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# ***Almafuerte: Metal pesado argento and its construction of Argentinian nationalism***<sup>1</sup>

## **ABSTRACT**

*This article analyses the tension between the local and the global in metal pesado argento of Almafuerte, the most massive band in the metal scene of Argentina. This group reinforces their local identity through their dialogue with tango and folklore, the emblematic music genres of this country. Metal pesado argento, as a bricolage of genres and metal, can be seen as contradictory and controversial. Here these aspects are studied in relation to a particular type of nationalism and its historical context, and as a feature of global metal code. Three dimensions of Almafuerte's production – sonic, visual and verbal – are analysed and discussed against the theoretical framework that accounts for the production of music and culture in the context of globalization, with particular emphasis on processes of mundialization as well as on the semiotic of culture and the notion of semiosphere. Both theories make it possible to engage in a dialogue without hierarchical levels.*

## **KEYWORDS**

Argentina  
nationalism  
*tango*  
*folklore*  
heavy metal  
globalization  
mundialization

## **INTRODUCTION**

Metal music is a thriving music genre in the local metal scene of Argentina. Rather than reproducing metal in its international form, local bands tend to adopt this originally British style and blend it with elements of the most emblematic music styles of Argentina, namely *tango* and *folklore*. It is, therefore,

1. This article is based on the author's MA dissertation 'Un análisis socio-semiótico comparativo de los discursos que conforman el metal pesado argentino de Almafuerite'/'A socio-semiotic analysis of the discourses of Almafuerite's metal pesado argentino', presented at Facultad de Lenguas of Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Argentina. In this dissertation, the production and reception of Almafuerite's albums in Argentina are discussed. Data were collected in 2012 through participant observation of many concerts (live and record shows) and interviews to fans ('*alfafueriteros*'), men and women of various ages.

necessary to provide an overview of these music genres upon which metal musicians draw to construct the national metal identity.

Argentina is well-known throughout the world for its *tango* of Río de la Plata, a unique genre that originated in the 1880s in the *conventillos*/tenement houses of the *arrabales* – the city outskirts (Archetti 2002). Just as *tango* music and dance are associated with the urban life in Buenos Aires at the turn of the century, so *folklore* is the most representative music of the provinces, depicting the rural setting of the *gaucho* and his customs, through a rich diversity of subgenres, like *zamba*, *chacarera* and *chamamé*.

Metal, in turn, is embedded within the convention of local rock. The first local rock bands were strongly influenced by hippie culture, characterized by attitudes of love and peace, flourishing mainly among middle-class families and circulating among city theatres. At the end of the 1970s, some new bands distanced themselves from hippie culture not only in the lyrics, but also in the kind of music. They composed rawer and more critical lyrics, mixed the sounds of rock and blues, and came from suburban Buenos Aires, the areas inhabited by the poorer social sectors. These rockers from the margins of Buenos Aires held concerts in small clubs of low-income neighbourhoods (Alabarces 1995; Seman et al. 2011), the same suburbs where immigrants had given birth to *tango*.

This was how *rock pesado* (heavy rock or Spanish blues) emerged, with bands such as Manal, El Reloj, Vox Dei, Pescado Rabioso and Billy Bond y La Pesada del Rock and Roll. One of the most outstanding groups was Pappo's Blues, led by Norberto 'Pappo' Napolitano, a famous Argentinian guitarist who had travelled around Europe and participated in jam sessions with Lemmy Kilmister in the forming stage of Motörhead. Pappo also shared the stage with Peter Green and B. B. King. Although Pappo was closer to blues, he learned from the New Wave of British Heavy Metal that was booming at that moment (Blumetti and Parise 1993).

When Pappo returned to Argentina in 1980, he decided to break up Pappo's Blues and formed Riff, considered the first band whose musicians wore the typical metal music outfit: leather clothes, metal studs and chains. It was also the first band to remove the seats from the concert halls to create a mosh-pit. Considerable acts of violence before, during and after the concerts were common, with the fans destroying everything on their way. Thus, Riff marked the birth of metal music in Argentina, as a migrant musical genre. In a way, Riff initiated the construction of the Argentinian metal scene. However, the local press considers another band, V8, the first metal group because their attitudes onstage, their songs and sound were more aggressive than Riff's. In those years, Argentina was under a cruel military dictatorship and many innocent people were being murdered. That metal bands emerged in such a context was both remarkable and risky. V8's teenage musicians hated the Argentinian rock bands that played songs about peace and love while these crimes were being committed. Therefore, many of V8 songs, which were closer to thrash metal than to heavy metal, contained apocalyptic metaphors meant as affronts to the hippies. Similarly, they criticized social inequalities and iniquities, as well as the war waged by Argentina and Great Britain over the South Atlantic islands.

Bassist and singer Ricardo Iorio, the founder and leader of V8, originated a new band named Hermética after V8's break-up, thus playing a fundamental role in spreading metal throughout Argentina. This new band was characterized by songs about the everyday life of Argentine youth. They also included

*folklore* music themes and tributes to South American aborigines. Hermética was dissolved in 1994, and the following year Iorio decided to form a new band, which he named Almafuerte. In this move, he had an even greater intention to infuse the national identity into metal music.

Given the foreign nature of these genres of rock and metal, the way in which metal was constructed locally can be studied from different theoretical perspectives that account for the specific ways in which global and local cultures articulate and blend. In this sense, many researchers have recently examined the relations between the local and global features of metal. Such is the case of Khan-Harris (2000), who wrote on the importance of Sepultura in the extreme metal scene of Brazil and in the world in general. Other important contributions, published in *Metal Music Studies Issues*, report on the Kenian metal scene (Knopke 2015) and metal in Puerto Rico (Varas-Díaz et al. 2014). In other hand, other compilation about the globalization of heavy metal is outstanding (Wallach et al. 2011).

In their history of heavy metal in Argentina until 1992, Blumetti and Parise (1993) describe the circulation of some international bands and the birth of the first subgenres in this country, in a narrative non-academic account that includes many details and interviews. In addition, Regev (2007) studied the relation between local and global components in pop-rock in Israel and Argentina, but did not include metal music. Other Argentinian researchers studied the history of rock in Argentina, especially from its origin in the 1960s until the 1980s, in the context of the military dictatorship and from different points of view: in journalistic (Gringberg [1977] 2014), sociological (Alabarces 1995) and cultural-historical (Pujol [2005] 2013) reports. More recent works have focused mainly on the relations between rock and the popular sectors at the periphery of Buenos Aires City since the 1990s in the context of neo-liberalism. For example, Semán et al. (2011) define the rock of those years as *rock chabón* and review some famous Argentinian metal bands, like Hermética and Almafuerte; however, they do not address the particular features that characterize them as metal music bands and only focus on the local context. As a result, most of the literature about rock and metal in Argentina fail to address the tension between the global and the local.

Within this context, the aim of this article is to discuss the relationship between local and global components in the Argentinian metal music scene by analysing Almafuerte, currently the most massive metal band in Argentina – attendance hit a record high in 2013, with 25000 fans in Malvinas Argentinas stadium. Determined to construct a strongly local type of metal music, Ricardo Iorio has, in fact, named his music style *metal pesado argento*, by means of which his music engages in dialogues with the music and the rhetoric of *tango* and *folklore*. Therefore, Almafuerte's metal code can be situated at the intersection of the global and local scenes. Their productions are a complex creation in these traditions in tension, manifested in some ideological contradictions in the lyrics and the rhetoric of the band, where the local notions of nationalism and its particular context in Argentinian history coexist with the various controversies surrounding metal at a global level.

This article is organized in three main sections. The first section outlines the theoretical framework of the global and the local, following the concept of mundialization (Ortiz 2006), the theory of pop-rock fields (Regev 2007), the notion of music scenes (Straw 1991), and the theory of semiospheres and the semiotic of culture (Lotman 2005). In addition, metal is conceptualized according to a number of scholars, especially Weinstein ([1991] 2000).

The second section provides the concept of nationalism as defined by Geertz (1973), Shumway (1991), Semán et al. (2004). The third section analyses *metal pesado argento* in light of the theoretical contributions of the authors mentioned above and incorporating Archetti's (2002) views on *tango* and *folklore*.

### ***Metal pesado argento: Between the global and the local***

Local and global metal can be situated within the discussion about globalization and mundialization, a topic often addressed in communication studies. Ortiz, a Brazilian researcher, states that '[...] mundialization is a total social phenomenon, which pervades all cultural manifestations. The whole goes to the core of its parts, redefining them in their specificities' (2015: 402). He differentiates mundialization from globalization, defining the latter as a social process produced by capitalism, while the former does not imply homogenization of the cultures in the world and the existence of one culture 'above the local, regional and national practices' (2015: 402). For him, diversity lies within the hybridization of cultures.

Concerning music in the process of globalization and mundialization, the work of Regev (2007) is innovative because he steps away from investigations that approach global music as cultural imperialism. He has analysed pop-rock music in this context and proposed the notion of *aesthetic cosmopolitanism*, which considers that some countries have naturalized the tradition of Anglo-American pop-rock and transformed these elements with an ethno-national cultural emphasis. He applies Bordieu's notion of *field* to culture and artistic production, in particular to his analysis of some Israeli and Argentinian bands willing to become famous in the global context.

The field of pop-rock has the typical hierarchical structure and logic of struggle of all artistic fields. Thus, it has dominant positions, consisting of consecrated canonic musicians and their works (mostly albums), and corresponding production of meaning positions [...] that maintain the successfully imposed criteria of evaluation.

(2007: 320)

Thus, Regev views pop-rock not as a product of cultural industry and imperialism, but within hierarchical levels.

In this study, the field notion of Regev is not relevant, because Almafuerte does not intend to become an international band, but rather to circulate among Argentinian fans within Argentina. Instead, this work is framed within Straw's (1991) theory of music scenes because metal has global and local scenes in different countries, a perspective that approaches the study of music in the context of global circulation of culture through migration, diaspora and globalization phenomena. In this sense, a musical scene is 'that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross fertilization' (Straw 1991: 373).

The concept of music scene is similar to that of the semiosphere in Lotman's (2005) semiotic of culture. This Russian author defines semiosphere as a delimited semiotic space where meaning circulates. It explains cultural behaviour because it involves a boundary that separates the semiosphere from the non- or extra-semiotic space and other semiospheres. The border operates as a filter, because the exchange of meanings is possible through the

translation process: 'The border is a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa' (Lotman 2005: 210). This exchange of meanings engages this process in a dialogue. Unlike the concept of field, the semiosphere does not imply hierarchical levels, but is closer to the process of cross-fertilization of musical scenes described by Straw:

The manner in which musical practices within a scene tie themselves to processes of historical change occurring within a larger international musical culture will also be a significant basis of the way in which such forms repositioned within that scene at the local level.

(1991: 373)

In the same way, Weinstein proposes that:

Metal is transcultural, not cross-cultural. In other words, metal is not a music tied to a particular culture, which people in other cultures happen to enjoy as outsiders; rather, metal is the music of a group of people that transcends other, pre-existing cultural and national boundaries.

(2011: 46)

Moreover, local scenes diffuse through the efforts of musicians, fans and mediators.

According to Straw (1991), the global scene has a significant basis, which is international. The ruptures and the continuities in local scenes in regard to the global one mark the birth of subgenres into metal. Many authors define metal as a music genre principally in the context of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal. One perspective defines heavy metal as '[...] a variety of music discourses, social practices, and cultural meanings, all of which revolve around concepts, images, and experiences of power' (Walser 1993: 2). This author describes metal as a genre emerging from the patriarchal order, through three strategies related with masculinity: misogyny, exscription and androgyny. Straw also addresses the genealogy of heavy metal within the rock culture and acknowledges that 'Heavy Metal is often presented as anti-fashion, anti-commercial, and authentic' (1984: 119).

Other authors like Hjelm et al. define metal as counter-culture due to the controversial nature of the genre: 'metal tends to be dominated by a distinctive commitment to "transgressive" themes and musicality [...] metal's transgressions has caused it to be a frequently controversial music' (2012: 6). They outline four elements involved in controversy: (1) its material nature; it is not ideas that create controversy, but people; (2) its public character; controversy figures prominently in mass media and public discourse; (3) the discursive-symbolic feature of the process of claims-making; controversy has a symbolic character but circulates through discursive forms; and (4) subjectivity; controversies depend on perception in certain conditions.

The definition of metal music used in this article is based principally on Weinstein's ([1991] 2000) sociology of music. She defines heavy metal as a *bricolage* of elements organized in a complex way. Further, she considers that heavy metal has its own code, which has branded it with its principal characteristics. This code is sonic, visual and verbal, and has a social dimension formed by the transaction between the artists, the audience and the mediators. For the sonic dimension, Weinstein considers that heavy metal, as a

music code, is rooted in blues rock and the tradition of acid-rock. However, 'The essential sonic element in heavy metal is power, expressed as sheer volume' ([1991] 2000: 23). Heavy metal also uses special musical instruments: distorted guitar and electric bass and drums. These are accompanied by a strongly emotional voice. The visual dimension relies on the use of black and red, which predominate on album covers, logos and clothes. As to the verbal dimension, the author argues that heavy metal songs are grouped in a binary opposition: on the one hand, Dionysian themes (sex, drugs and rock and roll), and on the other, themes of Chaos (death and destruction). Heavy metal code can be considered a semiosphere, because it is a space where meanings engage in dialogue with other spheres. Thus, the *bricolage* process may be seen as a translation between semiotic spaces.

### NATIONALISM IN ALMAFUERTE

The relation with the local in Almafuerte is manifested in the dialogue with *tango* and *folklore*, which reinforces the national identity in *metal pesado argento*. The choice of these genres involves particular forms of nationalism. This article proposes to analyse this in the context of Latin America and Argentina, because seeing it from an ethnocentric perspective may lead the reader to believe that this nationalism is 'fascist'. To understand the concept of nationalism, Geertz's explanation of how New States are formed is useful:

The first, formative stage of nationalism consisted essentially of confronting the dense assemblage of cultural, racial, local, and linguistic categories of self-identification and social loyalty that centuries of uninstructed history had produced with a simple, abstract, deliberately constructed, and almost painfully self-conscious concept of political ethnicity – a proper 'nationality' in the modern manner.

(1973: 239)

He classified these impulses of confrontation into two tendencies: essentialism, characterized by the pursuit of coherence and continuity with the tradition, extolling ancestral wisdom and pride; and epochalism, characterized by a predominant attraction towards western technical advances, such as urbanization, dynamism and contemporaneity.

Shumway (1991) explains the roots of nationalism in Argentina through two guiding drives, which coincide with Geertz's tendencies. One tallied with the liberal and elitist position that regarded Europe and the United States as progress models to be imitated. Such a movement focused on Buenos Aires city and the upper social classes, rejecting the popular traditions, regarded as inferior and barbarian. The other movement approached essentialism, but Shumway argues that it was ideologically confusing as it grouped populist, nativist, reactionary, and federal ideas, which had the following points in common: they defined Argentina by economic disparities, not by political differences; they used historical revisionism to defend the *caudillo* as an authentic popular leader; they had ideological solidarity with other Latin American countries and criticized European liberalism; they extolled the *gaucho* as the prototype of the Argentinian inhabitant and defended the traditions of the native peoples.

The production choices made by Almafuerte can be seen as predominantly essentialist. They try to extol Argentina, with its traditions and the

*gaucho*, while defending the natives. In fact, many rock journalists see Iorio as a *caudillo*, a popular leader. Shumway aptly puts it this way:

The political reflection of localism was government by charismatic individual, or *caudillo*, rather than an institution, who somehow embodies cultural folk values. In personalist, the caudillo becomes a visible symbol of authority and protection who on a smaller scale is not unlike the patriarchal symbols of king and priest with which the popular masses were already familiar. In a choice between abstract theories of government and the caudillo, the masses felt more comfortable with their caudillos, who, however primitive and ruthless their methods, were more sensitive to the fears and desires of the rural masses than the centralist elite.

(1991: 5, original emphasis)

This essentialism is associated with *tango* and *folklore*, because both music genres have their own distinctive characters, the oldest being the *gaucho* – i.e., the rural working class – considered the prototype of the traditional culture of Argentina, and therefore of *folklore*. In Shumway's words:

The *gauchos* (like the rural population generally) stemmed from the three ethnic roots: Spanish, Indian and African. They roamed freely over the pampas, lived easily off a bountiful land, captured and rode wild horses, drank abundantly, gambled, smuggled, robbed, fought, hunted wild cattle, sold cowhide to purchase what little they needed, ate mostly beef, sang improvised ballads celebrating their heroics and loves, and lived in free unions seldom consecrated by the sacrament of holy matrimony. In short, they were superstitious, filthy, unlettered, and happy.

(1991: 12, original emphasis)

On the other hand, in *tango* it is the presence of the *guapo* that stands out. He is depicted as the *compadrito*:

The free nomadic *gaucho* world had more or less vanished by the 1880s, yet the suburban *compadre* did perhaps inherit certain gaucho values: pride, independence, ostentatious masculinity, a propensity to settle matters of honor with knives.

(Collier in Archetti 2002: 7, original emphasis)

Both the *gaucho* and the *compadrito* were characterized by their forms of masculinity, so they are important sources of manliness to *metal pesado argento*. This is related with the masculinist ideology of heavy metal and rock (Weinstein [1991] 2000). Walser (1993) holds that heavy metal is a music genre shaped by patriarchy. The same can be said of the societies where *tango* and *folklore* music originated. In Almafuerte, for example, Iorio tells jokes and ironic tales and performs take-offs including sexual gestures. Sometimes he mimics homosexuals using different gestures and has been accused of discrimination. His hand gestures add ambiguity to the songs, which also transmit a sense of authority. This machismo is typically displayed not only by heavy metal stars, but also by *compadritos* of *tango*, where the woman is considered a treacherous sexual object, like in metal. When Iorio sings about love, he makes a gesture conveying the female genitals. According to Weinstein, 'The anti-female posturing of heavy metal stars relates less to misogyny than to



a rejection of the cultural values associated with femininity' ([1991] 2000: 67). Nonetheless, many of Almafuerite fans are women and they attend their concerts, Iorio being a charismatic leader for both men and women. He is not only a rock star, but also a teacher or a father who gives advice on life. Fans go to Almafuerite concerts to watch the band as well as to listen to Iorio speak to them. His discourse resembles that of the *gauchos* and many of his fans imitate it in their everyday lives. We can relate this popular discourse with New Wave of British Heavy Metal, as Weinstein explains, 'British performers speak in an exaggerated lower-class accent, the antithesis of a refined accent' ([1991] 2000: 220).

Semán et al. (2004) include Almafuerite in the local scene of Argentinian rock, specifically within *rock chabón*, a music style produced by musicians from popular sectors on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, the same place where *compadritos* and *tango* originated. For these authors, *rock chabón* originated as a response to neo-liberalism:

*Rock chabón* is the rock of those youths who, longing for the world of their elders (a world characterized by full employment and perspectives of social improvement, and symbolically expressed by Peronism), find an alternative to their exclusion from the neo-liberal socio-economic model developed in Argentina of the early 1990s in this form of musical expression.

(2004: 263)

The Argentinian context in the years of Almafuerite's birth was a nation suffering the bad consequences of the neo-liberal politics implemented by President Carlos Menem in the 1990s. Those economic measures brought unemployment and inequalities. Menem adhered to Peronism, but during his administration he promoted the hardest neo-liberalist policies, such as the privatization of many state enterprises. The musicians of *rock chabón* were the children of people that relied on the imaginary of Peronism and its ideal of working people fighting for egalitarian principles. This ideology, also named 'Justicialismo', was constructed around the former Argentinian President Juan Domingo Perón in the mid-1940s. This movement has different internal currents, but is characterized as a populism on behalf of workers' rights. Semán et al. explain that Populism offered the construction of *pueblo* and the narrative of national belonging: 'the effectiveness of populist formulations and narrative persists beyond the disappearance of the socio-economic conditions that sustained the Peronist political regime. The hegemony of the globalization process did not kill the populist imaginary' (2011: 264).

In this context, youngsters were disillusioned and this was reflected in the songs, in the way the lyrics extol the nation, a recurrent topic according to Semán et al. (2011), who classify Almafuerite's songs as *rock chabón* because of their strong nationalism, which should not be seen as 'fascist'. The musicians of *rock chabón* identify with 'the nation's people'. They cite the song 'Zamba de resurrección'/'Zamba of Resurrection', where Almafuerite wrote 'Desheredados, gauchos, indios, empobrecidos reencarnan'/'The disinherited, gauchos, indians, impoverished people reincarnate' (2011: 282). Then, poor workers embody the continuation of *gauchos* and aboriginal people and represent the popular sectors, so-called '*cabecitas negras*'/'little black heads' during Perón's government. Almafuerite shares this sense of nationalism with *rock chabón*. In fact, in his authorized biography, Iorio explains that he is not a



Peronist, but he identifies himself with the poor people defended by Perón (Torres 2007). For Seman et al. 'This is an articulation highly prized by a non-liberal school of Argentine historical revisionism, and, above all, is one of the central narratives of the imaginary woven by Peronism' (2011: 282).

However, nationalism in Almafuerte is confusing and contradictory; it is as essentialist and controversial as metal itself. On the one hand, in different songs, along with interviews and Iorio's authorized biography, the band acknowledges their opposition to Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, an Argentinian soldier and popular hero that fought in the Cuban Revolution. Iorio dislikes 'Che' because he is against the use of guns (Torres 2007: 118, 210) to defend national struggles. His fighting tool is music and therefore his idols are the musicians of *tango* and *folklore*. His opposition to 'Che' is controversial given that many youngsters worship this hero. Similarly controversial were the xenophobic statements that Iorio made in an interview in *Rolling Stone* magazine, where he claimed that Jewish immigrants should not sing the Argentinian national anthem. Iorio faced charges for making such statements but was acquitted. Since then, the media has called Iorio and Almafuerte 'Nazis' or 'fascist'. However, this has not stopped him and in one song he prides Mohamed Seineldin, a famous Argentinian Army General who opposed the neo-liberal policies of the 1990s, thus challenging political correctness in a country where publicly supporting the military equals taking a fascist stance, especially after the military dictatorship that ended in 1983. Such events led the media to condemn Almafuerte's expression of nationalism and their rightist leanings, but in his biography he explains that he is against the military dictatorship, the war and the use of guns. He wants to protect his nation with his music (Torres 2007). The way he has chosen to take care of his country is by singing about his nation, reviving the history of the most unprotected or vulnerable citizens of Argentina. In his song, Iorio intends to extol Seineldin as a human being, not as military man, but still the media qualified his attitude as controversial.

Almafuerte's disapproval of the war is best illustrated in the lyrics of 'El visitante'/'The visitor', about the South Atlantic conflict between Argentina and Great Britain. This is the soundtrack that Almafuerte composed for the film about the 1982 South Atlantic War also entitled *El Visitante*. Some film scenes and some images of one of Almafuerte's concert appear in the video clip of the song. Both the film and the song depict the figure of the war veterans, while the song and the video refer to the life of the soldiers after the war, i.e., their physical, psychological, and social suffering and consequences. Such objections, as seen in Almafuerte's and V8's lyrics, show these bands' disagreement with the decision of the Argentinian government to initiate a war, and their contempt for the local media and the de facto government, who lied to the citizens about the outcome of the conflict. However, although Iorio sympathizes with the veterans – neglected by the Argentinian society – he prohibited a chant that rock fans sang during and after the war: 'El que no salta es un inglés'/'Those who don't jump are English'. Iorio acknowledges the English tradition of rock and metal and therefore objects to such a disrespectful chant. Nevertheless, the Argentine map in the cover art of *Profeta en su tierra*/*Prophet in His Own Land* shows the Malvinas/Falkland islands.

The fact that Iorio faced charges has turned *metal pesado argento* into a most controversial band. The contradictions involve criticizing the jews while supporting the military, defending the people while speaking out against Che Guevara. Ideas cannot be contradictory in themselves, but people and productions

can. One important feature of this controversy is its subjective nature: it depends on a certain perception of reality. Therefore, this article intends to address the contradictions from the local context of Argentina and not from an ethnocentric perspective, such as that of Hjelm et al., who ‘use the case to discuss how “controversiality” of metal is dependent on the social context and the cultural context and the interpretations that allows and enables’ (2012: 13). Many of Almafuerite’s fans accept and even forgive these contradictions, holding in high regard the characteristics arising from the dialogue between *tango* and *folklore*.

In the post neo-liberal context, Almafuerite continues the same construction of nationalism. Iorio states that he aims to defend Argentinian culture and history against the transnational practices of neo-liberalism and globalization. He criticizes his fellow citizens who leave Argentina and work abroad, especially the middle-class citizens who do not mind cleaning other people’s homes on a foreign land. Iorio would rather resist in his own country (Torres 2007). In another attempt to criticize neo-liberalism, Almafuerite created their own record company: Dejesú Records, whose albums circulate only in Argentina. Then, through extolling this country, Almafuerite defends the popular sectors: the people of the provinces, the *gauchos* and the poor workers of Buenos Aires city.

### ***The bricolage of metal pesado argento***

*Metal pesado argento* can be considered a *bricolage*, following Weinstein’s ([1991] 2000) definition of heavy metal. It is a complex formation combining, as explained above, metal elements with *tango* and *folklore* music. Almafuerite draws not only on the music of these genres, but also on its languages. In this sense, the three music genres can be considered semiospheres: *tango*, *folklore* and metal appear in the sonic, verbal and visual dimensions of *metal pesado argento*. Almafuerite uses the three instruments of metal (distorted guitar, electric bass and drums), along with the guitar solos of Claudio ‘Tano’ Marciello and Ricardo Iorio’s voice, which often sounds like that of *tango* singers. Almafuerite’s heavy metal has been influenced by Motörhead and Black Sabbath, but their originality lies in making heavy metal versions of *tango* and *folklore* songs. They also include songs from these genres by playing the typical instruments: creole guitar and *bombo legüero*. They have covered such distinctive Argentinian popular singers as Carlos Gardel, Alfredo Le Pera, Aníbal Troilo, Cátulo Castillo, Nacho Whisky and José Larralde, especially songs with strong social criticism.

This introduction of local musical instruments is comparable to that reported in other studies. For example, Khan-Harris found similar cases in Extreme Metal: ‘[...] bands from a diverse set of locations made music drawing on local instrumentation and constructed place in various ways, including the “Oriental Metal” of the Israeli band Orphaned Land and the “Salsa Metal” of Venezuelan band Laberinto’ (2000: 20). Regev noted the same in pop-rock in local fields: ‘This practice includes the use of native music instruments (sometimes modified to be electric), indigenous vocal techniques of enunciation through singing and rhythmic patterns, and, most obviously, recording electrified pop-rock cover versions of traditional music’ (2007: 325).

As regards the verbal dimension, the name *metal pesado argento* is important because it contains the translation of heavy metal into Spanish and the

addition of *argento*, the short for the adjective *Argentinian*, also related to the Latin adjective *argentum* meaning 'plated' or 'silvery', thus reinforcing the literal meaning of the word 'metal' and investing the music style with an Argentinian identity, originating in Río de La Plata/River of Silver. As Nicolas Shumway argues:

In the case of Argentina, the country's very name reflects the area's development from colony to country, from imperial territory to nation, for the name Argentina had a slow, uncertain evolution, not unlike that of the country itself. In 1514, one year after Balboa discovered the Pacific, Juan Díaz de Solís was commissioned by the Spanish crown to search the coast of South America for a river passage connecting the two oceans. A year later, Solís entered the immense estuary separating what is now Argentina and Uruguay, only to be killed by Indians who, feigning friendship, wooed him and some of his crew to shore. Later explorers, believing that the estuary led to the silver-rich areas of Upper Peru, now Bolivia, renamed it The River of Silver, 'El Río de la Plata'. From the Spanish word *plata*, meaning silver, comes the English corruption, the River Plate. The name *Argentina* preserves the association with silver in that it derives from *argentum*, the Latin term of silver (Rosenblat, *Argentina, Historia de un Nombre* 13–18).

(1991: 7)

In addition, the name of the band is a tribute to an Argentine poet, Pedro Bonifacio Palacios, whose pseudonym was Almafuerte. This name is a compound word containing the noun *alma*/soul and the adjective *fuerte*/strong. Both appear in a poem entitled 'Milongas clásicas'. Here the lyrics provide a dualistic conception of man, composed of body and soul, to demonstrate that despite life's ups and downs, he will survive with his '*carne sana*'/'healthy flesh' and '*alma fuerte*'/'strong soul'.<sup>2</sup> These verses are related to the history of the band, because Almafuerte was born after the break-up of Hermética. The true reasons for the separation of the band are unknown, but through the lyrics written by Almafuerte, we can perceive a sense of treachery. Perhaps Iorio tried to demonstrate physical strength (strong soul) in spite of this predicament. The adjective 'strong' is also associated with the power of heavy metal code.

Both the album titles and the lyrics are written in Spanish, but they also contain *tango* and *folklore* jargon. The former is characterized by a special vocabulary named *Lunfardo*. According to Grayson, 'By origin, Lunfardo is the idiom of the Buenos Aires underworld, a thieves' cant comparable to English Alsatian and French argot' (1964: 66). At the beginning, *Lunfardo* served as a secret language, but later it spread considerable:

With the passage of time, however, Lunfardo has emerged from the water front to permeate the everyday speech of higher strata of Buenos Aires society. Although its inelegance is undisputed and purist rail against it, it has come to be employed to some extent by all porteños, if only humorously, and has developed a fairly extensive literature of its own. Moreover, as the language of the ever-popular tango, Lunfardo has spread from its native Puerto to other parts of the Argentine and even beyond her borders.

(Grayson 1964: 66)

2. The original verses are: '*Que me dejen solo, solo, / sin apoyo, sin escudo, / cual un párvulo desnudo / sobre un témpano de polo ¡pero pueda yo bajar, / carne sana y alma fuerte, / y en el antro de tu suerte / revolver y escudriñar!*' (Palacios 1967: 99).

3. *Tehuelches* is one of the native peoples of Patagonia, in the south of Argentina.
4. *Payador* is a roustic troubadour, whose business it was to entertain the gauchos in their hours of recreation.[...] The *payador* lives no longer except in tradition, an interesting type that has passed away along with the social class to which he belonged. As in the case of our own cowboys who were forced ever westward until they have become non-existent as a social class, the *gauchos* were forced to retreat before the advancing forces of modern civilization, to give place to the more prosaic landowners and farmers. (Umphrey 1918: 145, original emphasis) Augusto Romero is one of the few surviving *payadores* of the twenty-first century. He lives and dresses following the tradition of nineteenth-century *gauchos*.

In contrast, *folklore* uses the typical vocabulary of the gauchesque literature. It exalts the speech of nineteenth century *gauchos* facing the growing immigration and hybridization. Archetti explains:

This reinvention of tradition was made possible by the privileged place that the *literature gauchesca* (gauchesque literature) occupied in popular urban and rural literary consumption from the 1880s. The epic poem *Martin Fierro* written by José Hernandez in 1872 in a style reproducing gauchesque rural language was a synthesis of the idealization of the gaucho (Borges 1980: 108). Its narrative of a gaucho struggling against state injustice in order to keep his freedom was transformed into a model for a 'national literature'.

(2002: 5, original emphasis)

Almafuerte uses words from languages of both semiospheres, *tango* and *folklore*. Therefore, the band identifies with the whole country – namely, with the grasslands and the city, with the metropolis and the provinces.

Regarding the albums, the title of the first album, *Mundo guanaco/Guanaco World* makes reference to the *Guanaco*, a mammal of Argentina known for spitting. In *lunfardo*, a *guanaco* is a disgusting and bad-mannered person. Then, *Guanaco World* refers to an ominous reality, as do most of metal album titles. But the use of *lunfardo* also endows the title with an Argentinian identity. Indeed, extolling Argentina is a predominant practice, as can be seen from the titles of other albums.

Continuing with the verbal dimension, Almafuerte restructures the binary opposition between Dionysian and Chaotic themes. In the former, there is the resurgence of the trinity sex, drugs and rock and roll (Weinstein [1991] 2000). The songs of Almafuerte do not celebrate any of these three elements. On the contrary, sex and drugs are condemned as destroyers of man. In this respect, following Weinstein, Almafuerte's songs resemble those of speed/thrash metal:

Although speed/thrash provides some of the most Dionysian sounds ever invented by human beings, it overturns or ignores the Dionysian lyrical themes. It specialized in chaos. Sex is rarely mentioned, alcohol and drugs are judged to be bad rather than pleasurable.

([1991] 2000: 50)

Sex and drugs are substituted by new objects of pleasure: travel and life in the grasslands, barbecue with friends, and wine and beer drinking. Both friendship and drinking are generally celebrated in metal concerts. The praise of rock and roll is replaced with a celebration of *metal pesado argento*. Friendship also has special characteristics: it celebrates loyalty and the friend is compared to a brother. This way of relating to friends is shared by the *compadres* of *tango*. The faithful and loyal friend is characterized by a metaphor, '*de fierro*' ('of iron'), thus reinforcing the metallic sense. Almafuerte has also produced songs to pay tribute to some musician friends of Iorio's, such as *folklore* singer the *tehuélche*,<sup>3</sup> Rubén Patagonia, and the *payador*,<sup>4</sup> Augusto Romero.

Almafuerte has themes of Chaos. Their lyrics include what Weinstein calls 'interest in disorder, conflict, opposition, and contradiction. It incorporates images of monsters, the grotesque, mayhem, and disaster. It speaks of injustice and of resistance, rebellion, and death' ([1991] 2000: 39). In the case of the

New Wave of British Heavy Metal, this set of topics opposed the characteristic Eros of hippie culture. In Almafuerte, the representation of Chaos results from the contraposition to the themes of *Cumbia*, Pop and Electronic music, such as the celebration of dance and courtship. Almafuerte's themes relate to those enumerated by Weinstein: religion, injustice, wickedness, mental disease and night. First, religion appears heartily and contradictorily: they condemn Catholicism as a justification for conquering America and massacring natives. For this reason, Almafuerte defends the natives' pre-Christian religions. Nonetheless, they also adhere to a Christian spiritualist religion of Argentina named 'Escuela Científica Basilio'/'Basilio Scientific School',<sup>5</sup> which they believe to be a source of truth and equilibrium. Concerning injustice and wickedness, there are elements of social criticism in Almafuerte, who denounce poverty and the poor working conditions of workers, environmental pollution, corruption, mass media manipulation, killings by police, and the South Atlantic War. Another important theme in Almafuerte's songs is their strong disapproval of human errors, treachery figuring prominently among them. The night is depicted as the scenario where human excesses and miseries abound, while meetings in the grasslands in daylight are extolled. Like speed/thrash metal, Almafuerte presents critiques with humour and irony. For example, they include references to card games and children's games like 'hide and seek'.

Regarding the visual dimension, logo, album covers and fashion are important in Almafuerte. Its logo is not constructed with Helvetica typeface, but in the typical colours of metal: white letters on a black and red background. The importance of the logo lies in the set-up of the letters: in some cases, we see it as one word, Almafuerte, but in others, as two words, *alma* and *fuerte*. In the latter case, they possibly intend to reinforce the meaning of the adjective *fuerte*/strong, thus intensifying their musical power. Both versions of the logo are reproduced in patches, T-shirts, sweatshirts, flags and tattoos for the fans, who often wear leather jackets, metal-studded accessories and black clothes. During the concerts, Almafuerte musicians wear T-shirts with logos of classic heavy metal bands, but they also include elements of Argentinian culture: Iorio wears a tuft of hair and so do many of his fans. Formerly, he used to wear long hair but in the 1990s he decided have it cut, so as to differentiate himself from Argentinian *cumbia* musicians, who started wearing long hair too. Regarding outfits, in many concerts Iorio has started to wear the typical overalls of blue-collar workers, whereas guitarist Carlos 'Tano' Marciello wears belts, waistcoats and bracelets with *guarda pampa*, a geometric design characteristic of aboriginal natives.

Weinstein holds that 'The heavy metal code specifies that what is depicted must be somewhat ominous, threatening and unsettling, suggesting chaos and bordering on the grotesque' ([1991] 2000: 29). In album covers, Almafuerte's relation to metal, *tango* and *folklore* is visible. The first album, *Mundo guanaco/ Guanaco World*, has white letters for logo and title, against the typical black background of metal. The second album is entitled *Del entorno/Of Surroundings* and its cover art depicts a human foot in black tennis shoes treading on dog faecal matter on dry pasture. This image is associated with the restlessness of the metal code, while the presence of pastureland is linked to the grasslands and *folklore* themes. The cover art of the third album, *Almafuerte*, shows a photograph of three winning playing cards in a game of *truco*, a popular card game in Argentina. The presence of playing cards is related to *folklore* and to the title 'Ace of spades' by Motörhead. The winning card is the 'ancho

5. The Basilio Scientific School is a Spiritual/ Religious organization. We call the places we gather, Schools, as of today we have 356 schools worldwide in South America, North America, Europe and Australia. Founded in Buenos Aires, Argentina on November 1, 1917 by two French immigrants Eugenio Portal (1867–1927) and Blanca Aubreton de Lambert (1867–1920). The motive for its founding is to reconnect humanity with God, and the recognition, study, and expansion of the Spiritual Knowledge that Jesus of Nazareth transmitted during his time on earth (not as in the Bible) and continues to transmit from the spiritual dimension of harmony, showing mankind the truth regarding the existence of the spirit in all its manifestations (Source: <http://www.basiliousa.com/%23/about/aboutPage>).

6. *Pampa* is the central region of Argentina. There is much countryside and its geography is suitable for agrarian economy. The Pampas were the places where the *gauchos* lived.

*de espadas*/'ace of swords' and its presence reinforces the sense of power. The same game-like and ironic element appears in the sixth album. This is '*Piedralibre*/'Safe' (an expression used by the winner in the children's game '*Escondidas*/'hide and seek' – when he or she reaches the home base and cannot be tagged). Its cover art shows three men's hands painted black, red and white, the colours of metal and of Almafuerter's logo. The three hands touching each other strengthen the sense of friendship. Below the hands is a white and sky-blue cross. These are the colours of the Argentinian flag.

Other Argentinian elements appear in the fourth album, which contains a set of remastered songs. Its title is *Profeta en su tierra/Prophet in His Own Land* and its cover art is a map of Argentina on a silver backdrop, which reinforces the image of *metal pesado argento* and its connection with the Latin adjective *argentum*. Here the translation between different semiospheres is literal. The same occurs in the fifth album entitled *A fondo blanco/On a White Background*. The backdrop of its cover art is literally white. It is interesting to note that this phrase in *lunfardo* means 'drinking all in one gulp'. Their latest two albums have a special relation to the grassland. This is interesting because Iorio and his wife have lived in the countryside for some years. They moved away from Buenos Aires City to live in a cottage without Internet and phone connections. Similarly, Almafuerter has never had an official web page. Their contact with the Internet appeared only three years ago, when the band opened a Facebook account, coordinated by the band manager. The penultimate album is entitled *Toro y Pampa/Bull and Pampa*<sup>6</sup> and its cover art portrays a bull alone in the grasslands. Bovine meat is characteristic of Argentinian economy and gastronomy, and the choice of a bull rather than a cow reinforces the sense of virility.

Another interesting visual element onstage is the regular presence of musicians from other musical genres, such as Argentinian rock, *tango* and *folklore* musicians, and just as the *folkloristas* wear *gauchos* outfit, many Almafuerter fans attend *folklore* concerts in their metal apparel. In a 2015 concert, one of these musicians was a famous female guitarist, Carina Alfie. Therefore, Almafuerter is not an example of what Walser calls 'exscription', i.e., 'total denial of gender anxieties through the articulation of fantastic worlds without women' (1993: 110). Alfie has also appeared onstage next to Iorio and the other musicians as a colleague or friend, not as a sexual object. As for other visual elements, the concert lights range from predominantly red, the characteristic colour of metal, to white and sky-blue, the colours of the Argentinian flag. The very presence of these colours constructs the Argentinian symbology.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has analysed the way *metal pesado argento* is constructed, by using the methodology proposed by Weinstein. Thus, the way in which Almafuerter gives an Argentinian identity to its music style was reconstructed by focusing on the combination of metal, *tango* and *folklore*, which serves as an example of the tension between local and global components in metal music.

Almafuerter is an original product that is not homologous to economic globalization, but an example of the mundialization of culture. The ideological contradictions in its productions are not only part of the Argentine historical context, but also of the rock and metal tradition: metal in particular has become a very controversial musical genre. In future works, it is necessary to analyse the consumption and reception of Almafuerter among its fans, called '*almafuerteros*', because these features could contribute to researching



the social dimension of this phenomenon in the Argentinian metal scene in the context of globalization and mundialization. It would also be relevant to research the new forms in which *tango* and *folklore* figure currently as symbols of identity in Argentina.

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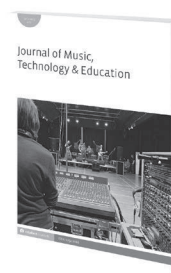
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