

May 2022

Local Garage Psychosis Rockabilly Disease: Glocalization and the Athenian Psychobilly

Michael Tsangaris
University of Piraeus, Greece

Recommended Citation

Tsangaris, Michael (2022) "Local Garage Psychosis Rockabilly Disease: Glocalization and the Athenian Psychobilly," *Journal of Global Awareness*: Vol. 3: No. 1, Article 4.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24073/jga/3/01/04>

Available at: <https://scholar.stjohns.edu/jga/vol3/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by St. John's Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Global Awareness* by an authorized editor of St. John's Scholar. For more information, please contact karniks@stjohns.edu, fuchsc@stjohns.edu, fazzinol@stjohns.edu.

Abstract

Music is an art that permeates every human society. It is used for such diverse social purposes as ritual, worship, coordination of movement, communication, or entertainment. There are no limits to music as it can move freely in space through sound waves, radio, cinema, television, and the new digital technologies. Music is directly related to subcultures in that cultural identities and lifestyles can be mediated through music. This article aims to use the development of music scenes such as psychobilly to establish a link between music, subcultures, globalization, and the global-local dialectic.

Keywords: globalization, glocalization, music, psychobilly, Athens, Greek, culture

Introduction

Life as a psychobilly in Athens was a rather costly and dangerous adventure in the mid-eighties. For a start, it was very difficult to keep up to date with what was happening in the original British scene, as psychobilly was always overlooked by the mainstream music media and there was no internet, so you had to travel to London regularly when there were no budget airlines. Walking around Athens, you had to deal with all the people making fun of you for having a quiff and looking eccentric. At school, you were very often accused of being obsessed with xenomania by fellow students, especially those who belonged to the youth organizations of political parties. However, there were some neighborhoods in downtown Athens where you could always find solid circles of people connected to all these imported subcultures.

The far-reaching socio-economic trends in Greece at the time had led to the popular notion that preference for imported Western products of any kind conferred prestige on the consumer. It could be argued that this echoes Tarde's theory¹ of imitation

¹ This pioneering social psychologist believed that similarities in social life are intentional or unintentional products of imitation, which may be due to tradition, fashion, habit, education, membership in a particular social group, etc. Deviant behavior, he believed, strongly inspires imitation, transmission, and suggestion (Borch, 2019). Tarde, therefore, concluded that every case of social similarity has its principle in imitation. However, imitation also favors differentiation. The

and contagion, considering that humans are naturally inclined to imitate because of their sociability and often imitate others to gain recognition and respect (Tarde, 1890).

On the other hand, within a Wallersteinian approach, the Greek state pursued an ethnocentric development strategy that combated consumer xenomania with major advertising campaigns against Western imported products (Tsatsanis, 2010). Against this backdrop, even the Anglo-American subcultural lifestyles and values connected their adherents to exogenous elements that were ultimately by-products of their mother culture.

However, globalization and the emerging "space of flows" and "timeless time" brought by the "network society" (Castells, 2013) after the millennium led to a new understanding of global (Barber, 1995; Ritzer, 2004) and glocal (Roberson, 1994) culture. Nowadays, all imported musical genres and subcultures are seen as natural and normal developments of a globalized world rather than as foreign musical invasions or contagious cultural diseases. The link between mimesis and contemporary society seems to have a new appreciation, especially in discussions of cultural theory (Borch, 2019).

Globalization, Glocalization, Subcultures, and Music Scenes

Before discussing globalization, I should refer to the concept of "cultural imperialism," which developed strongly in the sixties but emerged as a theme much earlier. This term is directly related to the "dependency theory" and the "world-systems theory," which argue that the international order that prevails and reproduces itself between rich and poor countries is due to the historical context of Western imperialist expansion and the functioning of the "world system" (Frank, 1967; Wallerstein, 1974).

In the field of communication, cultural imperialism held that global media fostered dependency rather than economic growth. It has been argued that the imbalance in the flow of media content undermines cultural autonomy and reinforces the relative global power of the large and rich countries of origin, hindering the development

imitation models are often modified in the process of imitation, passing between different individuals or social groups. (Borch, 2019b; Djellal & Gallouj 2014).

of national identity and the image of the poor. Thus, media flows lead to a state of cultural homogenization, which in turn leads to a dominant form of culture (Boyd-Barrett, 1977; Schiller, 1971).

In recent decades, a new visual framework has emerged that is more interested in the global flows of cultural production, technology, people, goods, and capital that increasingly determine how modern societies change, than in the balances between rich and poor countries. Hence, globalization itself is now seen as the new world order of things, reorganizing the time and space of people, objects, and ideas. According to Giddens (2001), all these developments have led to the emergence of a new world, a new international system of production, distribution, and consumption of information, which, like every aspect of globalization, has developed unevenly, reflecting the differences between developed and developing countries.

Curran (2012) argues that the main shift towards the globalization of media occurred between 1914 and 1939 with the rise of American film hegemony, the worldwide distribution of American music, and its dissemination through the new media of the time: records, cinema distribution networks, and radio.

Several studies have shown the relationship between the music industry and cultural imperialism (Frith, 1991; Garofalo, 1993; Hesmondhalgh, 2004; Kim & Shin, 2010). Although some alternative media existed, multinational media conglomerates controlled the music industry throughout the twentieth century and influenced much of the subcultures and music scenes.²

All music genres and their corresponding subcultures that originated in Western countries have, over time, found their way into the international music industry. Local music genres from less developed countries, on the other hand, have had a hard time making it into the international market. And when they have managed to do so, it has been under the control of the dominant music industry, e.g., ska and reggae.

Roberson (1994, 1995, 2001) brought another issue into the social science dialog by introducing the term "glocalization." He suggested that in modern society, there

² For many years, the international recorded music industry was dominated by five major corporations: CBS, WEA, RCA-Ariola, PolyGram, and EMI (Laing, 1986).

is a multiplicity of local and global phenomena perceived with the new, unified, and dominant reality of globalization understood outside the dimension of time. The local, the global, and their dialectics are thus not outside the global today but have been integrated into it. Roudometof (2015) considered that this situation could be perceived as waves that reach the local in a similar way as light penetrating through the glass. The result can reflect the properties of the waves back on the world stage, but after their refraction in the local. The notion of "glocalization" can thus be defined by an analytically different position, such as the refraction of the global by the local (Roudometof, 2015).

In the most general sense, subcultures are considered groups of people who have something in common with each other that distinguishes them in some way from members of other social groups (Thorton, 1997). However, this definition is very vague and focuses directly on assigning people to subgroups rather than examining their culture. Other scholars, notably from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), have proposed much more restrictive descriptions, often seeing social class or ethnicity as central to the formation of subcultures. Thus, the term subculture has been performatively associated with working-class youth groups in certain Western countries who form gang-like collective structures and oscillate between the constraints of dominant institutions such as home, school, work, etc., and the constraints of leisure such as peer-group associations, etc. (Clarke et al., 2000).

Some interesting articles and collections of studies have been presented on subcultures or music scenes in terms of transnational cultural flows and globalization, e.g., by Bennett & Peterson 2004, Goulding, C., Saren, M. and Canniford, R. (2005), Nilan and Feixa 2006, etc. Since subcultures emerge from specific local communities, their origin is linked to the countries to which these communities belong. According to Brake (2013: 6), subcultures share elements of the mother cultures but also differ from them. Thus, they do not emerge ex nihilo; on the contrary, although they ignore or reject some of the prevailing attitudes, goals, conventions, practices, etc., they nevertheless adopt the norms and values of the parent society. Subcultures can be exported to other countries that maintain different kinds of guiding cultures, and by working as Trojan Horse, they can also transmit cultural elements of their parent cultures. This transplantation of foreign subcultures can occur in many ways, such as through negative (or positive)

commentary and information in the mainstream media, through alternative media that the foreign subcultures use (fanzines, alternative cinema, etc.), through imported subcultural products (clothing, accessories, etc.), through subcultural tourists, or through indigenous innovators who travel and seek social interactions outside their local environments.

Economic studies have often found that consumers from less developed countries value imported products from highly developed countries (Goldberg & Baumgartner, 2002). Looking at specific imported cultural forms such as music, movies, fashion, or lifestyles from the Anglo-American cultural industries, similar assumptions can be made about the appreciation of these products by individuals from less developed countries within the framework of cultural hegemony theory (Sassoon, 2002). In short, imported subcultural products from affluent Western countries typically add a different kind of cultural capital to fans in host countries, often different from what the subculture's adherents receive in the country of origin; moreover, importing a subcultural trend from abroad often ignores various related concepts, such as its original connection to social class or its socio-historical roots. Imported music genres and subcultures are very often adopted by people who come from different socio-economic classes than their carriers in the countries of origin (Shahani, 2006: 121).

According to Straw (1991: 494), a music scene is a cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other through a variety of processes of differentiation and mutually transforming and enriching each other in very different ways. The term scene can serve as a designation for cultural entities whose precise boundaries are invisible and stretchable. In this sense, this term is very practical, flexible, and unconditional; it can harmoniously incorporate subculture and can easily be restricted and expanded. For example, it can easily be associated with glocalization theory, so that someone can easily argue that psychobilly is a British subculture that has expanded into a global scene.

The Greek Psychobillies Global-Local Dialectic

It is said that the first rock concert in Greece took place in 1956 at the club Aegli Zappiou in Athens, when the jazz band of the United States Sixth Fleet, which was playing there that morning, was asked by the audience to play rock and roll music

(Bozinis, 2008; Symvoulidis, 2012). In the same year, the film *Blackboard Jungle* (Brooks, 1955) was released in Greek cinemas. Since then, Athens has been a very fertile ground where various imported subcultures such as hippies, teddy boys, punks, metalheads, goths, etc., have been settled from time to time.

A recent study has shown that the local psychobilly scene of Athens is a subcultural space, where a few similar musical genres, such as rockabilly, punk, garage, etc., coexist and interact with each other within a variety of subcultural practices (Tsangaris & Agrafioti, 2020).

It is questionable whether there was a psychobilly scene in Athens in the 1980s, as there were no real Greek psychobilly bands, only fans of the British psychobilly scene who came from punk and rockabilly circles, although there were local garage bands like *The Last Drive* that reflected elements of the incoming psychobilly waves back on the world stage.

At the beginning of the new millennium, after the resurgence of the worldwide psychobilly scene, a small number of Greek Psychobilly bands began to appear, supported by younger fans. However, the new generation of psychobilly fans had a superficial subcultural identity that was much closer to pop fashion.

Diachronically, however, there was a central nucleus in the scene of Athenian Psychobilly, into which a few individuals entered and remained for quite a while. These individuals are distinguished by their anti-conformist, eccentric, hybrid punk and rockabilly appearance as the bearers of the authentic psychobilly identity, a near-complete lifestyle that includes psychotic rock and roll music, unconventional views, horror movies, and vintage esthetics, as well as stomping, wrecking, and boozing. They claim to hold no political views but reject the mainstream music establishment and pop fashion industry. Important contemporary bands representing this core of the psychobilly scene in Athens are *Thriller*, *Ducky Boyz*, and *Misty Blue Boys*, which are not limited to the Greek territory but often perform internationally (Tsangaris & Agrafioti, 2020).

The Greek Psychobilly can thus be understood as a glocal music community that, in addition to the pure psychobilly style, encompasses several other local

characteristics related to the cultural specificities of the region and the identities of the local youth cultures, which in turn reach out to the world.

Conclusions

In the twentieth century, with the development of large media conglomerates, the rigid boundaries of traditional regional music scenes have loosened. Production companies, composers, bands, and their fans around the world have softened their ethnic distinctions, while new musical products have been largely homogenized by globalization in the music field. In this new situation, the globalized, hyper-mediated reality of the present seems to encourage new forms of contagious imitation (Borch, 2019).

However, social life is marked by differences and inequalities between social classes and geographical locations, and it is impossible to eliminate all these differences during globalization.

Some local cultural trends had developed direct economic and cultural interactions with their uniform global projection long before the concepts of globalization and glocalization were popularized.

Pure dialectical patterns between local subcultures and global scenes became apparent very early on in the spread of certain music genres and the lifestyles of their adherents, which differed to a greater or lesser extent in each country, but each reflected the general global pattern.

In this sense, the music scenes, and their subcultures, which adapted to local moods and carried them modified into the world, were illustrative cases of the "glocal."

Although we live in a time when the ties that mark the unity of a subculture have loosened, Greek psychobilly, while insignificant, can be seen as a glocal music community that includes several other subcultural actors besides its core players, spreading values and characteristics of punk, rockabilly, and garage from a local perspective and building a shared sense of tribal unity that overall reflects a certain kind of global crazy rock and roll music scene.

References

- Barber, B. (1995). *Jihad vs McWorld*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Bennett, A. & Peterson, R. A. (Eds.). (2004). *Music scenes: local, translocal and virtual*. Vanderbilt University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv17vf74v>
- Borch, Ch. (2019a). The imitative, contagious, and suggestible roots of modern society. In C. Borch (Ed.). *Imitation, Contagion, Suggestion: On Mimesis and Society*. Oxon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351034944-1>
- Borch, Ch. (Ed.). (2019b). *Imitation, contagion, suggestion: On mimesis and society*. Oxon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351034944>
- Boyd-Barrett, O. (1977). Media imperialism: towards an international framework for the analysis of media systems. *Mass Communication and Society*, 116(135): 116–135.
- Bozinis, N. (2008). *Rock globality and Greek locality*. Athens: Nefeli.
- Brake, M. (2013). *Comparative youth culture: The sociology of youth cultures and youth subcultures in America, Britain, and Canada*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203408940>
- Brooks R. (1955). *Blackboard Jungle*. Pandro S. Berman-Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (film).
- Canniford, R. (2005). Moving shadows: suggestions for ethnography in globalized cultures. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 8(2): 204-218. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750510592463>
- Castells, M. (2013). *Communication power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clarke, J. Hall, S. Jefferson, T., & Roberts, B. (2000). Subcultures, cultures, and class. In S. Hall and T. Jefferson (Eds) *Resistance through rituals* (8-73). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203224946-3>

- Curran, J. (2012). *Media and power*. London: Routledge.
- Djellal, F., & Gallouj, F. (2014). The laws of imitation and invention: Gabriel Tarde and the evolutionary economics of innovation. *halshs-00960607*. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00960607/file/FDFG.pdf>.
- Featherstone, M. Lash, S., & Robertson, R (Eds) (1995). *Global modernities*. London: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446250563>
- Frank, A. G. (1967). *Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America* (Vol. 93). New York: NYU Press.
- Frith, S. (1991). Anglo-America and its discontents. *Cultural Studies* 5(3): 263-269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502389100490221>
- Garofalo, R. (1993). Whose world, what beat: The transnational music industry, identity, and cultural imperialism. *The world of music*, 35(2): 16-32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43615564>
- Giddens, A. (2001) *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goldberg, M. E., & Baumgartner, H. (2002). Cross-country attraction as a motivation for product consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(11): 901-906. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(01\)00209-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(01)00209-0)
- Goulding, C. Saren, M., & Canniford, R. (2005). Subcultures, neotribes, countercultures, or new social movements: The case of voluntary simplicity. In Karin M. Ekstrom & Helene Brembeck (Eds) *E-European Advances in Consumer Research Volume 7* (79-82). Goteborg: Association for Consumer Research.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2004). Globalization and cultural imperialism: a case study of the music industry. In R. Kiely, P. Marfleet (Eds), *Globalization and the Third World* (169-190). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2014.937947>.

- Kim, P. H., & Shin, H. (2010). The birth of rock: Cultural imperialism, nationalism, and the glocalization of rock music in South Korea, 1964–1975. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, 18(1): 199-230.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-2009-028>
- Monden, M. (2008). Transcultural flow of demure aesthetics: Examining cultural globalization through gothic & Lolita fashion. *New Voices*, 2: 21-40.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.21159/nv.02.02>
- Nilan, P. & Feixa, C. (Eds) (2006). *Global youth? Hybrid identities, plural worlds*. Oxon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203030523>
- Ritzer, G. (2004). *The Globalization of nothing*. London: Sage.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2003.0053>
- Robertson, R. (1994). Globalization or glocalization? *The Journal of International Communication* 1(1): 33–52.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.1994.9751780>
- Robertson, R. (1995) Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity–heterogeneity. In Featherstone, M. Lash, S., & Robertson, R (Eds). *Global modernities*. London: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446250563.n2>
- Robertson, R. *Globalization theory 2000p: Major problematics*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608351.n34>
- Roudometof, V. (2016). Theorizing glocalization: Three interpretations. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 19(3), 391-408.
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1368431015605443>
- Schiller, H. I. (1971). *Mass communications and American empire*. New York: Beacon Press.
- Shahabi, M. (2006). *Youth subcultures in post-revolution Iran: An alternative reading*. Abingdon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203030523-14>

- Straw, W. (2015). Some things a scene might be: Postface. *Cultural Studies*, 29(3): 476–485. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2014.937947>
- Symvoulidis, H. (2012). The Greek Sixties. In N. Sverkos (ed.) *Half century of Greek rock*. Athens : sonik-oxy.
- Tarde, G. (1890). *Les lois de l'imitation*. Paris : Félix Alcan.
- Thorton S. (1997). General introduction in K. Gelder & S. Thorton (Eds). *The subcultures reader* (1-7). London: Routledge.
- Tsangaris, M., & Agrafioti, K. (2020). Psychobilly psychosis and the garage disease in Athens. *IAFOR Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5(1): 31-47. <https://doi.org/10.22492/ijcs.5.1.02>
- Tsatsanis M. (2010). The persistent Greek-(wins): Ethnocentric developmental strategy and consumer xenomania, In V. Vamvakas & P. Panagiotopoulos (Eds.) *Greece in the decade of the nineteen eighties*. Athens: Epikedro.
- Wallerstein I. (1974). *The modern world-system*. New York: Academic Press.