Baulch's book stands out as one of relatively few that takes the relationship between distinct musical genres or scenes as a primary focus of scholarly analysis. *Making Scenes* complements the efforts made in my own book, *This Ain't the Summer of Love: Conflict and Crossover in Heavy Metal and Punk* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), and in other notable recent work such as Fabian Holt's *Genre in Popular Music*, to think across genres, scenes and subcultures rather than treat them as discrete and isolated cultural formations.

This is not to say that the context of Baulch's study is of no consequence. Her work is very much a study of reggae, punk, and death metal in a particular time and place. The complex mix of authoritarian and democratizing elements that characterized the final years of the "New Order" regime of Indonesian president Suharto is the backdrop to Baulch's analysis. Although she refrains from overstating the connections between music and politics in this setting, Baulch effectively demonstrates throughout *Making Scenes* that the changing musical and subcultural affinities of Balinese youth were informed by state discourses on youth that were by turns affirmative and repressive. Also crucial to her account is the transnational culture industry whose impact upon Bali was being experienced with new force during the

years of her fieldwork. Baulch observes of the emergent death metal scene in early 1990s Bali that the scene "seemed preoccupied with an elsewhere" (p. 56), taking its cues from a distinctly non-local repertoire of sounds, gestures, and visual style markers. Yet her work is no simple study of "Westernization." Like Ian Condry in his valuable study of Japanese hip hop, or the contributors to the recent collection, *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World*, Baulch stresses the ways in which Balinese scene participants moved between local and trans-local frames of reference as they reshaped subcultural norms to suit their own purposes.

Within Bali, Baulch concentrates most of her attention on the interrelationship between metal and punk. Balinese death metal, for all its absorption of influences from "elsewhere," was a determinedly underground phenomenon from the moment of its inception. Punk in Bali, by contrast, derived its early stimulus from the pop-punk style of Green Day. When Baulch arrived in Bali in 1996, the principal habitat for local punks was the shopping mall, a space that death metal adherents treated with great ambivalence. At this stage, she observes, the punk embrace of global consumerism encouraged metal scene participants to put forth their own paradoxical brand of localism. Whereas death metal musicians "demonized the metropolis," Balinese punks in this early phase "idealized it" (p. 100).

During the next three years, the oppositional character of metal/punk interaction would largely give way to a more complementary sensibility. Punk led the way in this transformation. Pop-infused "alternapunk" lost ground to a more confrontational style termed "*punk chaos*" or "*punk anarki*," through which Balinese punk

assumed an underground stance more akin to that found in death metal. The changes could be observed in the way that the mall was displaced by distinctive subcultural spaces that emerged in the Balinese capital of Denpasar, most notably Underdog State, a combination rehearsal studio, merchandise outlet, and café that “attracted death metal and punk groups alike” (p. 137). Sharing space in this way created the groundwork for a growing sense among Bali’s death metal and punk proponents that they were part of a “pangenre underground scene” that was also decidedly “pan-Indonesian” in character (pp. 154-155). Soon, death metal and punk bands would be appearing side by side at underground music events, joined in their disdain for “trendy people” with “trendy ears” (p. 159).

Reggae occupies a comparatively subsidiary place in Baulch’s analysis. It is a third musical and cultural space wherein the tensions between local and global, underground and commercial that inform the rest of *Making Scenes* assume a different shape. Unlike either punk or metal, reggae’s place in Bali – or at least, the place that Baulch assigns it – is defined by the island’s tourist economy. Although Balinese reggae began in a kind of heterotopic border zone located at the beachside Bruna bar, by the late 1990s local performers such as Gus They principally value reggae for being “nice to sway to, to accompany the tourists as they get drunk” (p. 77). As such, reggae marks for Baulch “the power of state discourses, including state-generated discourses of tourism development,” to transform local landscapes and the forms of culture that can be sustained (p. 87). For death metal proponents in particular, reggae’s other-directed opportunism became another point of opposition against which the scene’s underground stature was fortified, but also in relation to which death metal could be construed as a more authentically “local” brand of music making.

This emphasis on the interconnectedness of Bali’s various scenes is the real strength of *Making Scenes*. Taking this approach, Baulch valuably interprets reggae, punk, and death metal all to be taking part in a larger dialogue concerning the practice of “Balineseness” in relation to widely circulating aspects of global cultural production. One wishes at times that some of the broader ways in which punk and metal have assumed meaning in contexts outside of Bali were addressed with more attention. While it is interesting to learn that Green Day, for instance, had such a potent impact on the formation of Balinese punk, it would be useful for Baulch to have offered more context for Green Day’s significance relative to punk’s history and development, as it would have been for her to provide more background to the growth of a global extreme metal underground in the years leading up to the rise of Bali’s own death metal scene. Absent these elements, *Making Scenes* still provides much of interest for those wishing to understand how competing music scenes, genres and subcultures derive much of their meaning from the interactions – whether conflicting or cooperative – that occur between one scene and another.

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