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The Politics of Prague's Metal Scene

Master's thesis

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 30 May 2019

Alex Kurki

References

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Abstract

This thesis examines the potential links between political behavior and the Prague metal scene. Many authors have suggested theories on links between music and politics, but there are few empirical studies on the topic. This thesis focuses on one genre of music in one space and cultural context: heavy metal music in Prague, Czech Republic. The literature on metal subcultures claims that they exist to perpetuate rebellion and transgression, and that members of these subcultures reject “politics”; however, metal is seen as political in some cases. Because of this, it is hypothesized that metal subculture members will have negative opinions on the political system and political participation, and will express support for anti-system parties or ideas. These hypotheses are tested through a qualitative thematic analysis of interviews and survey responses from 22 members of Prague’s metal subculture. It is found that members of the subculture vote at a similar rate to the rest of the Czech population, and that the majority of participants identify as center-right or right-wing. The participants expressed ideas that were critical of the political system and of society discourses relating to politics. Furthermore, respondents viewed metal in Prague as apolitical, but felt metal could be political in some contexts. While the Prague metal subculture was viewed as an apolitical zone of free speech, respondents noted that it is not entirely separate from politics, due to the controversy surrounding far-right bands in the subculture.

Keywords

Subculture, Heavy metal , Political Participation, Perception, Prague

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá vztah mezi politickým chováním a pražskou metalovou scénou. Existují teorie, které ukazují na vztah mezi hudbou a politikou, ale je jen pár studií, které se tím empiricky zabývají. Tato diplomová práce se zabývá jedním stylem hudby na jednom konkrétním místě a v jednom kulturním kontextu. Těmi jsou heavy metalová scéna v Praze v hlavním městě České republiky. V literatuře o metalové subkultuře lze nalézt, že tento vztah je vyjádřením vzpoury a že jeho členové odmítají politiku; nicméně, metalová scéna je v některých případech vnímána jako zpolitizovaná. Z toho důvodu se předpokládá, že členové metalové subkultury budou mít negativní názor na politický systém a zapojení do politiky, a budou podporovat anti-systémové strany a ideje.

Tyto předpoklady byly testovány s využitím kvalitativní tematické analýzy rozhovorů a dotazníků od 22 členů pražské metalové subkultury. Bylo zjištěno, že členové subkultury chodí k volbám stejně často jako zbytek české populace a většina dotazovaných se identifikuje s se středově-pravicovými, případně krajně-pravicovými názory. U účastníků bylo možné identifikovat kritické názor na politický systém a společenskou debatu o politice. Navíc, respondenti vnímali metal v Praze jako apolitický, ale zároveň byli toho názoru, že v určitém kontextu by politický být mohl. Ač je pražská metalová subkultura vnímána jako apolitický prostor, kde je možné se svobodně vyjadřovat, dotazovaní poukazovali na to, že není zcela oddělená od politiky kvůli kontroverzím, které se objevily kolem krajně pravicových skupin, které jsou součástí subkultury.

Klíčová slova

subkultura, heavy metalová, politickým chováním, vnímání, Praha

Politika pražské metalové scény

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Introduction

Philosophers have debated music's role in society for generations. Plato's *Republic*, for example, discussed music and the arts' place in the education of philosopher kings who would lead the "just" society. Thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and members of the Frankfurt School—Theodore Adorno especially—have discussed music's supposed role in shaping political ideologies and tendencies.¹ Governments seem to act on the perspective that music is in some way an ideological, political beast, with state-approved music being used to foster loyalty and (particularly in authoritarian regimes) music viewed as normatively reprehensible being censored or otherwise vilified (Keller, 2007). Yet, despite the breadth of normative and theoretical viewpoints on music's political importance, the empirical mechanisms of music's perceived political workings is unclear.

The connection between music and politics is rarely examined in an empirical manner. The works that discuss music's role in politics tend to analyze its utility as a tool for mobilization in political campaigns, charitable fundraising efforts, or in new social movements (Street, 2012; The Subcultures Network, 2014). However, these perspectives focus on music's political utility in the hands of either famous bands or in movements for political or societal change. In these cases, the music in of itself is not creating the "connection" to politics. It is about *who* is using the music and for what purpose. It is the capital and fame of industry-backed musicians, or the already political arena in which social movements re-appropriate popular songs into, that makes music "political."

My thesis will clarify this muddy link between music and politics. One of the central concerns of examining this topic is definitional ambiguity. While "music" is fairly

¹ See chapter 8, "Politics as Music: The Sound of Ideas and Ideology" in John Street's *Music and Politics* (2012) for a more in-depth examination of different philosophical views on music's interaction with politics and morality.

self-evident, “politics” is a term that has myriad definitions. Examining the link between music and politics also presents issues of scope. Which music is being evaluated, at what time, and where? I examine one particular form of music (heavy metal and its subgenres). I choose to examine metal in part due to my own familiarity with the genre as both a fan and musician and also due to its prescribed and ascribed political salience. I ask: how does involvement in Prague’s metal scene interact with attitudes towards political participation?

In its lyrics and content, metal music is considered by many scholars to be of ideological or political weight. Metal lyrics evoke topics such as misanthropy, anti-religious sentiment, and war. These are dark, transgressive themes which function as tropes within the genre, and are presented in an abrasive sonic context (Kahn-Harris, 2007, pp. 34-42). Some scholars hold that metal’s content (Morris, 2015), along with the stances many amateur metal musicians take against mainstream forms of cultural replication and consumption (Graham, 2016) make it politically volatile. This idea is supported by the fact that in the past, metal has been singled out for government censorship—including in the Czech Republic under the Communist regime (Weinstein 2000, p. 3; Ramet & Dordević, 2019, pp. 66-68).

However, that is not to say that all scholars are in agreement about the politics of metal music. Most notably, Keith Kahn-Harris argues in *Extreme Metal* that “the notion of politics is antithetical to [many metal fans]” (2007, p. 152). Kahn-Harris’ use of the term stems from the definition of fans he interviewed, who define “politics” as being “restricted to interventions in the public sphere that are consciously intended to have an impact on social institutions” (p. 154). While this definition is overly narrow, it still highlights a divide in the literature on music, and metal music in particular. Grand theories and studies with a broad scope tend to romanticize music’s purported political nature, whereas smaller-scale studies that focus on the viewpoints of fans and musicians present music’s potential

link to politics in more pragmatic, cautious terms. The politics of metal is oftentimes attributed more by researchers than metalheads.

As a result, my research also speaks to the subcultural literature. While it would seem that this takes me away from the politics of music, music's political stances stem from its interactions with people. Music itself does not register to vote, does not go to protests, and does not discuss politics with friends. Political activity stems from people, so the people involved in a musical subculture in turn can inform us about that particular music's connection to politics.

The classical viewpoint of subculture—pioneered by professors and alumni of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (CCCS) in the mid-twentieth century—is best exemplified by Dick Hebdige's 1979 work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. In short, Hebdige defines subculture as a rigidly structured, class-based form of belonging centered around “symbolic rebellion” against dominant, hegemonic discourses. However, Hebdige holds that subcultures have “specificity,” meaning that different subcultures rebel against different discourses (Hebdige 2002). Hebdige's work, like that of other adherents of the CCCS standpoint, holds that subculture is inherently situated in opposition to mainstream discourses created by those in power, and links subculture to deviant behavior.

In the decades since Hebdige's seminal work, globalization and neoliberalism have broken down traditional class-based forms of identity and belonging. The discipline has also experienced a “post-subculturalist” turn, emphasizing the specificity of individual cases over a unified vision of subculture. They are no longer seen as being homogenous embodiments of class rebellion, but are instead demographically heterogeneous and made up of individuals with distinct levels of involvement and different reasons for participation (Muggleton 2002; Huq 2006). Many scholars have developed concepts—neo-tribe, scene,

et cetera—to try and reflect the diversity between and within groups that would previously be labelled as subcultural. Some scholars have gone so far as to suggest doing away with the term “subculture” altogether (Berzano and Genova, 2016). Yet, subcultural units are still seen as situated outside of the “mainstream” (Ulusoy and Firat, 2018) and in some cases participants see their participation as a form of political expression outside of institutional politics (Riley et al, 2010a; Riley et al, 2010b). My research will shed light on the specificity of the Prague metal scene, and will help to clarify potential links between subcultural (or, more precisely, scenic) membership and politics.

Political science research has mentioned the link between subcultural membership—and the effects of said subculture’s practices and beliefs—on political participation, but there has been little systematic examination of the topic. Sidney Verba suggests that “small groups” (including even “street corner gangs”) are the main source of people’s decision-making, and may affect people’s viewpoints on politics due to processes of socialization relating to the norms and beliefs of said groups (1972, pp. 7-30).

Interestingly enough, youth street gangs were a common subject of subcultural research at the time (Berzano and Genova, 2016, pp. 89-109). Several other political scientists hold that social spaces affect people’s attitudes towards institutions and their likelihood of politically participating (Burns, Scholzman, and Verba, 2001; Clarke, Jennings, Moss, and Steter, 2018). Meredith Rolfe, for instance, proposed a “social theory of political participation,” in which people’s likelihood to vote is affected by the characteristics of their (in-person) social network (Rolfe, 2012). Subcultures are social spaces centered around the consumption of cultural artifacts (in this case, music). As a result, their norms and the norms of the cultural artifacts they are centered around may interact with participants’ political viewpoints.

In light of this, I use a methodology based on an in-depth examination of a single case: the Prague metal scene. This scene is a potentially interesting case for multiple reasons. There is very little English-language literature examining music scenes and subcultures in the Czech Republic. They focus on the hardcore punk or skinhead scenes (Císař and Koubek, 2012; Smolík, 2015). Outside of articles published by Ondrej Daniel, professor at Metropolitan University Prague, little English-language academic work has examined metal in the Czech Republic. However, Daniel's works on metal are comparative between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, understandably providing a broad overview of each country (Daniel, 2018; Daniel and Almer, 2018). More detailed analysis of a specific scene will allow for greater scrutiny and in-depth results.

Prague also has a history of politicized music subcultures (Ramet & Dordević, 2019, pp. 60-68). During “normalization” the Czechoslovak regime censored music—most famously, bands in the “Prague Underground” such as the Plastic People of the Universe (Raková, 2010). The regime also banned metal bands from performing and releasing music. However, in metal's case, censorship did not arise because musicians were political dissidents, but because their music was not perceived as being in line with the aesthetic tenets of Socialist Realism which the state espoused (Ramet & Dordević, 2019, pp. 66-68). Music scenes serve a role in popular memory (Bennett and Rogers, 2016), so this history may present a unique specificity to the scene. Examining this specificity may provide unexpected implications for existing theory on musical scenes, as the literature on scenes largely focuses on cultural and historical contexts of Western Europe and North America (Císař and Koubek, 2012, pp. 2-6).

I also focus on Prague for practical reasons. It would be almost impossible to provide a comprehensive analysis of metal in the Czech Republic—with over 1,400 metal bands currently listed by the Metal Archives as “active” in the country (Encyclopedia

Metallum). Furthermore, there is evidence that metal bands congregate closer to large physical markets, where they have greater access to fans, other musicians/collaborators, and music venues (Makkonen, 2014, p. 1586). As a result, Prague, the Czech Republic's largest city, serves as a logical geographic cutoff to my scope.

My methods are qualitative interviews with musicians in the Prague metal scene. My research will add to the post-subculturalist turn by focusing not on symbolic rebellion as political activity, but on interaction of a particular subculture's norms with political science-oriented viewpoints on politics. In short, my research examines the link between politics and subcultural participation based on the consumption of a genre of music with a set of transgressive, oppositional values. I propose two hypotheses stemming from the literature on metal music, subcultures, and politics:

H1: Members of Prague's metal scene will have negative opinions on politics. As a result, they will be less likely to participate.

H2: If they do participate, they will still have negative opinions on politics and will express support for anti-system² parties and ideas.

The research question and hypotheses stem from Kahn-Harris' notion that metal scenes' main function is to provide opportunities for transgression and that scene members express a dislike for "politics." The hypotheses will be tested through a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with musicians in the Prague metal scene. In answering these questions, I hope to do a small part to illuminate whatever connection

² In short, parties that are critical of the way "the system" functions, and that appeal to their anti-establishment appeal over ideology (Učeň, 2007). My definition also has similarities to Cas Mudde's definition of populism: "*an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' versus the 'corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people*" (Mudde 2004, 543). However, I avoid using the word "populist" due to the politically-loaded nature of the term.

music may have to politics in this context. It is important to note, however, that because I am drawing on distinct streams of literature—each with different methodological and epistemological viewpoints—I do not seek to establish a causal link between metal scene membership and political participation. At best, I hope to illustrate a correlational link by examining Prague metal scene’s potential link to politics “as it is,” in the hope that future scholarly work will delve deeper into possible causal interpretations. While the research is guided by the two hypotheses, they served as a base for unexpected but relevant findings to be included. There is an exploratory element to this research, as the scholarship on this topic is, at best, vague on what is to be expected.

My dataset comes from interviews with and survey responses from musicians. While music scenes include fans, concert promoters, et cetera, I limit my analysis to the viewpoints of musicians. This is largely for practical reasons. Firstly, they are easy to reach out to, as their bands have dedicated social media pages and email addresses to contact. Secondly, they have a degree of mundane subcultural capital gained through playing shows and releasing music in the scene—they have experience operating in the scene’s environment and norms. As a result, they have a built-in level of “authenticity,” and are likely to understand the “politics” of the scene.

I use “Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives,” to identify bands based in to contact for interviews. The Metal Archives is a database categorizing metal bands from around the world, and has information about the bands’ location, releases, subgenre, lyrical themes, et cetera. Adam Mayer and Jeffrey Timberlake (2014) advocate for the database’s importance as a research tool, and their interviews with the database’s webmasters confirm that database is systematic, comprehensive, and trustworthy. Data on bands is collected by volunteers—who are members of their local metal scenes—and is then catalogued by the

webmaster (Meyer and Timberlake, 2014, pp. 33-35). The expertise of the volunteers and webmasters involved makes the website's categories reliable for research.

I first reached out to bands via email addresses found on Metal Archives, the band's official websites, or (most commonly) their Bandzone.cz accounts. I found that several listed email addresses had been removed from existing servers or were no longer in use. I then reached out to bands whose email addresses were either incorrect or not in use through their Facebook pages. This idea came from a suggestion in one of my early interviews, when a respondent pointed out that a band's email address may only be managed by one member, or rarely checked. Facebook pages, on the other hand, are usually administrated by multiple band members—as a result, messaging Facebook pages would increase the likelihood of a response. In all, I contacted 115 bands, and 22 musicians agreed to participate. The respondents varied in age and length of involvement in the scene.³ Some had been playing in metal bands since the late 1980s, while others had joined the scene in the past five years.

I asked bands about interviews to be held either in person, via phone call, or video chat. For bands and individuals that did not want to participate in a verbal interview—due to time constraints or their comfort level speaking in English—I allowed the option to fill out a 19-question survey. Five respondents filled out a survey: seven were interviewed one-on-one; 10 were interviewed in three pseudo-focus groups, with three or four members of the same band participating. Additionally, respondents were allowed to have their inclusion in the project be anonymous, or to be identified under an alias if they wished. To

³ Age and length of involvement were not expected to affect respondents' opinions, and there were no trends in the data suggesting that they did. As a result, these factors are not discussed in the analysis.

protect my respondents' privacy, I use their first names, and use the first letter of a band's name when referring to said band in the study.

Interviews were semi-structured, broadly following the questions covered in the survey.⁴ The topics centered around people's processes of and reasoning for joining the scene; their experiences in it, and their level of involvement; interactions between the scene and their political beliefs; links between metal and politics; and their viewpoints on politics and political participation. While the majority of interviews were semi-structured, I allowed feminist interview techniques to influence my methodology, allowing the opportunity for "documented conversations" in which interviewees can feel free to find out more about my own background and knowledge of metal music.⁵ In all circumstances, I took handwritten notes to document the respondents' answers—when possible, I recorded the conversation with the participants' permission.

I analyzed my data through a thematic analysis.⁶ Thematic analysis is crucial in this context as it allows me to highlight individual interviewees' responses, but also allows me to analyze responses across my dataset to craft group meanings.⁷ While I proposed two hypotheses based on the literature prior to my interviews, I acknowledge that due to my status as an outsider in the Prague metal scene, I would not know its specificity until after the interviews. In light of this I coded my results in an inductive manner to reflect this specificity and potentially unexpected findings. My coding process consisted of re-examining my interview notes and recordings, along with questionnaire responses, and noting specific topics and ideas interviewees discussed to get an overview of potential

⁴ See Appendix for the full list of questions.

⁵ For an example of this interview style, see Gerard (2013).

⁶ See Braun and Clarke, 2012; Nowell et al, 2017; and Maguire and Delahunt, 2017 for in-depth discussions of the thematic analysis method.

⁷ A notion key to the post-subculturalist turn, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

themes. The responses were synthesized into four relevant themes: “Politically Active and Largely Right-wing,” “Talking Politics: Antipathy towards politics and political discourse,” “Metal Music and Politics: A Free-speech Apolitical Sphere,” and “Right-wing Bands and “Political” Music.” From there, I consulted my notes and transcribed audio recordings once again for all relevant discussions and quotes from my interviewees, with the text then used to construct a comprehensive picture of the theme.

There are limitations to the scope and generalizability of this study. Regarding my sample, there are two limitations. First of all, I am interviewing a very small number of participants in the scene. I cannot generalize my findings to the entirety of Prague’s metal scene as a whole, or other metal scenes—yet, my findings may hint at possibilities and potential trends for future scholars to examine. Secondly, I focus my analysis on musicians—fans, managers, and venue owners may have different opinions or insights.

The second limitation is language. As someone who does not speak Czech, I can only interview people who speak English. While my online questionnaire did allow for a few respondents who did not speak much English to participate, it was not a definitive remedy for this issue. Additionally, the language barrier forced me to abandon participant observation as part of my methodology. While participant observation at concerts is a common methodological tool when studying musical scenes, if one does not speak the language they are forced to focus on visual components of concerts—conclusions drawn from this would be dubious at best, and would risk removing visual aesthetics from the contextualized meaning of attendees.

Additionally, this project also does not focus on song lyrics or visual style, unlike many other scholarly examinations of metal. This limitation is justified by my emphasis on individual perceptions of political participation, which can be sufficiently examined through interviews. Furthermore, like the subcultural literature as a whole, previous

research on subcultures in the Czech Republic are centered on readings of visual style. My emphasis on individual perceptions of political participation, which can be sufficiently examined through interviews—the cultural artifacts and style of subcultures are important, but are not the focus of my study.

The structure of my thesis is as follows. Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the important theoretic concepts and definitions I will be using. Chapter 2 provides an examination of the literature on metal scenes. This will situate my research's place in the literature and illustrate why the link between (metal) music and politics is worthy of examination, despite the inherent epistemological and methodological difficulties it presents. Chapter 3 presents a thematic analysis of my interviews with musicians from Prague's metal scene. Finally, I conclude with a brief summary of my findings and discusses aspects of this thesis relevant to future researchers.

1. Theoretical Concepts: Political Participation, Metal Scenes, and Scenic Membership

Previous discussions of subcultures' relationship to politics provide different definitions of each term (Pastarmadzhieva, 2012). In this study, I use a definition of politics that is a cross between John Street's *Music and Politics* (2012, pp. 6-8)—in turn derived from Colin Hay's 2007 book *Why We Hate Politics*—and Lester Milbrath's hierarchy of levels of political participation (Milbrath as cited in Ruedin, 2007). I define political activity and behavior as agentic choices with a social impact. By “agentic choices,” I mean that individuals make political decisions of their own volition. While structural conditions such as socioeconomic status may shape one's decisions, I hold that political decision-making and activity still stem from individualized cognitive processes and perspectives. “Social impact” in this case means that “political behavior” must affect

others in some way—be it by voting a candidate into office whose policies impact society, or by having a conversation that challenges one’s interpretation of an issue.

While I agree that the personal is political, I side with Street’s view that not all aspects of the personal are political (Street, 2012, pp. 6-7). This is where Milbrath’s hierarchy of political involvement comes in. Milbrath’s 1965 work divides political participation into a pyramid—with activities like “holding office” and “active party membership” at the top, and “trying to talk someone into voting a certain way” and “voting” situated closer to the bottom (Ruedin, 2007, pp. 9-11). I do not strictly systematize political behavior in the same way Milbrath does, but use his typology to inform to what degree I consider actions as “political.”

The subcultural unit I analyze is Prague’s metal scene. Keith Kahn-Harris’ (2007) definition of scene in *Extreme Metal* is most applicable to this research for obvious reasons. Kahn-Harris writes that scene is a holistic concept made up of “music making, production, circulation, discussion, and texts” (pp. 11-15). Scenes can be made up of participants from various backgrounds, with different motivations, meanings, and interpretations of the scene’s importance. Scenes are about more than just style and dress: they are about the location, production, and interpretation of content as well (pp. 16-22). Finally, scenes are “all-encompassing” and include people with drastically different levels of involvement (pp. 21-22).

Metal scenes serve as sites for the production and consumption of local and global cultural artefacts—i.e., albums and live music performance (Wallach & Levine, 2011, p. 119). While there are different levels of involvement, metal scenes patrol their boundaries—defining constantly in- and out-groups based on level of dedication to the musical genre and the local scene. Authenticity is key, and intolerance towards superficial dedication and affinity is common (pp. 124-125).

I base my definition of scenic membership on a combination of “existential authenticity” and subcultural capital. In contrast to externally-prescribed authenticity, “existential authenticity refers to a dynamic of being and becoming true to one’s self, being one’s own, and not being what others expect,” (Hopper et al., 2015, p. 320) and is linked to self-authentication (Oirko, 2014). Because scenic belonging involves subjective interpretations of involvement and different levels of engagement, this form of authenticity is more useful for this study. However, to avoid completely blurring the boundaries of scenic involvement, I invoke Kahn-Harris’ notions of mundane and transgressive social capital in the metal scene. Mundane subcultural capital is gained by undertaking tasks needed for the scene to exist (organizing shows, publishing fan zines, et cetera), and “transgressive” subcultural capital is gained by embodying the scene’s viewpoints of uniqueness and individualism (Kahn-Harris, 2007, pp. 122-138).

2. Scholarly Perspectives on Politics, Music, and Metal Subcultures

This chapter provides an overview of the recent scholarship relevant to this thesis. Subcultures are centered around the communal consumption of cultural artifacts, such as music—as a result, the norms of the artifacts being consumed may affect the norms of the subculture. Thus, the first section examines the “politics” of music and metal music in particular. It illustrates that metal music may have political salience, as it critiques the norms of the cultural industry and invokes political issues in its lyrical and aesthetic content. However, there is little scholarly agreement as to what metal’s link to tangible political action and attitudes is. Additionally, theorists focusing on music and politics as such often present their work as analyzing music in of itself, with little mention given to the subjective interpretation of fans and musicians.

The second section examines the literature on subculture and perspectives of how the politics of music manifest in metal scenes. Metal scenes in particular are seen as subcultural units having a purpose that relates to the content of the genre. While metal scene members describe themselves as apolitical, they operate as spaces to escape from and transgress the norms of modernity. Furthermore, scenes foster a sense of community and belonging for members—a community that broadly places itself in opposition to a notion of the “mainstream” or “normal.” From this discussion, it follows that metal scenes are based on an oppositional code—stemming from the anti-mainstream and critical nature of the music—which may interact with members’ viewpoints on politics and political participation.

2.1 Metal and Music as “Political”: Ascribed or Prescribed Meanings?

2.1.1 Theoretical Viewpoints on Music and Politics

Theodore Adorno’s theory of the “cultural industry” is one of the most influential modern theories on music’s social and political functions. In his view, mainstream art from the “cultural industry” is imposed on consumers from above. The industry, driven by the profit motive, produces art that places “rationalized distribution” over aesthetic quality or progress. Any apparent innovation or rebellion in popular culture is not a departure from the profit-driven political norms of the cultural industry, as the art is still part of mass culture (Adorno and Rabinbach, 1975, pp. 12-16). In short, different forms of music have different ideologies inherent in their aesthetic characteristics and production methods.

Adorno’s theory has received a substantial amount of criticism. Rupa Huq notes several scholars have objected to the elitist nature of Adorno’s critique of the “cultural industry” and classical music, as Adorno tended to use normative language in his

writings—regarding the guitar and banjo as “infantile” instruments for untrained musicians (Huq, 2006, p. 46). Huq’s own research complicates Adorno’s idea that audiences lack agency as consumers, especially as technological advances have allowed for more independent music production and distribution outside of the control of multinational corporations (pp. 46-48, 259-163). Additionally, Adorno's school developed his theories in the middle of the twentieth century. The sound of “popular music”—and the level of formal musical training the people who make hold—has changed significantly in the decades since. While some aspects of Adorno’s view on music’s political and ideological importance have not aged well, the idea that different forms of music potentially embody distinct political values is still influential and, to an extent, valid.

Like Adorno, John Street (2012) holds that music is important because “tastes and standards may vary wildly, but they all driven by a desire for some notion of the best ... aesthetic discrimination entails more than an expression of taste” (p. 140). His main argument is as follows:

Music *embodies* political values and experiences, and *organizes* our response to society as political thought and action. Music does not just provide a vehicle of political expression, it *is* that political expression. (p. 1)

Not all of the personal is political in his view: listening to music for private reflection is not political, but once music enters the public sphere, it is political and operates as a form of public deliberation (pp. 6-8). Music’s political communication can become representative if it connects to a cause or viewpoint that people share (pp. 41-45). Yet, music’s capacity to lead to political engagement is contingent on three elements: capital flows surrounding an artist; the perceived legitimacy or authenticity of the political action; and the live performance and visual aesthetics attached to the music (pp. 67-73). In his conclusion, he touches on music’s use in shaping everyday behavior (i.e., shopping malls

playing certain types of music to keep people shopping longer) and underlines the idea that in deliberative democracies, music can help people understand the viewpoint of others (pp. 163-166).

Street's work provides several convincing, concrete arguments illustrating the links between music and politics. He avoids the pitfalls of Adorno's work by avoiding normative claims and adhering to his concrete definition of politics, which narrows the scope of his results. However, the examples Street draws on come from music and musicians operating firmly within the cultural industry—the activism of millionaires like Bono and Bob Geldof are the most frequently cited examples. While these artists certainly exert political influence, it is more emblematic of their celebrity status, not their work as musicians. It does not speak to the experiences of musicians who have smaller audiences.

Stephen Graham (2016) fills the gap left by Street's work. He argues that “almost every aspect of our lives has been absorbed into capitalist production as a value-producing process” through “real subsumption”—for instance, people's emotions or desires for political change manifesting on Facebook as the post interactions, which in turn drive Facebook's profits (Graham, 2016, pp. 53-58). While these “subsumed” online platforms provide new promotional opportunities, underground musicians use them in subversive ways or separate themselves from them entirely when they can, favoring “antistatist anarchist, separatist, and autonomist models of art production and political activism” (pp. 53-57). In other words, underground musicians attempt to critique capitalist models of production and cultural promotion—and the aesthetic effects they could have on their art—while acknowledging that they exist in a context that is not entirely outside of these capital flows. Graham includes case studies of noise music and extreme metal, and holds that while each genre has its own worldview and ideology, underground music is united by a rejection of “mainstream” aesthetic values and norms (pp. 169-218). In his conclusion, he

emphasizes that while the underground may interact with mainstream channels of cultural distribution, it “exists in a primarily extra-institutional, anintermediated [sic] space that stretches to the fringes of the marketplace and high-art institutions,” and that it represents a third, separate category from distinctions between high and low art (p. 243).

Graham’s theory on the politics of underground music can be seen almost as a twenty-first century update of Adorno (that is, if Adorno had a taste for hardcore punk and harsh noise instead of the Western classical canon). His Marxist discussions of capital flows and subsumption echo Adorno’s cultural industry. In this case, however, the cultural industry does not manifest itself as a top-down imposition of taste on the audience—now social media and music streaming companies affect taste. However, unlike Adorno, Graham holds that musicians can still critique the music industry while interacting with its institutions. Furthermore, Graham’s perspective emphasizes that the political power of music is not necessarily limited to famous bands or classically-trained composers: smaller bands have a place in the discussion as well.

2.1.2 The Politics of Metal Music

Martin Morris (2015) provides a topical, modern-day application of Adorno’s theory. He argues that extreme metal music exists outside of the cultural industry because it constitutes what Adorno calls “serious music.” While popular music “promotes the ‘illusion of escape’” from the listener’s struggles, serious music strives to be “difficult” to listen to and raises “alarm bells” about dominant discourses in society. Morris notes that while popular music can have political lyrics, the main goal of popular music remains escapism, not a true call to political action (pp. 286-291). Morris argues that extreme metal, on the other hand, subverts the conventions of popular music with its dissonant harmonic, rhythmic, and structural qualities, while also critiquing the existing social order.

Because serious music is rebellious in sound *and* text, it is more politically volatile (pp. 290-292).

Niall Scott argues that metal's identification as "apolitical" is paradoxically a political stance and a critique of the cultural industry. He holds that "members of the extreme metal community are capable of reflective political engagement, but choose not to," and that within metal, people with different viewpoints across the political spectrum coexist (Scott, 2011, pp. 227-229). Metal attempts to situate itself outside of market-centered values imposed by the cultural industry, but its rebellion against the market discourse and rationale has been commoditized itself (pp. 230-234). However, certain metal genres—such as black metal, with misanthropic rhetoric full of "self-loathing, misery, and the void" as an example—provide subversive discourses that are not easily commoditized. Additionally, the metal scene views works that enter the mainstream's consciousness as "inauthentic," further limiting its ability to be absorbed into mass culture (pp. 234-237). The black metal scene—and other smaller, underground metal scenes—exist outside of the cultural industry to an extent, as they are not imposed on fans, but start from the ground up (pp. 236-237). Resistance to the cultural industry and its ideology create a form of "apolitical politicality."

While there is a consensus around metal's stance against hegemonic narratives, metal does not critique *all* of them. Robert Walser holds that metal's discourse is shaped by the patriarchy, emphasizing strength, virility, and musical virtuosity (Walser, 2013, pp. 108-116). This encourages misogynistic and homophobic viewpoints in the genre—in the rare spaces for women to participate, they are required to exhibit masculine values of dominance and physical power (pp. 121-123). While Walser's book focuses on metal mainly from the 1980s and early 1990s, tropes of violence against and sexual objectification of women are still prominent in many contemporary metal subgenres.

Ondrej Daniel and Jiri Almer's examination of sexploitation in Czech and Slovak black metal and porno-gore grind (PGG)⁸ exemplifies that some modern, sonically extreme subgenres of metal push the already masculine discourses of metal into over-the-top misogyny and sexism (Daniel and Almer, 2019, p. 203). In black metal's case, nudity and sexual exploitation are used to position the genre as an "eroticized, blood-seeking anti-thesis to Christianity," and in PGG's case, bands draw upon the imagery for satirical purposes—extremely sexual music played by male musicians who do not adhere to standards of aesthetic beauty or musical skill, poking fun at stereotypes of eroticized rock stars (pp. 204-209). Nonetheless, both genres focus their objectification on the female body, and that little is done for queer empowerment in either scene (pp. 210-211). The authors conclude that sexploitation in extreme metal offers heterosexual male fans a chance for empowerment (by disregarding conventional standards of appearance) and pleasure (through the objectification of women) but does not offer the same to other groups, in turn reinforcing mainstream gender discourses (p. 211).

Additionally, the link between subgenres of extreme metal—particularly black metal—and far-right ideologies has been widely discussed. Some of the subgenre's formative bands, particularly those from Oslo's scene in the 1990s, flirted with neo-Nazi aesthetics and rhetoric, with some openly advocating for white supremacist ideals outside of their music (Beckwith, 2002). In addition to anti-Christian topics, black metal's lyrics and aesthetic often call upon "heritage" narratives and pastoral imagery, constructing a mythical, idealic past that evokes ethnocentric nationalist and anti-modern discourses (Sprackeln et al, 2014; Hochhauser, 2011; Venkatesh et al, 2016). Yet, black metal's tropes are not solely used to express racist ideologies. Onderj Daniel writes that in the Czech and

⁸ A hybrid of hardcore punk and heavy metal music with a lyrical and visual aesthetic depicting extreme violence against women.

Slovak cases, bands used satanic imagery to express their endorsement of extreme individualism and opposition to Communism—even while a small minority of bands identified as part of the “Nationalist Socialist Black Metal” scene (Daniel, 2018, pp. 79-85). Daniel holds that racism in the Czech and Slovak black metal scenes reflects the racism prevalent in the broader sociopolitical context (p. 86).

2.1.3 Conclusion

Music, regardless of genre, is viewed as having a link to different forms of politics. It can either endorse or resist the aesthetic norms of the cultural industry and corporate-controlled models of musical production and promotion, and can serve as a mobilizing tool in some cases. Metal music in particular is considered an aesthetic critique of the cultural industry’s norms and of discourses that exist outside of the scene. Yet, metal’s critique of outside discourses includes attacks on anti-sexist and anti-racist discourses, which in turn paradoxically reinforces pre-existing power structures. It is important to note that many of the scholarly works on this topic are heavily theoretical or rely on analyses of lyrics and/or music. Little has been said about the mechanisms through which “political” music leads to political action for everyday citizens and musicians—music may have a political message, but the message may not necessarily be one fans choose to act on, or even acknowledge.

2.2 Metal Music Scenes: Articulated Transgression, or Identity and Belonging?

2.2.1 The Weinstein Hypothesis and Metal as Class-based Rebellion

Deena Weinstein’s *Heavy Metal*, originally published in 1991, was the first full-length scholarly work focusing solely on heavy metal. It is a sociological analysis of the genre’s characteristics and its most prominent figures at the time, as well as the ways in which the music’s detractors and fans relate to the genre. Although limited in scope, *Heavy*

Metal is considered a foundational work in what some have dubbed as “metal studies,” and many of her observations and definitions are cited by scholars today. Weinstein describes metal as a subculture mainly comprised of mostly of young, white, lower middle-class males (Weinstein, 2000, pp. 97-117). She points out that metal’s working-class “values and mythologies” allowed members to subvert expected social and political mores, and that the subculture itself was simultaneously a response to the decline of 1960s youth culture and the “cultural marginalization of the working class (pp. 114-115). In Weinstein’s view, members of the subculture are “proud pariahs” who find belonging with others taking a perceived stand against the mainstream by participating in the subculture (pp. 221-272).

Weinstein’s updated edition of the book, released in 2000, notes that while metal music did not have the same level of influence on music charts as in the late 1980s, a thriving “globalized” metal underground with several new subgenres has emerged (pp. 282-290). Weinstein’s main rationale for this is “the rise of pan-capitalism, which creates an industrial working class in which youth are in rebellion against their more traditional parents and invest their identity in neither the nation state nor religious groups” (p. 282).

Weinstein more explicitly articulates the link between economics and metal subcultures across the world in her 2011 essay “The Globalization of Metal.” She claims that metal arises due to class tensions exacerbated by globalization’s economic changes. In the concluding lines of her essay, Weinstein writes, “Economic globalization and its handmaidens, industrial and post-industrial technology, create their casualties and resistances. . . . [Metal] is a symbolic rebellion of a compromised class, proletarian internationalism in a most imposing and surprising form” (Weinstein, 2011, pp. 56-57). This conclusion has been labelled as the “Weinstein hypothesis” (Wallach et al., 2011, pp. 16-17; Wallach, 2011, p. 88) and is a notion shared by other scholars (Levine 2009, pp. 11-12; Mayer and Timberlake, 2014, p. 41).

While the Weinstein hypothesis serves as a good starting point for articulating what the “symbolic rebellion” of metal may position itself against, it takes a similar place in the metal studies literature as Hebdige’s work did in the subcultural literature: providing strong, if overly simplistic, claims for future scholars to refine. Weinstein’s work is also context-dependent in its theoretical applicability. The two cases she devotes much of the book to—the United States and United Kingdom—are cases in which class would certainly manifest itself in metal scenes, as they were a large part of the social structure at the time. The discussions of other scenes in Mexico, Poland, the-then USSR, Brazil, and Japan are cursory, with a paragraph dedicated to each (Weinstein, 2000, pp. 117-120). They appear to be token inclusions to illustrate how metal works in more “exotic” locales—little discussion is given to how metal’s meaning varies in different cultural contexts. Even in her 2011 essay, she presents metal in non-Western contexts as an articulated rebellion by an idealized global proletariat. While she provides some quotes from metal fans in her analysis in which they discuss the importance of rebellion in vague terms, it is not made clear if they themselves think of metal as class-based. This disconnection between subject and author, like Hebdige’s, comes from a reliance on external readings of style and lyrics. Metal’s “meaning” is prescribed by the author. As a result its spectacular and controversial aspects are emphasized at the expense of mundane activities and nuanced meanings.

Weinstein’s view is shaped by its temporal context as well. It covers the genre in the mid-1970s and 1980s, and the genre’s sound has drastically changed since then. While Weinstein’s later work (and the update to *Heavy Metal*) acknowledges this, her core argument does not account for nuance these changes may bring. According to Weinstein, metal is and will always be linked to class rebellion. Additionally, Weinstein released *Heavy Metal* in the aftermath of a moral panic surrounding metal music. This context may have affected the topics she chose to examine in greater detail, as there was plenty of

topics—mainly related to the genre’s perceived deviance—highlighted in the media, but little previous scholarly literature about metal for her to determine which aspects of the subculture to focus on. Additionally, in the decades since Weinstein’s initial work, the “youth” subculture of metal has grown up. More recent studies show that the subculture is not necessarily only for the young, and its fans do not necessarily identify with the working class (Muršič, 2011; Elovaara 2014; Brown and Griffin, 2014).

2.2.2 Metal Scenes’ “Reflexive Anti-reflexivity” as Transgression in Modernity

Kahn-Harris’ *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* provides a drastically different viewpoint on metal’s symbolic rebellion than Weinstein. Kahn-Harris draws a distinction between more recent, “extreme” metal and the metal Weinstein analyzed, writing,

Extreme metal music frequently totters on the edge of formless noise. Whereas heavy metal [i.e., the genre categorizing bands Weinstein and Walser discussed] was at least intelligible to its detractors as ‘music’, extreme metal may not appear to be music at all and its attendant practices may appear terrifying and bizarre (Kahn-Harris, 2007, pp. 2-3).

He argues that “the purpose of the scene is the production of transgression,” or to allow participants the chance to cross social boundaries and escape societal norms relating to “power and authority” in general (p. 48). Extreme metal is centered around three forms of transgression: sonic (i.e., the rhythmic, harmonic, and structural aspects of music); bodily (participating in concerts with mosh pits and other forms of movement that skirt the line between chaos and order); and, most importantly, discursive transgression. Discursive transgression centers around the music’s lyrics and aesthetics, which deal with dark, often violent themes of the abject in unambiguous terms. In addition to the commonly known

Satanic and anti-authoritarian tropes, extreme metal bands sometimes draw on racist and fascist discourses, as “the Nazis are the pre-eminent transgressive symbol in the modern world” (pp. 30-46). At the same time, full-fledged racists or fascists are not allowed in the scene (pp. 155-156).

Kahn-Harris argues that the metal’s transgression is part of the scene’s “reflexive anti-reflexivity”—an antidote for the complexities of modern identity. This concept can be summed up as “knowing better but deciding not to know” (p. 145). Reflexivity is the process of constantly adapting one’s social practices to dialectical discourses in society. Anti-reflexivity is the act of acknowledging that several competing discourses exist, and deciding to removing oneself from them. It “produces a simplistic world in which nothing need be examined and everything is just as it appears” (pp. 141-145). Kahn-Harris argues that selfhood in modernity is in tension with the idea of reflexivity, as one must constantly adapt to several ever-changing discourses. Metal scenes allow people to express their individuality by temporarily freeing themselves from reflexivity, while providing a sense of community that fights alienation (pp. 157-160). Importantly, Kahn-Harris notes that despite metal’s content, “the notion of politics is antithetical to many scene members.” This may stem from the fact that politics in the scene “is restricted to interventions in the public sphere that are consciously intended to have an impact on social institutions” (pp. 152-154). The scene and its members are supposed to place the music before any political commitments or viewpoints (p. 155).

Like Walser, Kahn-Harris points out that metal scenes attack less powerful with the same veracity as dominant ones. Combined with its disdain for “politics,” this constructs barriers to inclusivity that he predicts metal will not address due to its purported “apoliticality” (pp. 161-165). Ultimately, he concludes that “the extreme metal scene exists on an exceptionally thin line between reproducing a bad parody of the world as it is, and

developing a utopian, egalitarian vision of the world as it could be” (p. 162). Kahn-Harris’ work, in short, deconstructs and problematizes the nature of metal’s symbolic and discursive rebellion. While metal discourages the use of outside discourses, its goal is not to rebel against them in an articulated sense—instead, it provides a supposedly apolitical reprieve from them.

Michael Phillipov’s examination of Norway’s black metal scene in the early 1990s examines how transgression manifests as a form of subcultural capital. Musicians in Norway’s black metal scene gained notoriety for committing acts of violence, from church burnings to murder and suicide. The arsons were committed to illustrate bands’ “seriousness” regarding their music’s transgressive and blasphemous musical themes, and their combination with the bands’ other criminal behavior made violence part of the “mythology and meaning of the genre” (Phillipov, 2011, pp. 152-156). These bands were seen as gained “authenticity” and transgressive subcultural capital by embodying the themes of their lyrics (pp. 153, 156). However, Phillipov acknowledges that many bands in the scene did not last due to their overemphasis on transgressive over mundane capital. Simply put, a band can gain attention by embodying their lyrics, but cannot play shows if the members are in prison. The bands that lasted toed the line between the two, later distancing themselves from the scene’s violence while refusing to outright condemn it (pp. 156-162). Phillipov’s work illustrates the tension scene members face: between authenticity, which in metal subcultures can be achieved through embodying the ideas expressed in the music—transgression, rebellion, et cetera—and the mundane aspects of the subculture. Metal scenes are built around transgression, but only to a certain extent.

2.2.3 Metal Scenes as Community-building

Metal scenes also function as a form of community-building. Varas-Díaz and Scott's 2016 book *Heavy Metal Music and the Communal Experience* examines metal's importance in community formation and identity making. Weinstein's essay in the book tries to codify what forms of communal belonging metal scenes create. Her conception of the ideal "community" requires shared values that dictate acceptable conduct and beliefs; mutual identification and interaction; solidarity between members; and boundaries that define in- and out- groups (Weinstein, 2016, pp. 10-19). She concludes that metal fans belong to an "imagined community" that treats the ideal metal community like an imagined heartland, potentially mitigating the complexities of identity in the modern world (pp. 19-20). Weinstein's essay provides a more nuanced view on metal's function than her previous work. While still portraying members of metal scenes as belonging to a community with clearly-defined ideas and goals, she acknowledges that local scenes may differ in their operation and meaning to participants.

Niall Scott argues that metal communities are defined by metal music as "unifying principle." Yet, this principle is at odds with the disunifying emphasis metal places on individuality and misanthropy (Scott, 2016, pp. 26-32). Unlike other scholars, Scott does not venture to say how exactly metal functions as a unifying principle—if participants are there simply because of shared tastes in the music, or if there is a specific ideology attached to the "unifying principle." Paula Rowe's addition to the volume presents a possible clarification for Scott's idea. She finds that many people who join metal scenes felt as if they were "weird kids" or "outsiders." The metal community structures a sense of belonging for them, as it keeps the "right" people in, and the "wrong" people out through boundary making. It serves as a simple way to ascribe trust to others and belonging to oneself (Rowe, 2016, pp. 79-95).

Other scholars have found that metal scenes help foster forms of identity and belonging in participants. Susanna Larsson finds that members view metal music as something that has “always been there” for them, and that participating in the subculture makes them feel closer to what they consider to be their truest selves (Larsson, 2013, pp. 99-104). Similarly, Baker and Brown (2016) find that metal serves as a cathartic release for fans, and helps reduce feelings of shame and stigma for those with mental health issues, while contributing to a sensation of community and belonging. Finally, Paula Rowe notes that as “normative markers of identity have become less visible if not completely unrecognizable in Western democracies,” participants use the metal community as a way to determine who the “right” people to associate with are, thus linking participants’ involvement to their “biographies of survival” instead of serving as a form of resistance (Rowe, 2016, pp. 84-95).

2.2.4 Conclusion

There is a scholarly consensus that metal scenes help to foster participants’ senses of identity, community, and belonging, similar to other subcultures. Metal scenes also transgress “mainstream” discourses and serve as a form of rebellion. However, there is disagreement over what exactly metal scenes rebel against. Some scholars claim that metal is a class-based rebellion against dominant discourses. Others hold that metal serves as a broader critique and escape from the pressures imposed by modernity. Interestingly, participants’ behaviors and attitudes do seem to reflect the purported norms of the music (discussed in 2.2.2). Yet, while examining the politics of metal scenes, scholars have not answered how participants act on “politics” in the political science-oriented definition of the term. Much discussion is devoted to participants embodying metal’s oppositional code

through “symbolic rebellion,” “transgression,” and “reflexive anti-reflexivity,” but little attention is devoted to their viewpoints on voting, activism, et cetera.

2.3 Summary

This chapter illustrated different scholarly perspectives on the connections between metal music scenes and politics. It is established by Adorno, Street, and Graham that music embodies certain worldviews, and that metal music presents an oppositional, critical stance. While the music itself is read as a politically salient critique of outside discourses, there is still debate surrounding the purpose of metal music scenes—the arenas in which the music’s political content manifests itself outside the realm of the theoretical. Authors adhering to the Weinstein hypothesis hold that metal is an articulated, targeted working-class rebellion. This is reminiscent of the CCCS viewpoint on subcultures, and the methods used by these authors are similarly focused on external readings of aesthetic style and the interpretation of song lyrics over the subjective interpretations of these factors. Kahn-Harris and others view metal scenes as having a more broad importance as communal, social spaces of release from the pressures of modernity, in turn echoing the post-subculturalist viewpoint discussed in the introduction. This thesis itself is positioned in the same post-subculturalist understanding of metal scenes as Kahn-Harris’ work is. It holds that metal scenes operate as spaces to transgress the norms of modernity. However, unlike Kahn-Harris, it does not discount the idea that metal scenes can be linked to politics or the discourses they rebel against.

3 Thematic Analysis

This study seeks to examine potential links between the Prague metal scene, political participation, and viewpoints towards politics. Once again, my hypotheses are:

H1: Members of Prague’s metal scene will have negative opinions on politics. As a result, they will be less likely to participate.

H2: If they do participate, they will still have negative opinions on politics and will express support for anti-system parties and ideas.

This chapter is predominantly made up of a thematic analysis of interviews with 22 members of Prague’s metal scene. In section 1, it is concluded that H1 is not supported, and H2 is supported. The section also provides an overview of responses stemming from questions regarding political participation, orientation, opinions on “politics,” and metal’s relation to politics, providing context for the following sub-sections. Section 2 examines the scene’s apolitical, and antipolitical standpoints. Section 3 shows that respondents hold that while metal can be political in some contexts, already said “while” metal in the Czech Republic today is largely perceived as apolitical. Section 4 examines scene members’ discussions far-right wing politics and bands in the metal scene. Section 5 synthesizes the different themes to arrive at a definition of “politics” in Prague’s metal scene, and how the different themes speak to the literature on metal subcultures and music. The chapter concludes with an addendum from the author about the content of the thematic analysis.

3.1 Politically Active and Largely Right-wing

Figure 1 sums up the different ways in which respondents politically participate. Unlike other aspects of this thematic analysis, these findings are summarized in graphic form as questions related to political participation are nominal—either one votes, or they do not. Note that these forms of political participation are not mutually exclusive, and that respondents can and did indicate that they politically participate in multiple ways.

Methods of Participation	Prevalence
Vote	13
Party membership	1

Share/post content on social media	3
Attend demonstrations	3
Regular in-person political conversations	4
Did not mention/do not participate	8
Number of respondents who participate in at least one way	13
Total Number of respondents	21 ⁹

Figure 1 Methods of Participation. Source: Author's interviews and survey responses.

According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the average voter turnout in Czech parliamentary and presidential elections since 2010 has varied between 58 and 62 percent (IDEA, 2019). Slightly over half of the interviewees who answered questions about political participation (13 of 21, 61.9 percent) indicated that they vote. The voting rate for my respondents coincides with the average in the Czech Republic, casting doubt on the validity of H1 (that scene members will be less likely to politically participate). This suggests that a large portion of respondents (eight of 21) completely separate themselves from involvement in or discussion of “politics,” making them apolitical in terms of political participation.

H2 (that scene members who vote would support anti-system parties or would hold anti-system views) is supported. Only one respondent, Alena, indicated that she was a member of a party. She did not name which one, but noted that she joined it as “a favor for a friend” who was running as a candidate of the party, not because she felt politically motivated to do so (Alena, personal correspondence, 18 February 2019). Another respondent, Lai6, mentioned that “[for a] long time I did not vote, simply because here there was no one to vote [for]. Today I vote ,Pirátská strana,“ (Lai6, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019) but otherwise, no respondents mentioned any preference

⁹ While the sample size is 22, one respondent did not discuss political participation or their political leanings.

for a specific party. Several respondents mentioned that they do not vote or identify with a political party because they do not think any political party is representative of their views. This finding will be discussed more in the following subsection.

Predictions about voting for anti-system parties did not hold, but it is apparent that members of the metal scene—even those who do participate—harbor strong critiques of the political system. Seventeen of the 21 correspondents expressed anti-political sentiments, critiquing the nature of institutional politics and the societal discourse surrounding “politics.” Ten of the 13 respondents who voted expressed anti-political sentiment. These findings provide nuance to the initial hypotheses, which were narrowly focused on scene members’ political participation. As a portion of the respondents do not politically participate, but a majority of respondents (even those who politically participate) express anti-political sentiment, looking at these sentiments will tell us more about the scene’s relation to politics.

Additionally, when asked if metal was a “political” genre of music or if there was a place for politics in metal, 14 responded that metal could be political in certain contexts, while six indicated that politics did not (or in some cases, normatively *should not*) have a place in metal. Furthermore, 15 respondents indicated that they got a sense of enjoyment, expression, or belonging from participating in the metal scene. Examining these different “meanings” of metal music will speak to the literature’s claims related to music’s political utility. It may be that music is only as political as people think it is.

There was another result worth examining as well: the majority of respondents identified as center-right or right-wing. Figure 2 shows how interviewees identified their political leaning on the left-right spectrum. Thirteen of eighteen identified as center-right or right-wing. No respondents identified as far-left or far-right. This is an unexpected trend, but one worth examining for two reasons: due to the literature’s discussions on

metal’s sometimes racist and sexist lyrical tropes; and when considering my respondents’ discussions of bands that either hold far-right viewpoints or invoke far-right discourses in their music (see subsection 4).

Political Leaning	Left	Center-Left	Center	Center-Right	Right
Number of Respondents	1	1	3	10	3

*Figure 2 Political Orientation of Respondents (n=18).*¹⁰ Source: Author’s interviews and survey responses.

3.2 Talking Politics: Antipathy towards politics and political discourse

3.2.1 Critisms of Politicians

Several respondents held the view that politicians were corrupt and did not represent the people’s interests. The members of Band C were heavily critical of current President Miloš Zeman and Prime Minister Andrej Babiš. Lai6 held that politicians were inherently corrupt and ineffective: “every politics group, it’s a s***hole, f*** them. It’s either Communists, or democrats, or something else.” Frank noted that “I vote usually, I find the candidate that I find the least repulsing. The problem is that there are no personalities in our politics. And I think it is not only here but it is similar all around the world ...” (Band C, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019). Petr, who regularly votes, also expressed deep antipathy towards the political establishment. He mentioned that he restrains himself from greater involvement in politics to critique the status quo:

¹⁰ Three respondents indicated that they were not political in any sense themselves, which I considered as apolitical, while one respondent’s political leanings were not discussed at all in another interview.

“[I am] mainly ignoring them [politicians], which is one of the best things to do, in my opinion - they need our attention and without it they are losing the power. I am not going to be politically active in any way. We don’t need neither politics nor politicians. There are other systems in which the society can operate. It is only a question of the will to change.” (Petr, personal correspondence, 14 March 2019).

Fedor also held that politicians are in office due to their ability to influence people, rather than their ability to govern effectively. He viewed this as the primordial nature of politics: “some might think about principles of power—why you would have incompetent people in power. ... It was always like this in nature ... who was stronger ... [nowadays] if you can influence people, then you are stronger.” He voiced a feeling of powerlessness in the face of this situation. He explained that while he votes, he is largely “passive” in regard to politics, saying, “I don’t think I can influence [the state of things] in an efficient way” (Fedor, personal correspondence, 8 February 2019).

Dan expressed similar sentiments, but had a more hopeful outlook on the potential efficacy of political participation:

Voting I do most of the time—I have missed one or two votes. I don't know. I think people have the right to [participate] if they want—it's their problem. I don't like violent protest or anything like that. I don't perceive that it does much. I could be wrong about that. But I personally wouldn't do it because, I don't know, it seems like a bit of a waste of time and getting worked up about something with no results. Although I would be perfectly willing to have that opinion changed if I had more evidence on that sort of thing (Dan, personal correspondence, 13 March 2019).

3.2.2 Disdain for Political Discourse and Discussion

Several respondents were critical of the way political issues are discussed. Social media in particular was singled out as contributing to polarization and unconstructive public political discourse. Individual T commented:

I think it's very important for people to discuss politics at some level. But it should be a discussion not an argument, as is the case in many, many interactions. I believe that social media is just a big bubble and lots of people are ignoring the other opinions. They just don't see them and so they can't understand why do some people say what they say (Individual T, personal correspondence, 9 February 2019).

Other respondents expressed that while they talk about politics to their friends in person, they do not involve themselves in political discussions on social media, perceiving it as counterproductive.

Jana also lamented social media's effects on public discourse. In response to the question "If you do participate politically, how and why? If not, why not?," she elaborated that political discussion "only makes sense with people who are pretty advanced in their personal development and have achieved some basic balance. It is difficult to lead a constructive debate with frustrated individuals who feel like their happiness is being destroyed by some 'guys up there' and I don't think it's worth my time" (Jana, personal correspondence, 9 February 2019). It is important to note that while Jana is critical of the current state of political discourse, she claims that people's apathy towards their potential for political impact is another source of her frustration.

Some bands perceived political correctness discourses as being a contributing factor to polarization and unconstructive political dialogue. The members of Band C, for instance, felt that while people in the 1990s were united in hope of improving the country

after the fall of the Communist regime, people have become more polarized since. They held that political correctness has shifted people's attention away from important issues:

Mike: "Satire of political jokes and TV of [the 1990s] was over the top. Today they'll be judged for it."

Frank: "People who are involved with the shows nowadays are really politically correct."

Mike: "And speaking of politically correct. About the gays, you can't tell [him] that he's gay and you have to tell a black man he is African American."

Lai6: "In every movie, there must be a Chinaman, black man, gay man, lesbian ..."

Frank: "... I think that some of the ideas are good definitely. But sometimes it is a bit too much and there are things which they problems from things which are not so important, I would say, and some serious issues are not addressed." (Band C, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019).

The members of black metal band Band N were also critical of political correctness. The band discussed facing backlash from Antifa and the left-leaning organizers of the Zizkov Noc festival, who they perceived as unfairly labelling them as a "Nazi band." The group vehemently denied this label, stating that politically the band and its members are neutral, and that their "participation is zero." Lead guitarist Ondrej notably remarked that "We ain't no Nazis," holding that the double-negative reflects the ambiguity of playing black metal—a genre which, as previously discussed, has a reputation for being right-wing. They also mentioned that they used politically incorrect humor in their band's group chat on Facebook, but Ondrej clarified that this was justified, as "we hate everybody [laughs]" (Band N, personal correspondence, 2 February 2019).

3.2.3 Positive Viewpoints on Participation

While most members of the scene were critical of politics and the political climate, it is important to note that a few did emphatically express the importance of political participation. Robert holds that he “tries to be a good citizen by voting.” Jana holds that “I think people should cherish their right to vote and use it, but also understand the responsibility ... Unless I am dead, I will always go and vote, during every election” (Robert, personal correspondence, 19 February 2019).

Individual T held that political participation is crucial, especially in light of the Czech Republic’s history: “Don't start me on voting, I believe EVERYONE should vote. My generation was born after the fall of the Communist regime and many of them don't vote because they don't care... Yet they complain constantly. ... I try to vote every time I get the chance but I'm not a member of any party because, frankly, I don't have the stomach for that. But I have joined protests that were important to me” (Individual T, personal correspondence, 9 February 2019).

3.3 Metal Music and Politics: A Free-speech Apolitical Sphere

3.3.1 Lyrical Freedom and Contempt for Overly Political Lyrics

Several respondents expressed that one of the factors that drew them to write metal music was the degree of structural and lyrical freedom it presents for self-expression. Robert reflected that “you have quite a large amount of freedom to write lyrics in comparison to some type of pop tunes because it’s a very freeform genre. It was good for writing anything I wanted to write lyrically. I thought there were very few restrictions and that was good for me” (Robert, personal correspondence, 19 February 2019). Alena similarly said that “you can play whatever, political or not” (Alena, personal correspondence, 18 February 2019).

Despite this freedom, expressing “political” opinions were frowned upon. Michal from Band E held that because there is “freedom in music,” it is a normative good to avoid political music, as “there is no reason to make political lyrics when you have your own freedom” (Band E, personal correspondence, 2 February 2019). Other respondents felt that political content got in the way of creating aesthetically pleasing music. Lai6 from Band C answered that “Absolutely not! I think that policy in music globally - is death of pure good music. Music crystalize from inner feelings (good or bad), but not from political preferences. I think that each band coquettish with policy is more about obtrude (bad) personal opinion, than instrumental and composing skills” (Lai6, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019).

Dan noted that he does not like bands that wear their political viewpoints on their sleeve: “There are some bands that I sort of dislike little bit because of the politics, but it's normally not because it's the exact politics. It's because it's too obvious. It's like preaching. A good example is band called Ministry who released an album recently ... I don't necessarily agree with what their politics are and I don't know exactly what their politics are, but it seemed too aggressively, like, ‘forcing down your throat’ sort of thing: ‘This is our politics and we’re angry about it.’ It detracts from the music somewhat” (Dan, personal correspondence, 13 March 2019).

Respondents largely viewed metal’s “politicality” as stemming from its lyrical content, and not intrinsically from its sonic characteristics. Lukaš held that metal’s lyrics operate as a critique of society (Lukaš, personal correspondence, 6 February 2019). Respondents often cited specific bands or genres as being “political” based on their lyrical themes. Individual T singled out thrash metal, for example: “Well, not metal in general but I guess thrash metal is based around politics and opinions about it. ... I think metal is about the perspective of the composer and their emotions and feelings which can include

opinions and emotions about political situation” (Individual T, personal correspondence, 9 February 2019). Robert and Karel, for instance, both cited the thrash band Megadeth—whose lyrics often discuss war and political corruption—as an example of “political” metal (Karel, personal correspondence, 29 January 2019; Robert, personal correspondence, 19 February 2019).

The respondents said that the majority of their music’s lyrical themes were apolitical, and addressed aspects of social life and served as an outlet to express their emotions. However, some respondents noted that some songs they had written were “political” songs, as defined by their lyrical themes. Fedor, for instance, mentioned one of his band’s songs that used a horror trope (zombies) to discuss environmental issues. He held that “you can do anything with metal,” but that the lyrics do not need to be politically oriented: “if you want to sing about how you cook pizza, you can” (Fedor, personal correspondence, 8 February 2019).

Several respondents noted that lyrical content was often based on tropes established by previous bands. While many of these tropes are transgressive, respondents held that the lyrical content did not necessarily reflect their own personal beliefs. Dan noted that his band’s dark lyrical content is reflective of books or movies his band enjoy, and “also because it’s [a trope that has] been established by other bands as well. The early black metal bands are all about Satanism so most people like try and emulate that. Lots of the death metal bands wrote about gore and so it’s just like ‘if you’re going to write this sort of music, then this is what everybody has done previously’ seems to work” (Dan, personal correspondence, 13 March 2019).

Several respondents held that the seemingly political tropes of metal’s lyrics do not necessarily convey political ideology. Instead, they fit the aesthetics of the music: “I think even if a band is singing about war it doesn’t have to mean that they are like pacifists. It’s

just that the aesthetics of war is what they needed for the song. Even like I heard about the [Swedish] band Marduk and some Antifa guys in the USA were like blocking their shows because they didn't want them to play because [imitating the Antifa criticism] 'Marduk are Nazis, they are singing about war. I do not think this is the case. They are just singing about the war because it is really heavy and drastic stuff because they just want to make 'evil' music' (Marek, personal correspondence, 20 March 2019).

Many said that attaching any inherent importance to lyrics was foolhardy, as different listeners could have varied interpretations of them. When discussing one of her songs that reflected themes from the film *The Matrix*, Alena noted that "it is important about how you read it and who reads it" (Alena, personal correspondence, 8 February 2019). Other respondents noted that due to the unintelligible—screamed or growled—vocal delivery common in metal, lyrical content may not even be relevant to the average listener (Dan, personal correspondence, 13 March 2019; Lukaš, personal correspondence, 6 February 2019)

3.3.2 Politics in Music as Context-dependent

At the same time, respondents noted that metal could be political in certain contexts. Many mentioned that metal was "political" during the Communist regime. Karel held that under Communism metal "was the face of revolting" (Karel, personal correspondence, 29 January 2019). Lukaš claimed that metal's political legacy stems from its experience under Communism, when in the eyes of the police "all music was rebellion. ... It meant much more to people than nowadays" (Lukaš, personal correspondence, 6 February 2019). However, the political nature of metal music in the Communist era was viewed as something that stemmed from the regime's stance towards the music, not by the intention of the musicians themselves. Petr, for instance, noted that while he views his

music as apolitical, “if I wanted to play metal deep in the eighties, during the Communist totality, I probably would have been persecuted. Now our government is full of Communists again but I can still play metal liberally” (Petr, personal correspondence, 14 March 2019). According to respondents, metal was seen as political because it came from a Western capitalist culture context. Mike from Band C, for instance, noted that “This place was in the east block and music was prohibited, especially rock music. It's all began in the 60s Rock music was a sign of the Western way of style and they [the regime] didn't like it” (Band C, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019).

However, the prevailing notions among many respondents was that metal is largely separate from politics in the Czech Republic nowadays. Lai6 noted, “I think [compared to the global metal scene] in Czech Republic metal is absolutely apolitical... The core of the music metal genre Maybe some Nazi black metal.... In my opinion I don't think there are some strictly political bands here” (Lai6, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019). Some held that metal in the Czech Republic has been subsumed into the mainstream, and hence is not inherently political or rebellious (Individual OW, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019; Band C, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019; Dan, personal correspondence, 13 March 2019). The metal scene was often contrasted with the punk scene, which was portrayed as more politically oriented:

Interviewer: “Some people say metal is sort of rebellious or is about fighting the power.”

Individual OW: “It is more punk or grindcore. Metal is about metal. ... In my point of view grindcore is more about political s*** and less about music. I mean, to me. But you have a lot of s*** grind too” (Individual OW, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019).

They also use this distinction to represent the two scenes as inhabiting different ends of the political spectrum. Punk is viewed as being on the left, and metal is on the right. When asked if punk was more left-wing than metal, one respondent said:

If I have to say yes or no I would say yes. There are like many punk bands which are like Nazis and there are some metal bands which those people who are playing a very leftist ... it is not like every metalhead is right-wing of this not like every punk band is left wing, but generally it is (Marek Juřica, personal correspondence, 20 March 2019).

The punk scene's political advocacy was seen as a differentiating factor as well. Lai6 for instance noted that "sometimes, I really hate fascist/Nazis (and I am no punk)" (Lai6, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019). The parenthetical comment hints at the notion that punks are more likely to disapprove of far-right ideologies than those in the metal scene.

In a discussion of the different political causes taken up by the punk scene, one respondent posited:

Because the fact that there are a lot of vegans who are in grindcore, there's a vegan festival that's got a lot of grindcore bands playing. It is a trend. ... my gut feeling is that you would be more likely to be left wing if you were vegan or something. But I've got no evidence to base that on (Dan, personal correspondence, 13 March 2019).

While this quote casts doubt on the notion of the punk scene as being inherently political, a link is made between the scene and left-wing leanings. Robert made a distinction between his band's "political" work playing at benefit concerts and the punks' activism: "But if I was to compare [these shows] to some punk music which... is a left-wing political type of

music there wasn't really anything like that. ... we were not like these left wing rebels like some of the punk musicians” (Robert, personal correspondence, 19 February 2019).

3.4 Right-wing Bands and “Political” Music

Several respondents singled out big-beat band “Ortel” as an example of political music in the Czech Republic. Respondents were critical of the frontman, Tomáš Ortel’s, far-right politics. Additionally they expressed disdain for the band’s simplistic style of music, labelling it as “redneck” or music that novices could easily play (Band N, personal correspondence, 2 February 2019). This exchange from the members of Band C is emblematic of this:

Lai6: “One day of today's political scene is bands named Ortel. It is crazy.”

Frank: "Stupid, primitive music."

Mike: “It's a skinhead band."

Lai6: “No. It is *hidden* skinhead band. If you are familiar with some of the immigrants from Africa and from Syria and this [sic]. Where the big boost of the immigration came here before the real immigration, some bands tried to prove this in their music. And Ortel is an evolution of this because everybody is afraid of immigrants. They can hear “we start the band and sing the song and everybody joins us and nobody will make them come here. ...”

Frank: “It is not even rock... They can't play. They can't sing.”

Mike: “It is like business with fear. It is a 10,000-year-old business. It is the best business in the world. ‘I make you fear’ ...”

Lai6: “In music people like going to concerts and there is fanatics around here and it is easy to speak to people through some kind of political music. but I think it is short-living episode in this age.”

(Band C, personal correspondence, 12 March 2019)

Marek discussed that towards the end of his time in Band E, Ortel fans began to attend their concerts:

We have a really silly band in the Czech Republic called Ortel ... They don't play metal at all but the genre is like redneck rock, but they recently gained considerable popularity because the frontman of this band played in a band, Conflict 88 it was like a Nazi skinhead band but his band transformed to Ortel ... The lyrics are not so visible or transparent for everybody. Their lyrics are xenophobic but more I think that even a guy who just doesn't care can listen to their music if he is like ignorant and he is not a Nazi. And many people who went to our shows or not many but some of them were wearing t-shirts of Ortel and I was like “hey, I want to play for those cool metalheads that I saw and movies. I don't want to play for those rednecks!” (Marek, personal correspondence, 20 March 2019)

Music in Prague's metal scene that was singled out as “political” was far-right, National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM). One respondent stated that “in Prague, metal is not that political, even though there are certain bands and certain shows that share certain ideas. We don't really have problems with that, but we say big fuck off to extremism in every way possible” (Johnnie, personal correspondence, 6 February 2019). Michal from Band E held a similar viewpoint, saying there is no room for extreme racist viewpoints in the scene. However, he pointed out that in regard to bands' lyrics, it can be hard to tell which bands are genuine racists, and which are just employing racist lyrics as part of the tropes of the genre or for shock value. In his view, the issue lies in intent: “it's a thin line between what you mean and what you say” (Band E, personal correspondence, 2 February 2019).

Marek held more far-right people began to enter the scene around the time of the Refugee Crisis:

[It was] a strange time because it was a time when all the media informed about refugees from Muslim countries many people's attitude from Czech Republic were, like, really hysterical and some of those people are really xenophobic: "we hate all the refugees we don't want them here." And even Nazis took this idea that, "well there are no Jews in Czech Republic so we start to hate Muslims." And those people came to our shows quite often so I was really disgusted about [it]. (Marek, personal correspondence, 20 March 2019).

He asserted that more explicitly far-right individuals entered the scene, political tensions between left-wing and right-wing members increased:

I realized that there are basically three groups of people. The first group's like really s*****, xenophobic Nazis. Well, in Czech Republic [they say] 'I'm not a Nazi but I hate n*****.' The second group are like Antifa guys who organized a lot of concerts. And the third group of people are like 'I don't care.' And the problem was that those Antifa people ... They were like two sides of war. The first side was like Nazis the second side was Antifa guys, and if you didn't care everybody hated you because xenophobic guys told you 'oh, he's the leftist he just wants all those refugees come here' and the Antifa guys ... were all like 'well he doesn't care he's just, like, xenophobic'" (Marek, personal correspondence, 20 March 2019).

While the metal scene attempts to situate itself outside of political activism and political discourses, it is clear that outside discourses have affected the day-to-day operations of the scene.

The members of Band N also discussed this shift, holding that the “political thing is crazy in our scene.” They pointed out that recently some bands in the scene, including Naurrakar, were labelled as “Nazi.” In light of this, booking gigs at certain venues became more difficult, as the local Antifa chapter wrote letters to several venue owners to try and prevent Naurrakar from playing. They mentioned that “leftist committees” among the organizers of the Zizkov Noc festival led to them “not [being] accepted there because we aren’t leftists” as well. The band emphasized that they are politically neutral and that their “participation is zero” (Band N, personal correspondence, 2 February 2019).

Lead guitarist Ondrej felt that some bands were invoking far-right themes to “seem evil” and cultivate an image that would make their subpar music more marketable. On the other hand, Ondrej mentioned that some black metal fans told him that they “don’t listen to you because you are not because you are Nazis, but because you aren’t Nazis.” Ondrej joked that “if we were Nazis, we would play very much more often,” but noted that his band “is about reputation, not image” (Band N, personal correspondence, 2 February 2019).

Alena mentioned that while her band had played shows in Austria, she did not enjoy the experience as much as in Prague because “they cared more about the politics.” Austrian venue owners also looked into whether or not her band had played with bands that had been barred from playing at certain venues due to their political leaning—these bands were usually “black metal bands with a Second World War thematic.” She said that if she played with said bands she would “have the stigma” attached to her, and that venues would “fear that you have music that is political, radical.” She characterized in the Czech Republic, on the other hand, “you can play whatever you want,” and that venues were less stringent about banning politically right-wing bands. She also noted that in the Czech Republic, many bands poked fun at totalitarian ideologies—both on the left and the right—

but that she is not “so sure it is always a good thing.” Alena also mentioned that she attended the Eternal Hate Fest, a right-leaning festival in Nyrsko, but did not do so because the festival’s politics were in accordance with her own views—she attended because she liked the music. She holds that bands who discuss right-wing themes do so as a gimmick “to get interest ... if you want to get support from a community that already exists, you have to play the right code” (Alena, personal correspondence, 18 February 2019).

3.5 Summary and Analysis

This thematic analysis presents several key findings. Firstly, it is important to note that while many members of the scene are politically involved and have opinions on political issues, they are largely disdainful of politics—from the unrepresentative nature of politicians, to the divisive nature of political discussions, to political correctness discourses. Respondents dismissed the idea that their involvement was “political” or rebellious. This stands in contrast to Morris’ claim that metal is an inherently political form of music. It also challenges the idea that members of music scenes view their involvement as a form of political participation.

The metal scene is largely seen as an apolitical zone of free expression. Respondents noted that while most of their lyrical content was not political, they drew up dark and transgressive themes. Lyrics were not seen to be taken at face value, and respondents often emphasized the subjective nature of lyrics’ meaning. Most participants held that the lyrical content of their music did not reflect their own political beliefs. Instead, they are drawing on tropes established norms set by other bands in metal’s various subgenres, invoked because they fit the music’s aesthetic. Furthermore, outside discourses on political correctness were criticized. This is in line with Kahn-Harris’ notion that metal scenes propagate discursive transgression and operate on a logic of “anti-reflexive

reflexivity.” The Prague scene is romanticized as a space separate from the mainstream, where discourses on freedom of expression reign over discourses on political correctness: A respite from the pressures of modernity and politics, where words are just words. While members of the scene have negative viewpoints on politics, the scene firmly defines itself as apolitical and the content of the music does not necessarily reflect members’ viewpoints.

Because the scene is perceived as an apolitical space, authenticity is defined by dedication to the metal scene and music. Mixing music and politics is seen as inauthentic—many respondents claimed that the scene does not (or should not) interact with politics. Mixing music with politics is perceived as a distraction from the music itself or as belonging to the punk scene. Interestingly, within the current metal scene, “political” music was limited to bands that drew upon far-right lyrical themes and aesthetics whose political viewpoints coincided with said themes. These bands were condemned by members of the scene for their political beliefs and were regarded as inauthentic. They were seen as cultivating an image instead of focusing on their music and as potentially “playing a code” to recruit fans who held far-right ideas. This finding illustrates that authenticity—and therefore, subcultural capital and status within the scene—in the Prague metal scene is centered around the preservation of the apolitical music scene. While discursive transgression is central to the scene, mixing it with political activities or genuine political intent is frowned upon.

It is important to note that the Prague metal scene is made up of people leaning to the right on the political spectrum, and that they do perceive that “political” right-wing bands are affecting the scene. Anti-reflexive reflexivity and the ability to define the scene as an apolitical space are reliant on the fact that lyrics about war, genocide, the occult, et cetera, are not reflective of scene members’ own beliefs. However, the presence of far-right bands in the scene complicates this notion, as it can be difficult to differentiate between

those who tropes and occasionally problematic content without political intent, and those who do so with a political agenda. As a result outside actors are changing this dynamic. They interpret song texts as political texts, and act accordingly, affecting some bands' ability to perform shows, whether or not the members of said band are far-right or not. The scene does not operate in an anti-reflexive vacuum.

In light of these findings, it seems that there is not one clear definition of “politics” in the Prague metal scene, but two broad definitions. The first definition prescribed internally by scene members is narrowly focused on participation in institutional politics, or (in the case of the music itself) when the lyrics of a musician’s art touch on issues important to them. The second, external definition is prescribed by those from outside of the scene, and does not have a consistent ideological meaning. In the past, “politics” was externally prescribed by the Communist regime who viewed metal as a “Western” form of art threatening their worldview. Today, external political meaning is attributed by left-leaning venue organizers and activists. While the internal definition may be what scene members operate on, the external definition is certainly having a large impact on the scene.

3.6 Addendum

In social sciences, it is crucial to maintain objectivity and to present data as it is—especially when the data is not numbers on a spreadsheet, but people. Conclusions must be limited to what is found in the data and is falsifiable. However, given the content of this thematic analysis, and following the example of Keith Kahn-Harris’ condemnation of the misogyny and racism he encountered in his (much more encompassing) research, I include a critical addendum to this section. The majority of respondents identified as right-wing, or center-right, and identified the wider scene as a right-wing space. The scene—and the metal genre as a whole—operates on the assumption that music and politics are separate,

and that free expression is paramount. Yet it faces issues with far-right extremism. In light of this, must be noted that the norms of the scene present a space where extremists may spread their message and use plausible deniability to deflect criticism. I have a small sample size—22 respondents—so to paint the entire Prague metal scene with a broad brush would be academically irresponsible. Furthermore, the respondents expressed that their subcultural identities did not interact with their beliefs and *emphatically* condemned far-right extremism. While in this study I present the scene for what it is, it is important to reflect on what it may be to some people.

Conclusion

This research empirically tested theoretical claims on the link between music and politics, employing political science concepts a post-subcultural framework. H1 was not supported. The voting rate in the scene (61.9 percent) was in line with the average of the broader Czech population, indicating that participation in the metal scene is not linked to likelihood of voting. However, H2 was supported. While members of the scene who voted did not indicate a preference for anti-system parties, the majority of those who voted (and the majority of respondents as a whole) expressed disdain for the political system and support for anti-system ideas. Furthermore, respondents felt that topics and ideas they perceived as “political” should not be present in metal music, or in the scene itself.

A thematic analysis of interviews with participants uncovered several interesting aspects about the Prague metal scene’s relationship to politics. First of all, the majority of respondents identified themselves as center-right or right-wing, and characterized the scene as a whole as a right-wing space. Yet, respondents were highly critical of far-right extremism inside the scene and outside of it. In a scene based around a musical style with lyrical and aesthetic content that sometimes discusses far-right themes, these findings

illustrate that subjective interpretations of said content, not just the content itself. This notion follows the post-subculturalist challenge to the idea of the subculture as a class-based form of rebellion—the subcultural specificity of the Prague metal scene is more about freedom of expression than explicit counterculture.

Additionally, in contrast to the CCCS viewpoint on subculture and theoretical works on music, participants held that their involvement in the scene, and the overall function of the scene itself, was apolitical. Respondents did acknowledge that in certain contexts, metal could be “political,” but in the Prague case, this was limited to metal under the old Communist regime, or to far-right bands. This notion of politics seems to have been externally prescribed (by Communist officials in the past and left-wing activists in the present). In line with Keith Kahn-Harris’ findings, the Prague metal scene tries to operate on a logic of anti-reflexive reflexivity, and serves as a zone for free expression separated from outside discourses. However, as issues of race and ethnicity have become more prevalent in the overall political environment, the Prague metal scene has not been able to stay completely separate from them. This result provides nuance to Kahn-Harris’ theory, as it shows that metal scenes can be affected by and interact with the pressures of modernity that they attempt to escape.

The study’s findings cast doubt that grand theories on the importance of politics in music and subcultures, illustrating that they are not necessarily reflective of the viewpoints of participants. Additionally, the research suggests that examining subcultures through a political science lens could lead to significant results about how people perceive and discuss politics. As traditional forms of identity and belonging based on class, familial ties, and nationality become fragmented, identities relating to consumption and lifestyle—rarely examined in political science—may be potentially linked to political viewpoints. An excerpt from the mission statement of the *český a slovenský archiv subkultur* sums it up

best: “subcultural identity represents one of the important forms of social identification during the period of late modernity” (český a slovenský archiv subkultur, 2019).

This research also shed light on subculture in the Czech Republic, a topic that is scantily discussed in the English-language literature. Future research should be conducted into the Prague metal subculture and into other metal scenes across the Czech Republic, including those in more rural and less developed parts of the country. The scope of this study was limited in large part by a language barrier, but there are plenty of Czech-language resources for scholars to use for future research. Future research would also benefit from the viewpoints of fans, venue owners, and the left-leaning protestors hinted at by respondents. Additionally, a more encompassing analysis would include deeper examination into the aesthetic style and lyrical content of Prague’s metal scene.

This research is only one piece of the interlocking puzzle made up of music, politics, and subculture. No causal link between political participation and scene membership was posited in this research. Given that the majority of Prague’s metal scene held similar viewpoints, and that distinctions were made between the politics of metal and other music scenes, it seems within the realm of possibility that subcultures and scenes attract people with specific political opinions. Further research can illuminate the “politics” of artistic expression and its consumption, and in which contexts art intersects with politics.

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List of Appendices

Appendix no. 1: Respondents (note)

Appendix no. 2: Survey (note)

Appendix no. 1: Respondents

Alena (2019, 18 February). Personal interview.

Band C (2019, 12 March). Personal interview.

Band N (2019, 2 February). Personal interview.

Band E (2019, 2 February). Personal interview.

Dan (2019, 13 March). Personal interview.

Denial (2019, 27 May). Google Forms survey response.

Fedor (2019, 8 February). Personal interview.

Individual OW (2019, 12 March). Personal interview.

Individual T (2019, 9 February). Google Forms survey response.

Jana (2019, 9 February). Google Forms survey response.

Johnnie (2019, 6 February). Google Forms survey response.

Karel (2019, 29 January). Personal interview.

Lai6 (2019, 12 March). Google Forms survey response.

Lukaš (2019, 6 February). Personal interview.

Marek (2019, 20 March). Personal interview.

Petr (2019, 14 March). Google Forms survey response.

Robert (2019, 19 February). Personal interview.

Appendix no. 2: Survey

1. How would you like to be identified in this study? This can be your name, band's name, subgenre, or you can be completely anonymous.
2. What subgenre or subgenres of metal do you play? (grindcore, death metal, melodic death metal, black metal, et cetera)
3. What are the themes/topics of your band's lyrics?
4. Name of band:
5. What instrument do you play/ what is your role in your band?
6. When was your band active in the past/is it still active?

Please answer the following questions in 2-4 sentences or more:

7. How did you get involved in the Prague metal scene?
8. How big of a role did/does involvement in the metal scene play in your life?
9. Describe your experience in the metal scene. (How many concerts were you playing? What were the good and bad parts of the scene? Did your experience in the scene change over time?)
10. Is there any way that "politics" affects the Prague metal scene in any way?
11. Do you think that metal is a "political" genre in any way? Why or why not?
12. Is the music of your band political in any way?
13. Does playing metal interact with your own political beliefs in any way?
14. What are your views on "politics" and political participation? (i.e. voting, being a member of a party, talking about politics on social media, protesting, et cetera)
15. Do you participate politically? (i.e. do you vote, are you a member of a party, do you post/talk about politics on social media, protest, et cetera)
16. If you do participate politically, how and why? If not, why not?
17. How would you describe your own political orientation (far-left, left, centre-left, centre, centre-right, right, far-right) or party affiliation?
18. Do you know any other bands or individuals who may be interested in this project? If so, please include the band's name:
19. Feel free to add more information or thoughts that did not fit into the questions above: