

# Translocal Religious Identification in Christian Metal Music Videos and Discussions on *YouTube*

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*This chapter shows that, although the geographical roots of Christian metal (CM) bands do play a role, not least for the audiences, the crossing of national borders in online settings is equally important both to the audience and to the bands themselves. A detailed look into the discourse and interaction around Finnish CM music on YouTube.com is the basis for considering social media sites, such as YouTube, as providing a space for translocal negotiation of and identification on the basis of religiosity, music, language and place.*

## Introduction

While established geographical roots often play an important role in making singers and bands authentic, today's subcultures utilise the World Wide Web to transcend the boundaries of place (e.g. Barker and Taylor 2007; Connell and Gibson 2003; Peterson and Bennett 2004). In the context of religious music subcultures, it is not only music that the artists wish to spread but also certain beliefs and values. Drawing on recent work on language, multisemioticity and globalization (e.g. Blommaert 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Leppänen et al. 2013, 2014) and on religion and popular culture (e.g. Jousmäki 2013; Moberg 2009; Partridge 2010), this chapter explores transnationalism in relation to how Christian metal (CM) music adherents interact with each other on the social media site *YouTube.com* on issues related to music, place and religiosity. This chapter proposes a bottom-up understanding of religiosity more specifically as *religious*

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*identification*, processed and indexed through discursive and multisemiotic means (cf. Leppänen et al. 2013, 2014), most notably text and visuality. Through analyzing such practices, this chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of the nature of online interaction and grassroots-level religious identification as *translocal*.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I briefly discuss the history of CM music, and religion in Finland, and consider the two together from 1990s onwards. Next, I review the literature on Finnish CM music especially on online contexts and propose the term *translocal* to be used in the context of CM music. After that, I introduce the notion of religious identification and show how it will be applied in the analytical part that follows. Following a three-part analysis of song lyrics, a video and comments, I conclude by considering the broader implications of the results obtained thus far.

## Background

Built around a combined interest in Christian beliefs and metal music, CM music was born in the US in the 1980s. Such a combination proved, and still is, problematic for many: while CM music distanced itself from anti-Christian metal music, it was regarded as inauthentic by secular metal music adherents. Nor were Christian believers enthusiastic about their young people playing such rebellious music (Luhr 2005, 106–121; Moberg 2009, 225–229). Thirty years later, in Finland, CM music is still a border (sub)culture (cf. Grönstrand in this volume), which transcends not only the national but also the traditional cultural borders of Christianity and of metal music culture: it does not comply with forms of practising Christian religion that favour modesty, silence and subtlety – the characteristics of religious practice that appeal to many Finns (Ketola et al. 2011), nor does it accept the rejection of Christian beliefs and values conveyed in secular metal music culture, in black and anti-Christian metal music in particular (Bossius 2003, 77–78; Jousmäki forthcoming; Partridge 2010, 498–499).

As Vertovec (2009, 145) notes, religion is inherently transnational in nature, and things are no different when it comes to CM music. Like various other religions, as well as popular cultural influences, CM music found its way to Finland in the 1990s – or, rather, was appropriated by young local Christians who were willing to take up the idea of merging the so-called ‘good news’ of their faith with what they considered to be good music (Moberg 2009; Nikula 2012). However, the Finnish social and religious context within which Christian metal music began to settle differed somewhat from the original

evangelical context of the subculture (Jousmäki 2013, 274). Even today, the Christian metal music phenomenon in Finland is not the same as it was in California in the 1980s: there are differences between the national, societal and religious backgrounds of today's bands around the world and influences. For example, while US-based Christian metal bands are often nurtured in the Evangelical Christian sphere of influence (Moberg 2009, 173), in the predominantly Lutheran Finland, Christian metal music is also employed in a distinctive Metal Mass (Jousmäki 2013, 273–274; Moberg 2009, 196). While the Evangelical Lutheran Church has a long tradition as Finns' default religious orientation, the Church today is losing members, especially among young adults (Niemelä 2007). At the same time, young people are searching for new forms of spiritual and religious expression—such as Christian metal music (see Moberg 2009). Likewise, evangelical, charismatic and experiential movements are gaining popularity (Kääriäinen et al. 2009, 110, 117; 2005, 69–71). Moberg (2009, 179) also points out that although most Finnish Christian metalheads are Lutheran, 'the lines between denominational affiliations become fluid in this context' as people may participate more or less actively in activities across institutional religious borders.

## Translocality

Since the 1990s, various Finnish metal bands, such as *HIM*, *Nightwish* and *Stratovarius*, to name a few, have been acknowledged internationally to the extent that metal music has been closely connected with the very notion of 'Finnishness' (Lukkarinen 2010). In this spirit, various Finnish CM bands have also become popular outside Finland, while the Finnish fan base also connects with and admires CM bands from other countries. Rather than calling this transnational, in this chapter I prefer the term *translocal*. It has previously been applied to the study of other music scenes (e.g. Peterson and Bennett 2004) and activity cultures (Leppänen et al. 2009; Peuronen 2011.) In the context of CM music, translocality is an apt term because Christian metal is, not only, a border (sub) cultural movement between Christianity and metal music on the one hand and between various different institutions and traditions *within* Christianity on the other; but also, despite being geographically and religiously and culturally dispersed across specific locales, is rather effortlessly conjured up with the help of today's virtual communication technologies (Block 2004; Jousmäki forthcoming).

Previously, Moberg (2009, 191–194) has pointed to the important role the Internet has had for the development of what he calls a transnational Christian metal music community:

The Internet has played an important role in the formation of what can be viewed as a transnational Christian metal discursive community with a set of common ideals and goals as it also offers a range of opportunities for communication and interaction among its members. However, in doing so it has not only affected the nature of Christian metal discourse by making it more fixed and concentrated but, arguably, also entailed the formation of certain requirements on participation, such as the acquisition and understanding of a specific use of language (*cf.* Moberg 2008, 97). (Moberg 2009, 192.)

Moberg posits that the Internet allows Christian metal enthusiasts to interact with each other, and that, in doing so, they engage in the discursive work of constructing not only the subculture (or scene, as he calls it) but also its language norms. (A similar tendency of peers regulating and monitoring each others' language use is also found in online discussions around other interests; Leppänen et al. (2013) discuss fan fiction and football as examples.) However, the literature on CM still lacks a description of that type of communication and interaction. While Moberg's analysis answers questions like how 'core members' of the scene, such as the administrators of central CM websites, define the basic functions and meanings of CM and how those outside the scene view it, as a largely macro-level approach it does not go into detail about the discourse practices of more or less sporadic social media users engaging with CM. This type of information is important, however, because it provides us with an understanding of the constant, contemporary making of CM translocally, especially from the perspective of the online audience, the members of which can seldom be anticipated in terms of, for example, nationality, age, sex, worldview or socio-economic status. Consequently, this chapter seeks to describe on a micro-level the on-going identification processes involved in the discursive and multisemiotic interaction of people affiliated with CM, Finnish CM in particular, around the world.

## Religious identification

In addition to discussing CM as translocal, another central undertaking of this chapter is the application of the concept of religious identification which points, firstly, to the fluidity of ‘identity’, that is, to the on-going discursive construction of identities in multisemiotic online spaces such as *YouTube.com* (henceforth *YouTube*). As Leppänen et al. (2013, 2014) and Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 14–21) argue, ‘identification’, as a term, steps away from what has become known as the more fixed concept of ‘identity’ and places more emphasis on the active process-type construal of it. According to them, identification entails affinity, alignment, emotional attachment as well as ideological notions of togetherness, which, in online environments, are put forth and indexed through using different multisemiotic resources, such as texts, sounds, pictures and moving images.

Secondly, as regards *religious* identification in particular, it refers to those a(spe)cts of identification that relate to and evoke certain discourses, systems of belief and religiosities. In the context of CM, it is important to highlight the fact that more is at stake than in the more traditional forms of Christianity or ‘religion’. Typically for (late) modern religiosity more generally, it can mean the incorporation of popular culture, consumerism, health and well being, and so on, into the realm of religion (see e.g. Ahlbäck 2012; Vincett & Woodhead 2010). But again, while CM centrally manifests itself through and with the help of popular cultural forms of expression, according to Moberg (2009, 172, 205–207) it builds strongly on the basic premises of Protestant Christianity. In the following, I explain my approach to study how this ‘building’ takes place in practice – that is, how religious identification is achieved – in CM videos and discussions on *YouTube*.

## Aim, data and method

To explore translocal religiosity and practices of religious identification on *YouTube*, I will look at different linguistic, discursive and textual-visual resources used in one specific *YouTube* video and in the discussions taking place around this and other similar videos. The central questions in the analysis become what the socio-cultural and religious meanings conveyed in and through these multisemiotic choices are and how these provide the discussants with points of translocal religious identification. This analytic approach combines sociolinguistics, multimodal discourse analysis and online ethnography (Blommaert 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Kytölä and

Androutsopoulos 2012; Leppänen et al. 2013, 2014; Leppänen et al. 2009), which enables a close reading of the multisemiotic features of user-generated videos whilst also situating the findings in socio-cultural and religious contexts. As a theoretically loaded tool of inquiry, it proposes a bottom-up approach to the construction of situated religious identification. The approach is not that of semiotic theory in a strict sense but draws on some aspects of it and incorporates them into a discourse-analytic framework, in the vein of sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert 2010), where discourse is by default taken as multisemiotic, that is, not merely text or talk but also visuality, orality and embodiment – in this chapter, mostly text and visuals.

While various social media sites are blooming today, this chapter focuses on only one example of such a site. Overall, *YouTube* videos on CM music make a good case for studying contemporary ways of participating in the production and consumption of socio-cultural reality and of interacting with others. As one of the most popular forms of social media, *YouTube* works not only as a site for distributing and circulating popular cultural products licensed by large record and film companies, for instance, but also as a platform for the general public to create anew, reinterpret and challenge commercial, ideological and political creations, and to connect, if only temporarily, with other like-minded people (Burgess and Greene 2009, Leppänen and Häkkinen 2012; Leppänen et al. 2013, 2014; Meikle 2002). As regards CM in particular, the creation of online videos makes it possible for the users to participate in a marginal musical-religious subculture independent of their geographical location, to find others with similar interests and to experience groupness and belonging.

As to the specific band around which the videos under scrutiny are made, *HB*, it provides a particularly apt example for the study of questions of music, place and identification because the band combines aspects of both ‘fluidity’ and ‘fixity’ (cf. Connell and Gibson 2003, 9–11). On the one hand, HB represents itself as a pronouncedly Finnish CM band as indexed by their use of Finnish and by the long-term use of blue and white colours (that is, the colours of the national flag of Finland) in the central photograph on their official website,<sup>1</sup> thus strengthening the disputable idea of an inherent tie between Finland and metal music (cf. *ibid.*, 1–15) – and Christianity. The claim that there is a natural connection between any of these three is debated in the comments section of some other CM videos (see Jousmäki forthcoming). On the other hand, their more recent practice of releasing albums in English and touring in Turkey and Central Europe,

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1 <[www.hbmusic.net](http://www.hbmusic.net)> Web addresses accurate as of 30 January, 2013.

together with an upsurge in their presence in various forms of social media (*MySpace*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube*),<sup>2</sup> gives the band a more fluid profile.

The video analyzed in this chapter is built around the song *Lovesong* performed by *HB* and uploaded onto *YouTube* by a Brazilian user *sonatamano*.<sup>3</sup> At a later point in the analysis, other data are also incorporated to widen the perspective. These include comments around three other videos on *HB*: *Ambition* by the Costa Rican *Henry Fernández*,<sup>4</sup> *Jeremia* ‘Jeremiah’ by the Brazilian *Aline Sartori*,<sup>5</sup> and *Jesus on Herra* (*Live at Turkuhalli*) ‘Jesus is the Lord (Live at Turku Hall)’ by the Brazilian *Jessica Kon*.<sup>6</sup> While *YouTube* features numerous *HB*-centred videos, the majority of which are uploaded by users of Finnish or Latin origin, these four are representative of the wider genre in terms of both visuality and textuality as well as of the thematic nature of the comment threads.

### ***HB as a translocal Christian metal group***

The analysis begins with a close reading of a *YouTube* video *HB – The love Song – Legendado*,<sup>4</sup> uploaded by user *sonatamano* in late 2008. *HB* first published the song on their first English-language album *Frozen Inside* in 2008. The album is an English version of their second Finnish album, *Enne* ‘omen’ (2006), where *Lovesong* was known as *Jesus on Herra* ‘Jesus is the Lord’. Before analysing the video and the comments it has received in more detail, a more in-depth discussion of the song itself is in place to gain a better understanding of what translocal religious identification means in this case. In the following, I will first compare the Finnish lyrics with the English ones as provided by the band on their website. Although lyrics are often best analyzed in the context of music and performance (cf. Frith 1996, 158–182) – and I do make some observations about sound – in the context of CM, the analysis of lyrics as individual artefacts is also justified because it is exactly the lyrics that make the difference between Christian and secular metal music (e.g. Jousmäki 2011, 2013). Towards the end of the discussion, I

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2 <[www.myspace.com/hbmetal](http://www.myspace.com/hbmetal)>; <[www.facebook.com/pages/HB-official-/149236541794296](https://www.facebook.com/pages/HB-official-/149236541794296)>; <[www.twitter.com/hbmetal](https://www.twitter.com/hbmetal)>; <[www.youtube.com/user/HBvideochannel](https://www.youtube.com/user/HBvideochannel)>

3 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqYJymmGHug>>

4 <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=xN4bjOmSaKU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xN4bjOmSaKU)>

5 <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pa9O8xysbg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pa9O8xysbg)>

6 <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=582P412fP2o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=582P412fP2o)>

look at the differences between the versions from the perspective of translocality and religious identification.

Despite the different meanings conveyed in *HB*'s song title in Finnish and in English, the lyrics resemble each other to the extent that *Lovesong* is easily taken as a translation of *Jeesus on Herra* 'Jesus is the Lord'. However, there is more to it. To start with, while the Finnish lyrics contain three verses only, the English lyrics expand up to five verses (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** The lyrics of *Jeesus on Herra* 'Jesus is the Lord' (left; translated into English by H.J) and *Lovesong* (right). Published on the band's homepage <[www.hbmusic.net/index.php?page=310](http://www.hbmusic.net/index.php?page=310)>; <[www.hbmusic.net/index.php?page=410](http://www.hbmusic.net/index.php?page=410)>.

Vain sinua Herrani, vain Sinua Herrani, vain Sinua rakastan, Herrani	For you alone my Father For you alone have my love, oh Father.
Vallan saat, nyt tunnustan, että Jeesus on Herra. Hän on!	You are love, from you comes all Even death could not hold you. (You live!) Now I know, I so love you
Hei! Miksi en tee niin kuin Sä tahdot, jos Sua rakastan niin paljon? Hei! Miksi en mee niin kuin sä tahdot, jos Sua ylistän ja palvon?	Jesus you are my Saviour. You reign! There's no one else like you God x 4 There's no one else who can compare with you.
('It is only You, my Lord, only You, my Lord, only You, my Lord, that I love	Hey, I want to be more like you Father, You are everything to me.
I give you all the power, I now confess that Jesus is the Lord. He is!	Still the good I should do I do not do Weren't you everything to me?
Hey! If I love you this much, why am I not doing things Your way? Hey! If I praise and adore You, why am I not going Your way?')	I know faith comes from you That's why I need you, so please fill me with you power I don't wanna lose your loving presence, Disobeying your Holy Spirit.
HB: <i>Jeesus on Herra</i> , <i>Enne</i> (2006)	HB: <i>Lovesong</i> , <i>Frozen Inside</i> (2008)



The overall tone in the two versions could be characterized as worshipful in both cases, as the author expresses his/her gratitude and adoration towards the Lord – for example, in *I so love you/ Jesus you are my Saviour* (in the English *Lovesong*, 2nd verse) and by repeating simple phrases several times in a row at the beginning of the song (cf. McGann 2002). As can be seen both in the final verse of the Finnish *Jeesus on Herra* and in the fourth verse of *Lovesong*, the author also becomes aware of the dilemma of “not doing the good s/he should” in the vein of Paul the Apostle as expressed in Romans 7:19 (NRSV 1989; for uses of the Bible in CM discourse, see Jousmäki 2012). The English version does not stop here, however, but continues to develop on the theme in another ‘final’ verse in which the author expresses powerlessness and remorse as well as dependence on God to provide His *loving presence* and *Holy Spirit*. Time wise, the different versions are of equal length, however (over six minutes), because the Finnish version is sung through twice. The text version of the lyrics in both languages lack the final phrase *Hän on ‘He is’*, which is audible when listening to the song and watching the video. In terms of genre, the song can be classified as symphonic metal because of its distinct guitar riffs and solos as well as the female lead singer’s clean vocals. Owing to these characteristics, many discussants on *YouTube* frequently compare the band with *Nightwish*, also fronted by a female vocalist; simultaneously, many also criticize calling bands such as *HB* ‘proper metal’.

We thus begin to see that the length of the lyrics is not the only difference between the two versions of the song, as the wording also differs, and this has important consequences for the translocal religious identification conveyed through the song. In English, the song is verbally and theologically more versatile than in Finnish, which may be due to time having passed since the publication of the original version in Finnish and to the band’s wish to work on the song again. From the perspective of translocality and religious identification, the English version is especially interesting as it introduces and makes use of words and expressions typical to Evangelical and Charismatic Christianity and to the praiseful and worshipful music produced within such movements. This of course also reveals itself in the Finnish version but the remodification of the lyrics in the English version intensifies it with the introduction of new material in the final verse: *I know faith comes from you/ That’s why I need you, so please fill me with your power/ I don’t wanna lose your loving presence/ Disobeying your Holy Spirit*. These lines emphasize the central role of the Holy Spirit, which is typical of (Neo-) Charismatic Christian movements, as is the talk about becoming ‘filled’ with the ‘presence’ and ‘power’ of God (Woodhead 2010, 227–229). Thus, the switch into English also enables *HB* to draw on Anglo-American Christian discourse whereby these lyrics become an

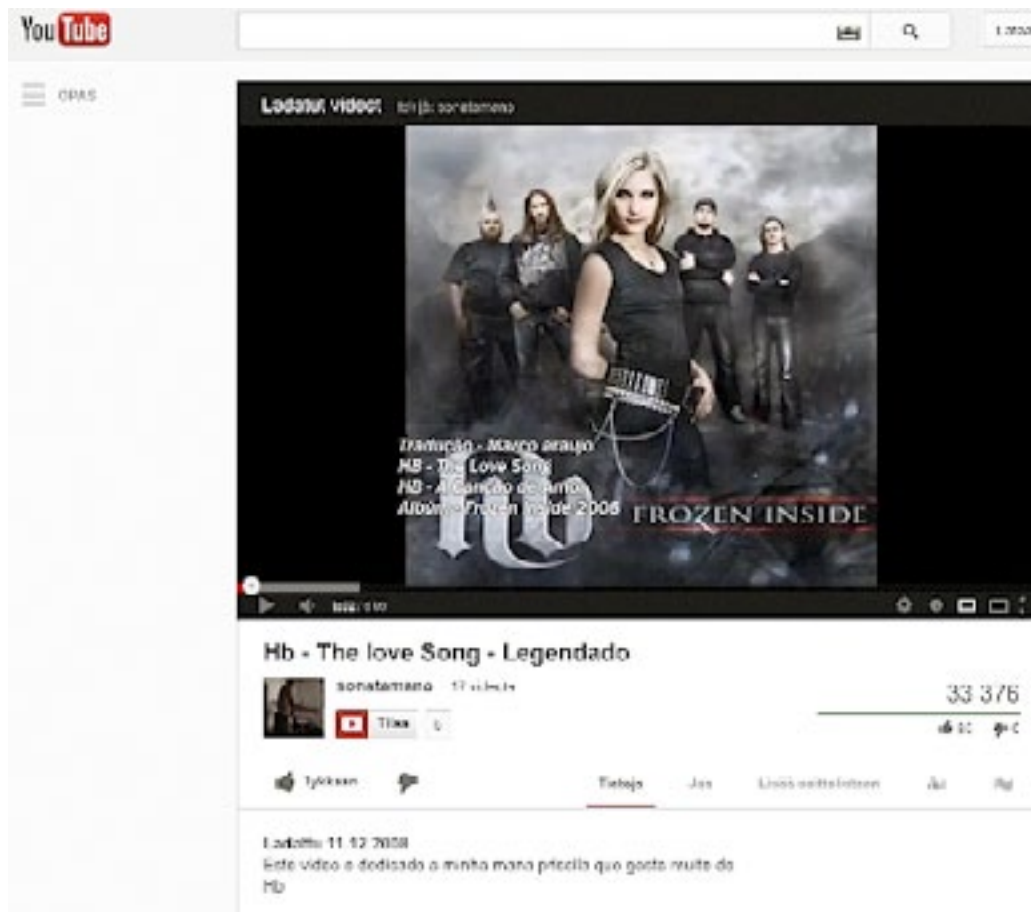
open channel for the band to identify with Evangelical religiosity, and Charismatic Christianity in particular.

### **Spreading the word: *HB*-centred videos on *YouTube***

In this section, I move on to analysing the reception of *YouTube* videos built around the music of *HB*. So far, this issue has not been addressed in the scholarly literature on media, music, religion or discourse, but I argue that by looking into such data we gain a window into naturally occurring discourse practices evoked by ‘border’ (sub)cultural videos around a controversial musical style, the oxymoron of CM (cf. Grönstrand this volume; Moberg 2009, 225–228). Such a view furthers the understanding of subculture in-the-making.

The audiences of *YouTube* videos around *HB*’s music are, of course, translocal in the sense that they are not geographically bound to any specific locality, which can be seen for instance by the fact that *YouTube* users from various national backgrounds in Europe, Asia, North America and South America (names of cities are not mentioned) have uploaded and commented on *HB*-related material therein. As mentioned, one of them is *sonatamano*, who reports to be from Brazil. So what we have is first a Finnish band translating (and modifying) one of their songs, previously published in Finnish, into English and dedicating it to the Lord; and a person from Brazil, a geographically distinct setting from Finland (and also one with an established metal music scene (Avelar 2003) and thriving Evangelical and Charismatic churches (Martin 1994); see also Moberg 2009, 172, 208), combining the soundtrack of *HB* performing *The Lovesong* with some band photos (live and promotional photos, album covers) and Portuguese subtitles for the lyrics, and using these to build up a *YouTube* video. Interestingly, on the basis of the opening screen (see Image 1), the user is not the translator of the lyrics as s/he gives the credit for doing that to *Marco araujo*.

Image 1.



The description below the video window reads *Este video e dedicado a minha mana priscila que gosta muito de Hb* ‘This video is dedicated to my sister Priscila who likes HB very much’. As *sonatamano* dedicates the emergent video to his/her sister in this manner, the song becomes framed in a completely different way to its ‘original’ context (cf. Jousmäki 2012; Leppänen et. al. 2013, 2014). This said, the Portuguese subtitles, titled *A Canção de Amor* ‘a love song’, seem to retain the message set out by the band in the English version of the song (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** The lyrics of Lovesong on the left and their Portuguese translation in the YouTube video Hb – The love Song (Legendado) on the right.

For you alone my Father x4	Só Você meu Pai x4
For you alone have my love, oh Father	<i>Só Você tem o meu amor, oh Pai.</i>
You are love, from you comes all	<i>Você é amor, de você vêm tudo</i>
Even death could not hold you. (You live!)	<i>Nem sequer a morte pôde O segurar. (Você vive!)</i>
Now I know, I so love you	<i>Agora eu sei, eu Te amo</i>
Jesus you are my Saviour. You reign!	<i>Jesus você e meu Salvador. Você reina!</i>
There's no one else like you God x 2	<i>Não há nenhum outro como Você, Deus x 2</i>
There's no one else who can compare with you	<i>Não há nenhum outro Que possa se comparar a Você</i>
Hey, I want to be more like you Father,	<i>Ei, eu quero ser mais como Você Pai</i>
You are everything to me.	<i>Você e tudo mara mim.</i>
Still the good I should do I do not do	<i>Eu ainda não faco todo a bem que</i>
Weren't you everything to me?	<i>Eu deveria fazer Você não era tudo para mim?</i>
I know faith comes from you	
That's why I need you, so please fill me with your power	<i>Eu sei que a fé vem de Você Esse é o motivo de eu precisar de Você</i>
I don't wanna lose your loving presence,	<i>Então por favor me preencha com o Seu poder</i>
Disobeying your Holy Spirit.	<i>Eu não quero perder Sua adoravel presença, Desobedecendo Seu Espirito</i>
HB: Lovesong, Frozen Inside (2008)	<i>Você reina!</i>

The fact that the Portuguese lyrics correspond rather seamlessly to the English version in terms of content and form – except for the use of italics in the Portuguese version – suggests that the video maker and/or translator aim at loyally reproducing the lyrics in a language that also allows Portuguese speakers with little or no knowledge of English to understand the message. On the other hand, the video maker/translator also observes the final line which is sung, *He lives!*, which is not included in either the English or the Finnish lyrics. However, s/he does not quite succeed in this: instead of providing

a literal translation, the subtitles read *Você reina!* 'He reigns!'. This is probably not so much about the translator not knowing the right verb as it is about him mishearing what is sung. A third explanation, albeit an unlike one here, is the translator's wish to use the video for his/her own aims and purposes, for instance, for proclaiming God's triumph. Such a transformative practice does take place in quite a lot of *YouTube* videos where the recirculation of popular music is more complex than in this case; for example, when users insert non-artist-related visual material into the video, thereby using the music mainly as a resource for their own artistic expression (see e.g. Leppänen and Häkkinen 2012; Leppänen et al. 2013, 2014).

As to translocal religious identification, the different elements of this *YouTube* video – sound, photography, vocals in English, text in English and Portuguese – that have a strong 'local' relevance for various people on various sites had, in fact, become translocal already before being combined into an online video. This is because of the opportunities afforded by online media for the exhibition and promotion of products and ideas, and for interaction between various parties. This is also to say that moving these elements from offline to online (sheet of paper, memory card, recording studio, etc.) had not diminished the meaning they had locally. Rather, it had extended the meaningfulness of the elements and built linguistic, religious, and musical bridges between different localities. These four issues are also frequently addressed in the comments sections after *HB*-related videos, and this is what I will now turn to.

## **Discussing music, place, religiosity and language on *YouTube***

Apart from metal, music produced in Finland has not been especially successful outside the country: for example, many Finns can hardly forget the low level of success in the Eurovision song contest traditionally, interrupted in recent years only by the metal group *Lordi's* victory in 2006. By contrast, Finland is most often experienced as receiving popular and socio-cultural influences, especially from the Anglo-American world—this is the case with Charismatic religious practice, too (cf. Ketola et al. 2005, 69–71). However, it is exactly Finnish *metal* music that has gained success outside the country (Lukkarinen 2010; Rossi and Jervell 2013), and this is something that *YouTube* users watching videos on *HB* frequently acknowledge. Examples from comment threads around the four videos mentioned in the aim, data and method section include:

**1commono**

The Glory be to GOD, I was almost done hoping to ever find a good Christian metal band. they had to be from Finland of course.

**TheDiscipleShipPA**

I want to go to a Christian metal concert in Finland. This looks amazing.

**777kutless**

they must be from finland or somewhere in europe

The commentators above thus show positive evaluation of not only Finnish metal but of Finnish *Christian* metal, as well. As to the construction of translocal religious identification, there are some important insights to be gained from the comments section. In addition to showing respect for Finnish (Christian) metal in general, some commentators index their geographical place in relation to that of the band in, for example, the following ways:

**kellu12**

I just saw them in my school.

**MrSve9**

they where in norway this weekend !! loved it <3

**TheJeffevilboy**

Muito bom o som da HB. . . Nice song! I'm from Brazil ^^ and I listen HB everyday! GOD bless you!!

**MagisterJE**

The most beautiful song I've heard in my life.

Greetings from the first fan of HB in Spain. God bless you all.

Through explicitly displaying their geographical proximity with/distance from *HB*, these commentators construct a translocal space in which some participants navigate effortlessly (e.g. *I just saw them in my school, I listen HB everyday!*) while others find it harder to manage and/or overcome the perceived distance:

**FlyingAxlade**

isn't this nice?

i want 40 cd's to pass out in Randolp, VERmont!

**Dnkan**

Great way to spread the word of God. I'd love this band to come to Costa Rica...

The comments above suggest these writers experience spatiality as a hindrance and themselves as passive victims of spatial circumstances when it comes to getting the most out of (the fandom of) *HB*: the first commentator explicitly and in a very straightforward fashion declares s/he *wants* 40 copies of the band's CD for distribution without telling others what specific album s/he is referring to – or, perhaps, s/he may not even know it him/herself but has only now come to heard of such a band and acts straight away. The second writer, furthermore, admires the way *HB spreads the word of God* – thereby identifying with the religiosity conveyed in *HB's* music – but continues with wishing the band would tour in the writer's country of residence. This is in contrast with those who are willing to travel to see their favourite band performing live, such as the North American *TheDiscipleShipPA* who says s/he *wants to go to a Christian metal concert in Finland*.

Often, this type of translocal space, which is constructed in, through and around videos on *HB*, gives rise to multilingual language practices evident not only in the videos *per se* but also in the comments section. Comments may, for example, be written mainly in Spanish or German but with some established English phrases, such as *Greetings from Germany* and *God bless* – often, these utilize religious discourse and evoke religious meanings and connotations. As to language as a theme, it is at times also addressed through meta-level talk. For example, having watched the video *HB – Jeremia* uploaded by user *Aline Sartori*, user *xxxMissRiskxxx* is but one of the users who has no clue as to what the vocalist is 'saying' in Finnish – in this video, there are no subtitles. However, not understanding the lyrics does not prevent her ('her', judging from the username), and many others, from enjoying the music:

**xxxMissRiskxxx**

woh.

i can hardly describe this.

they are very original.

and her voice, I could listen to her voice for like forever, so beautiful.

and well, I have no ideah what they're saying.xD

Another user shares her view of the vocalist having a beautiful voice but also expresses a more pronounced interest in 'language':

**Thuhn13**

who cares if u don't know what shes saying!!! her voice is beautiful and Finnish is an awesome language! i wanna learn just because of HB!!!!

ROCK ON!

GOD BLESS THEM!

User *Thuhn13* is among those commentators for whom the Finnish lyrics seem to work especially well. For him/her, *HB's* music seems to function as a source of inspiration for learning Finnish (*i wanna learn just because of HB!!!!*), as reported for instance in Balogh (2012). Therefore, it is not only music (metal), religiosity (Christianity and popular culture) and place (Finland), but also language (Finnish) that plays a role in the identification processes of these *YouTube* audiences, providing resources for their senses of affinity, alignment, emotional attachment and belonging. However, what often happens in *YouTube* discussions is that a more or less critical voice arises, at times even leading to the deletion of the most destructive comments by the administrator of the site. In these cases, it is not only about identification but about *disidentification* as well (cf. Leppänen et al. 2013). As regards the focal video in the analysis, *Hb – The love Song*, little critique occurs, but some effort is made to act authoritatively concerning the 'right' view on a central religious matter, salvation (cf. Jousmäki 2011):

**MirkaProduction**

This is the most beautiful christian metal song i've ever heard!! I am playing in a band in a church, i want to play this song so bad!! we're searching for good christian songs, and ive come up with this one, because this is some of the best i've ever heard!!

**Cristina Qzan**

Jesus is not best way to heaven. Jesus is ONE way to heaven !

**shadowlilly99**

Jesus is the ONLY way to Heaven.



User *MirkaProduction* praises the song as being *some of the best i've ever heard!!* To this, she gets the following reply from user *Cristina Qzan*: *Jesus is not best way to heaven. Jesus is ONE way to heaven !* Although the initial positive evaluation focused on the song and said nothing about Jesus, or about anything else for that matter, *Cristina Qzan* accuses *MirkaProduction* for claiming that Jesus is, among many, the best way to heaven. With the purpose of correcting her, *Cristina Qzan* writes *Jesus is ONE way to heaven* where the grammar, unfortunately, leads her to argue the same thing herself. A third user, *shadowlilly99*, responds to this by writing *Jesus is the ONLY way to Heaven* in a grammatically correct form. The way the use of such a perceived ungrammaticality leads *Cristina Qzan* to 'lose' her voice, in Blommaert's (2005, 255) sense of not being able to make oneself understood, in a discussion on spiritual salvation by someone with a better knowledge of English grammar illustrates the potential 'dangers' of multilingualism (Blommaert et al. 2012; Blommaert 2010, 103–106) on the one hand and the rise of new religious gatekeepers and peer authorities (Campbell 2012) on the other. While such negotiation of meaning and interpretation of theological issues as the one taking place between these three users is not exceptional, their exchange of words is particularly interesting as it highlights how religious identification intertwines with language practices in *YouTube* discussions.

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused on one typical *YouTube* video using music and lyrics by and photographs of the Finnish CM band *HB* and it has also looked at the comments around other similar videos. While the band has itself strived for success within and also beyond the national borders of Finland, *YouTube* has provided the band with unexpected audiences, reactions and interpretations independent of the band's own plans and wishes. The chapter has described how people in different localities (Finland, Brazil, Germany, Romania, Costa Rica, Philippines, etc.) participate in watching and commenting on these online music videos with a religious message, creating a translocal space where religiosity, music, language and place become points of identification for the users. On the basis of these observations, we begin to understand better the ways in which today's (young) people use social media for their projects of the self (Giddens 1991) where (commenting on) an online music video is an act and expression of attachment and identification, if only momentarily. Studying the comments (on comments) also adds to the understanding of religiosity today when it seems no longer to be solely

organized from above institutionally, nationally or historically but is, rather, negotiated translocally and at the grassroots level, person-to-person – or, better, one social media user to another.

This has several implications for research. Firstly, for media scholars, this chapter provides a detailed look into how a specific social media site is utilized translocally by regular people instead of professional music and media industries for disseminating music and a religious message. The latter is of relevance to religious studies, secondly; the chapter provides an example of a bottom-up approach to study how religious identification is ‘made’ in a situated, non-institutional popular cultural context – one of increasing importance especially for young people today. Thirdly, scholars of popular music benefit from the analysis of a specific music subculture from the perspective of online audiences and, for them, the chapter also provides an example of the relevance of analyzing lyrics both as an independent artifact and in the context of a song transmitted through an online video. Finally, for discourse studies, the chapter proposes, in the spirit of Brubaker and Cooper (2000) and Leppänen et al. (2013, 2014), a move from the analysis of ‘identity’ towards analyses of ‘identification’. To my knowledge, this chapter pioneers the applying of ‘identification’ to the study of the construction of religiosity. For this reason, I hope, future research will reassess, modify and push forward such an undertaking.

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