



# Abstract

The most extreme subgenre of metal, black metal, is famous for its anti-Christian and Satanic aesthetics. Violent incidents connected to the formation of the Norwegian black metal scene in the early 1990s, such as Church-burnings, murders, and arsons, would make the genre notorious and solidify the perception that its fans and musicians reject religion. However, since black metal is born out of a Christian cultural context, very few researchers have paid attention to this musical subgenre in Muslim majority societies, and even less attention has been paid to how the Muslim context influences the aesthetical choices of the genre.

A few years ago, some black metal bands in Turkey started to do something rarely seen before. Namely, to utilize Islamic semiotic resources in their cultural production, in an anti-Islamic way. Based on an extensive fieldwork, coupled with lyrical and visual analysis, this thesis explores this new relationship between Islam and black metal in Turkey. It seeks to answer the questions of why these expressions occur now, as well as which meanings are ascribed to them by black metal fans and musicians in Turkey. In doing so, the author argues that the increase in references to Islam in Turkish black metal are related to a dialectical relationship with international, as well as national, expectations of subcultural concepts such as authenticity and identity. Furthermore, the author explores the contemporary context of Turkey, which in recent years have undergone major changes in the political and social sphere, especially in relation to religion. The author therefore argues that the newly emerged expressions found within the Turkish black metal scene needs to partly be recognized as a subcultural response and counter hegemonic resistance towards the recent years of political and societal change in Turkey.

**Keywords:** black metal, extreme metal, metal, subculture, Turkey, Islam, counter-culture, identity, resistance, social semiotics.

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Douglas Mattsson

Lund, 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2018.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

*The narrow street outside, just a stone-throw away from the busy Istiklal-avenue, was full of people dressed in black. Smoking, drinking and chatting they seemed to be taking a break from the concert that was happening in the venue across the street, where distorted guitars were blasting from the doors. A bit late to the party, me, my fellow students and our professor had just experienced an intensive taxi-ride through the streets of Istanbul, accompanied by Turkish disco music at an ear-deafening volume. We were supposed to meet up with a symphonic metal band based in Istanbul to see their show (which we missed) and talk about metal music in Turkey. I, however, also had another purpose – I wanted to see if I could get any information about black metal music in Turkey. Once we had confirmed that we were at the right venue, we unloaded three bags of dog and cat food (the entrance-fee for the night), and entered the venue. After a beer or two I approached the bar-manager and asked her, a woman with big purple dreadlocks, if she knew anything about Turkish black metal or anyone playing it in Turkey – she did and helpfully put me in contact with my first informant in the scene. A few months later I was on my way to start my first field-trip in Istanbul.*

This was in March 2014, and now, four years later, I hope this master-thesis will give voice to an under-researched and often demonized sub-culture in Muslim-majority societies. Enjoy.

## Why a Thesis on Islam and Black Metal in Turkey?

Ever since I watched the music video for *Renegade* by the Swedish power metal act Hammerfall at the age of ten on *Voxpop* (a music show for kids where one voted on the most recent video releases), metal music has been a part of my life in one way or another. Like an entry level drug-user, I started out with “softer” bands such as Iron Maiden and Hammerfall, and then moved on to bands with harsher vocals and more aggressive playing style, until finally conquering the last frontier – extreme metal music. According to the sociologist Keith Kahn-Harris (2007, 5) extreme metal “teeters on the edge of formless noise” and, further, is an umbrella term for subgenres such as death metal, doom metal, thrash metal, grindcore and black metal, who share “a musical radicalism that marks them out as different from other forms of heavy metal”(Kahn-Harris 2007, 5). Black metal differs, however, from the other forms of extreme metal due to the genres emphasize on occult, Satanic, and anti-Christian themes (Kahn-Harris 2007, 4–5). The aesthetics of black metal have intrigued me since I was thirteen years old and many years later, when the time came to write my bachelor thesis in Islamic studies at Lund University, I saw a possibility to

combine my two interests of extreme metal and religion.<sup>1</sup> From my perspective, the main effort of Islamic studies is to answer the core question: How are Islam and religion understood, used, and negotiated by different actors in society? This does not only include the study of religious groups, texts, or history, but also the study of the ones who *hate* Islam. Following Talal Asad (2012) – who emphasizes that Islamic studies need to occupy itself with studying different actors within different societies– I consider an in-depth study of Turkish black metal musicians relation to religions in general and Islam in particular, to be relevant, albeit possibly outside the expectations of Asad. By the end of this thesis. I hope you will agree with me.

The present study is to a great extent a continuation of the bachelor thesis I wrote at Lund University called “‘Metal is the best way for blasphemy’: Islamisk representation i turkisk black metal” (Mattsson 2015). However, this thesis has been preceded by a longer and more extensive fieldwork (see chapter two) providing me with the opportunity to delve further into previous questions, as well as to include other dimensions to my research.

Turkish black metal is, to this day, mainly an underground phenomenon and apart from my previous work (Mattsson 2015, 2016; Otterbeck, Mattsson, and Pastene 2018), there hasn’t been any significant scholarly attempts to study black metal in Muslim majority societies at large, or in Turkey more specific. Mark LeVine’s pioneering work on metal music in the Middle East *Heavy Metal Islam* (2008) does not address black metal and neither does his later articles (see for example (LeVine 2009, 2011)). Similarly, Jeremy Prindle’s graduate thesis “The Devil’s Prayers: Metal Music in Iran” (2014) while exploring metal music in Iran, does not focus on black metal either. Orlando Crowcroft’s journalistic book *Rock in a Hard Place* (2017) about metal music in the Middle East, although covering black metal in, for example, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, does not include Turkey as a country. Orlando Pastene’s bachelor thesis ”Black metal i Saudiarabien: Kritik mot islam och den saudiska staten.” (2016) focuses on the Saudi band al-Namrood and thus suffers the same fate. The only exception to the above is Pierre Hecker’s research (Hecker 2010, 2011, 2012), not least his PhD thesis *Turkish Metal: Music, Meaning and Morality in a Muslim Society* (2012). Hecker’s research, besides being the most ambitious work on metal in Turkey up till now, also includes a chapter about black metal. In the chapter, Hecker noticed that Turkish black metal bands had started to incorporate Islamic symbols in their artworks, such as an inverted crescent. Unfortunately, he did not have the opportunity to pursue the phenomenon further and called for more research (Hecker 2012, 137ff). This thesis aims to explore the change that Hecker noticed, as well as to investigate the underlying reasons and consequences this change have for the Turkish black metal scene.

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<sup>1</sup> Studying music and popular culture is well established in Islamic studies, see: Ackfeldt 2012, 2013; Janson 2003; Otterbeck 2008, 2012b, 2012a, 2014.

Below follows an example. I have rendered the lyrics in capital letters stressing the performance's load growl (for further discussion, see chapter five).

JEZEBEL ANGELS! WE FUCKED THE RELIGIOUS INSIDE THEIR MOSQUES,  
THE SCREAMS OF THOSE WHORE RESOUNDED FROM THE MINARETS

The text-extract above is taken from Deggial's<sup>2</sup> song "Death Fucking War" from the album *Confronted With Deggial's Wrath* (2013). The lyrics contains explicit references to the Muslim faith and it is obviously done in a disrespectful manner. The lyrics could, therefore, be understood as an example of transgression.

Transgression is a key concept in this thesis and the term merits a short discussion already here. In his book *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (2007), Keith Kahn-Harris argues that *transgression* is part and parcel of extreme metal. According to Kahn-Harris, "Transgression, like extremity, implies a sense of testing and crossing boundaries and limits. [...] Consequently, transgressive behavior [...] transgressive practice occurs on the edge of acceptability, at the edge of society..." (Kahn-Harris 2007, 29–30). In this regard he argues that three types of "ideal scenic transgression" can be detected relating to extreme metal: *sonic transgression*, *discursive transgression*, and *bodily transgression*, all of them are testing and crossing boundaries within their own dimension (Kahn-Harris 2007, 30–49). But as Paul D. Green (2011) has shown in his study of Nepalese metal music, what constitutes a transgression in one culture might not necessarily be a transgression in another.

Further, transgressions are also multidimensional and dynamic – a sonic transgression does not necessarily imply a discursive transgression. The lyrical example above, coupled with the music that delivers it, is an example of both a sonic and discursive transgression. The complexity and dynamics of transgressive behavior will be explored throughout this thesis.

Transgression, understood as challenging societal boundaries, shares many similarities with what subcultural studies are referring to as resistance. In his book, *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts* (2011), Patrick J. Williams alters Hollander & Einwhoner's (2004) concept of resistance from a one-dimensional relationship to a multi-dimensional:

Resistance is a multidimensional concept in the sense that any particular action or event identified as resistance may be simultaneously analyzed as relatively passive or active, micro or

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<sup>2</sup> The band's name obviously refers to Deccal (Turkish, Dajjal in Arabic), the false messiah of Islamic eschatology, but also, with the spelling Deggial, to a song and an album by Swedish metal band Therion from 2000.

macro, and covert or overt. Neither subcultures, nor their participants – and not their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors – are fixed at any certain point on these dimensions (Williams 2011, 105).

Subcultures, understood as resisting and offering an alternative for its participants to hegemonic societal norms, will also be explored in the thesis. Lastly, this thesis will utilize theories from the field of social semiotics while analyzing the cultural production from the Turkish black metal scene. I will return to these theoretical frameworks in chapter five, six, and seven, when the parts related to them are analyzed.

## **Aims and Questions**

This thesis is about the Turkish black metal scene and the people behind the type of expressions previously mentioned. It is about those who support it, those who disagree, and the ones in-between. What motivates people to participate in this subculture? How did they become parts of it? What are their thoughts about religion and Islam, and how are those reflected in their music? Those are a few of the questions that I was interested in answering when I started out my research, and as always, more questions arose. With an ambition to pick up where Hecker left off and fill (some) of the scholarly gap that exists about this subculture in Muslim majority societies, I will try to answer the following questions:

1. Which representations of religion, and more specifically of Islam, can be found in Turkish black metal music? How are these presented and why?
2. How is religion viewed and understood by the actors of the Turkish black metal-scene?
3. In what way does black metal constitute a transgressive behavior in Turkey?
4. How do adherents to the black metal-scene in Turkey validate their subcultural actions in relation to societal restrictions and reaction to “Satanic” music?

## *Disposition*

The study is comprised of eight chapters. This introductory chapter, with general aims and questions, is followed by *chapter two* that features a description of what kind of study I have done, what methods I have used, the problems I encountered and a brief introduction to my empirical material and informants. *Chapter three* contextualizes “black metal” for the reader and features an introduction to (black) metal studies at large, but more specifically, metal studies made in Muslim majority societies. It also includes a history of metal – specifically black metal – in Turkey and some

of the controversies connected to the genre. *Chapter four* provides further context but this time on contemporary Turkey and its social, juridical, political, and religious environment. *Chapter five* will present and analyze my aural, textual, and visual material, as well as include a discussion of social semiotics. As stated previously, transgression in relation to subcultural resistance and social semiotics is an important aspect of this thesis, and it will be discussed in *chapter six*. The chapter will especially address how the expressions analyzed in the previous chapter function as local transgression in relation to “Islam” and the Turkish majority society. It will also discuss the self-reflexive motivation voiced by the scene as to why they are participating in such transgressions. As will be shown in chapter five and six, most of the bands are actively pursuing a portrayal as “non-Muslim” or “non-believer” (as part of a transgressive behavior). There are, however, times when they “act Muslim” (at funerals or in relation to certain family members). This dynamic and the at times contradictory behavior between ideal and praxis is further discussed in *chapter seven*. Finally, in *chapter eight* I will summarize the study, as well as make the argument that these types of studies are important, not only to understand a subculture like black metal, but also for future scholars of Islamic studies.

# Chapter Two

## Paranoia, Painkillers, and a Broken Back: The Cocktail of Anthropological Research

*BANG – the pain that followed was intense and instant. Hunch-backing out of the venue where Sarinvomit was still playing an intensive black metal gig, I sat down on the stairs leading up to the third floor where the upstairs-bar was occupied by a different crowd than the ones attending the event one floor down. I was soon followed by worried friends and concert attendees checking if I was ok. Looking left, looking right, my neck seemed to be intact. Bending forward and back, my lower spine seemed to be ok as well. No damage seemed to be done. It will most probably just leave a bruise, I thought to myself. Fast forward one week (which included another concert, a trip back to Sweden and an ‘end-of-the-semester-party’ at my student nation) and I’m at the hospital finding it a bit difficult to grasp what the nurse was telling me, “Fractures on my back? Had I actually broken my back?” – Yes, I had broken my back conducting fieldwork.*

### Fieldwork as a Method

Fieldwork can, as shown above, be an intense and stressful experience, so why do it? Relating to my research aims and questions, where the focus lies on *understanding* and giving voice to a (sub)culture in society, fieldwork is the way to go. In his classic introduction, *In the Field* (1984), Robert Burgess (1984, 3) states that the anthropologist job is to “... study situations from the participants’ point of view”. Similarly, Alvesson & Sköldberg (2017, 177) argues that the goal of ethnographic research is to scientifically study a group or culture in order to describe how social acts can be understood from their respective positions. Historically, the anthropologists were, with a few exceptions, men that traveled to foreign countries in order to study “exotic” cultures. The process could, and should ideally, go on for several years where the anthropologist spent his time learning the local language and gathering data through observations, interviews, studying artifacts, and participating in rituals (Burgess 1984, 12–13; Marranci 2008; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2017). The discipline has been criticized for aiding colonialism, lacking self-reflection, and its imposition of pre-defined understandings of cultural acts (especially when it comes to anthropological studies in Muslim societies), and consequently the anthropologist work looks quite different today.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gabriele Marranci (2008, 31–51) provides an excellent overview of how anthropological research in Muslim societies shifted from occupying itself with studies of “exotic” villagers, Sufis, and Bedouins in order to grasp the “core” of Islam as a cultural system (Geertz 1999; Gellner 2000), to be more interested in “ordinary” Muslims in urban environment and study Islam(s) rather than Islam (Abu-Lughod 1989; Varisco 2005; Asad 2012; Gilsenan 2013). Marranci ends by calling for more research on Muslims in the West in order to avoid “illusory exoticism of

Anthropologists today, increasingly find themselves studying what Burgess calls “the ordinary” which refers to those societies or environments that the researcher himself or herself comes from (Burgess 1984: 21–25). In doing so, the anthropologist is faced with a different kind of problems such as, how is one to observe and analyze patterns in an environment in which one is already familiar with? And, how are the participants of the study chosen and what does going “native” mean in such a context?<sup>4</sup> For my study contemplating on these questions was highly relevant.

As stated in the introduction, metal music has been part of my life since I was ten years old. How was I to keep an objective distance to my field? Luckily, I am not the first one to do this type of study. Terms such as *ethnographic tourism*<sup>5</sup>, and *reflexive anthropology*<sup>6</sup>, could both be seen as integral to what is referred to as *critical ethnography*.<sup>7</sup> Besides reflecting on the impact I, the researcher, have on the study, and how this in turn affects the material gathered, critical ethnography also encourage the researcher to take a critical stance towards the informants’ stories and do not necessarily take them for absolute truths (O’Reilly 2012; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2017, 341). In other words, you question everything, including yourself, which Burgess (among others), claims is critical in order to study the familiar.<sup>8</sup> Approaching the study from a critical theory perspective means that I believe that I am participating in the *construction* of knowledge, that is, I adhere to the constructivist school of thought which is interested in *how*, as well as *what* knowledge is produced (Berger and Luckmann 1990; Silverman 2014; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2017). Thus, rather than trying to understand what black metal *really is*, I was interested in what the people I spoke to *said it* was and what the people I met *made it to be*. Similarly, I was interested in *how* the metalheads I spoke to defined religion and Islam.<sup>9</sup> To be clear, if an informant said that he could not go to Fatih (a conservative neighborhood in Istanbul) and yell that “Muhammad is a child rapist” (a view held by some of my informants) because doing so would get him beaten up or killed, I have not tried to find out whether or not such an act would result in a beating (or worse), because the honest notion is that it would.

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fieldwork” (Marranci 2008, 47). On a general reflection on anthropology in other societies, see: Burgess 1984; Said 2003; Asad 2007; Davies 2008; O’Reilly 2012; Silverman 2014.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the methodological difficulties on studying familiar settings, see Burgess 1984, 22–25; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2017, 183–187.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph A. Kotarba (2018) use the term ethnographic tourism to describe the way that one can study popular music, meaning the researcher should act or pretend to be a “tourist” in a foreign land, where everything is new and, therefore, be able to “observe the phenomenon that was previously ignored or taken for granted by the researcher or members of the culture at large.” (Kotarba 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Reflexive anthropology was used by Jessica Moberg in her dissertation-study of charismatic Christians in Stockholm (2013), see also Davies 2008; O’Reilly 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Alvesson and Sköldberg 2017, 341–350

<sup>8</sup>: Here Burgess, (1984, 24) inspired by Delamont (1981), mentions four different strategies in order to study the familiar which include studying “bizarre” environments related to your research. For me that meant that I also attended pop-concerts, jazz-concerts, and opera performances in order to highlight what was special with metal concerts. Other strategies include reading comparative studies and question the researchers impact on the study.

<sup>9</sup> Approaching Islamic studies from this perspective is well established. See, for example, Stenberg 1996; Svensson 1996; Otterbeck 2000; Otterbeck and Hallin 2010.

Accordingly, even though I contextualize this study, somewhat in a factual reality, the experienced one is my main interest. In order to answer my research questions, I have been using a number of different methods during my fieldwork, and I will delve deeper into these methods below.

## Interviews

According to Burgess (1984), interviews are one of the most important techniques to gather material while conducting fieldwork. Interview techniques and philosophies are however manifold and different researchers have different preferences.<sup>10</sup> For my study, I mainly conducted qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews, inspired by phenomenology.<sup>11</sup> The interviews lasted for between one and a half and two and a half hours, and were accompanied by an interview guide (see appendix two) which, complemented with my observations and field notes, aimed to make a *thick description* (Patel and Davidson 2011, 80). To the extent that it was possible, I tried to conduct interviews one on one, so that the person interviewed would not hesitate or censor him- or herself depending on who else would be present. It also gave me the opportunity to delve deeper into personal experiences (my main interest) that otherwise might not be discussed. The locations used for interviewing were diverse and many since, in an attempt to balance the power dynamic between interviewee and interviewer, I let the interview subjects chose the location themselves. My only request was that the location would be somewhere the interviewee felt comfortable speaking about sensitive issues, and that it would not be so loud that a voice recording was unattainable. Subsequently, interviews were carried out in living rooms, bars, cafés, tattoo-shops, dark street allies, and rehearsal spaces.

Since the black metal community is rather small in Turkey, conducting solo interviews were also important for me in order to maintain a strict confidentiality for my interviewees, at least on my part, about who participated in my study. To further this aim, all of the persons I spoke to in relation to this study have been given a pseudonym or a code, and when identification markers (such as city, the name of the band, or profession) have been deemed non-crucial for the analysis, they have either been altered or left out.<sup>12</sup> Fieldwork is, however, marked by flexibility and my rules set beforehand have at times been bent.<sup>13</sup> Thus, I also conducted two group interviews, one email

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<sup>10</sup> Interview techniques and philosophies differ depending on what type of epistemological understanding the researcher adheres to. For an extended discussion about these differences, see Silverman 2014, 173–203.

<sup>11</sup> One of the identity markers of a qualitative interview is that it is done by a low degree of standardization and structure in order to allow flexibility and follow the natural rhythm of the interview, for more info, see Burgess 1984, 101–102; Patel and Davidson 2011, 71–73. A *phenomenologically* inspired interview aims to understand the world from the interviewees perspectives. For more info, see Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 41–48. For a discussion on *in depth interviewing* please, see Ahrne and Svensson 2015, 40–41. For more in email-interviews, see Kroksmark 2006.

<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth discussion about this, see Hannerz 2015, 35–36.

<sup>13</sup> For more on ethical flexibility, see the discussion in, Roth 1964, 284; Burgess 1984, 44–51, 199–201.

interview, and at one interview a translator had to be used because the language barrier (discussed below) was deemed to affect the interview in a negative way. The latter caused both an ethical dilemma (how to safeguard the informant's confidentiality?), as well as a methodological one (using a translator could disrupt the otherwise natural flow in a conversation). I tried to solve this by letting the interviewee choose the translator (one from the scene) so that the former would feel comfortable in the situation. In the end, the benefits of these exceptions far outweigh the potential ethical and methodological considerations and were therefore carried through. While preparing myself for the interviews I tried to achieve as big of an *indexikalitet* as possible which included reading about Turkish history, political situation, black metal and rock music.<sup>14</sup> The interviews were also complemented by previous observations or informal conversations that I had conducted during the fieldwork.

### *Languages*

Born and raised in Sweden to a family with no connection to Turkey, language was from the outset one of my biggest concerns. Even though my initial visits to Turkey had given me the impression that English, at least amongst the younger generations, was spoken effortlessly, I was still unsure of how big of a problem it might cause. Luckily my initial impression held true and apart from a handful of people connected to the scene, I managed to have valuable conversations in English with most of the people connected to the scene, and all but one interview was done in English. When English did not suffice, my knowledge of Turkish (even though limited but all the time improving), made it possible to have small conversations, although not adequate for an interview situation. Unless I was around people who were very comfortable with English, Turkish was the main language used at social gatherings which, at times, made me lose track of the conversation. I then had to ask or have it summarized for me later on which of course affected my material compared to if a person fluent in Turkish had conducted the research. The problem should, however, not be exaggerated and although not optimal, the Turkish language did not become a big enough barrier to stop me from attaining valuable material.

### *Observation and Participation*

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<sup>14</sup> In her study of migrants religiosity, the sociologist of religion Magdalena Nordin (2004, 54) uses Ottar Brox term *indexikalitet* to enhance her understanding in interview situations. The term refers to the aim of the researcher to have as much knowledge as possible about his/her informants background in order to understand things that are implied or not directly spoken. See Hecker (2012, 6–9) for a similar discussion about “knowing the field”.

[...] researchers can utilize their observations [...] to make seemingly irrational or paradoxical behavior comprehensible to those within and beyond the situation that is studied. (Burgess 1984, 79)

Combined with interviews, observations are among the anthropologists' best tools to gather data (Burgess 1984; Davies 2008; O'Reilly 2012; Silverman 2014). Observations make it possible for the researcher to compare what is said and what is being done. Some actions might be so obvious to the informant that they are not raised during an interview and some might be too sensitive to talk about. In both scenarios, observation is a necessary complement to interviews. Burgess (1984) lists four ideal types of observant positions where a participant observer is characterized by the fact that he, or she, is both observing and participating in the same events as her informants in order to develop relationships. Further, the researcher does not conceal the fact that he, or she, is there to conduct research as the complete participant might.<sup>15</sup> To the extent possible I tried to be the "participant observer" however, as Burgess (1984, 83) states, fieldwork is marked by flexibility and during the process, I rather shifted between different roles. At concerts, for instance, it was impossible (unless speaking in the microphone on stage which would most certainly disrupt the natural flow at the concert) to make my presence as a researcher known to everyone and thereby gather what is referred to as *informed consent*.<sup>16</sup> Participant observation also includes, by default, participation, which brings me back to the broken back incident. I had participated in, what in the world of rock'n'roll is usually referred to as "stage-diving" – an act where someone from the audience or the band playing, jumps from the stage and leaps out onto the crowd – hoping to get caught and land smoothly. As you might have understood, for me that did not happen. Stupid, said my mom, necessary said I. Following Simon Sorgenfrei (2013), part of the ethnographer's job is to experience their informant's life, including the physical dimension of the field which in my case was (at times) to participate in mosh-pits and stage-dives during concerts.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the four ideal types, see Burgess 1984, 80–83.

<sup>16</sup> The question of informed consent was raised at the Nürnberg trials after the Second World War and refers to that a studied subject should be informed about what the research is about and give its approval to participate. The Regional Ethical Review Board at Lund University suggests that written consent is gathered from the persons studied. For the research I was conducting and the questions I was asking, a written consent was deemed to jeopardize my informant's confidentiality and I therefore only asked for an oral consent in attachment to the interviews. Before that, a letter of information in English and Turkish was distributed explaining the rights and conditions of participating which included information that interviews could be terminated and the data erased at any time without questions asked. The Ethical Review Board approved this procedure. For more information about informed consent, see Burgess 1984, 200-212; Regional Ethical Review Board at Lund <https://www.researchethics.lu.se> webpage, as well as appendix one at the end of the thesis.

<sup>17</sup> Sorgenfrei (2013, 87–90) includes a reflection about what could be gained from physically participating "in the field" and concludes that by physically participating in the activities of his informants, he had easier to relate and understand his informants in interviews.

## Informants or ‘Metalheads’

As mentioned in the introduction, my initial contact was handed to me at a metal club in Istanbul during the spring 2014. After introducing ourselves to one another online (Facebook) I and, let’s call him, Mehmet put our communication on hold until summer. Then a few months before I would depart on my first field trip, Mehmet put me in contact with other people within the scene and once in Istanbul, it multiplied. The majority of my informants – or as I will refer to them in this thesis, ‘metalheads’<sup>18</sup> – have been selected through *snowball sampling*<sup>19</sup>. However, once my presence in the local scene in Istanbul was established, people started to add me on social media outlets, such as Facebook and Instagram, and I soon found myself in a situation where I had *too many* rather than *too few* potential informants which meant that I could, and had to, be more selective. Selection involves an active choice and as whenever something is chosen, my subjectivity will influence that choice. As many ethnographers before me have stated, my social skills, interests, gender, looks, age (the list can go on), affect who I am “drawn” to and, in return, who is “drawn” to me.<sup>20</sup> In other words, a different researcher undertaking the same study would not get the exact same informants, nor the same results as I have. Efforts were made, however, to limit the researcher effect and actively pursue “a range of informants [...] to avoid partial accounts to a social situation” (Burgess 1984, 75) including reaching out to other black metal bands outside of the initial “circle”<sup>21</sup>, and travel to other cities. I also actively pursued diversity in age, gender, and position within the group (newer and older members), as well as reaching out to record shops, studio, and bar owners. In short what Keith Kahn-Harris says constitutes a *scene*.<sup>22</sup> Following people’s and bands’ Facebook-pages with links to YouTube, pictures, news, and updates, also put me in a position where “the field” was always *virtually* available.<sup>23</sup> This required an ethical reflection on my part. What statements can be used for research? Even though I was not actively researching social media, it is foolish to believe that one can simply stop researching and distance oneself

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<sup>18</sup> What is considered to be the appropriate term for, what traditionally have been called “informant”, has been the subject of much discussion lately (Scheyvens 2014; Silverman 2014). Terms such as, “participants”, “teachers”, or “interlocutors”, have often replaced “informants” in an attempt to emphasize the research subject’s importance and participation in the research. Although this discussion is important, and past terminology should be subjected to critical examination, I have instead chosen to call the participants in this study “metalheads”. I wanted to have a terminology, symbolizing their subcultural belonging and after trying out “black metalheads” (too long) and “BMH” (too abstract), I chose to stick with “metalheads”.

<sup>19</sup> A “snow ball” sampling means that my informants helped me to reach other informants within the scene which in turn recommended others, visually resulting in a rolling “snow ball”. I tried to counter the risk of a partial account of a social situation by applying “reversed membership validation” (Hannerz 2015, 9). For more on snowball, see Ahrne and Svensson 2015, 43.

<sup>20</sup> For a lengthy discussion about this *researcher effect*, see Stjernholm 2011, 35–36; Moberg 2013, 61.

<sup>21</sup> To actively pursue members outside of the classical “snowball sampling”, including “rival” groups are used by Erik Hannerz (2015, 9) who call this sampling method as *reversed membership validation*.

<sup>22</sup> A “scene” is used by Kahn-Harris (2007, 15) and refers to something that “... encapsulates music making, production, circulation, discussion, and text”.

<sup>23</sup> In his study, Stjernholm (2011, 32–33) found himself in a similar situation.

completely from the field. In other words, what was being said and discussed on private Facebook accounts of those who had befriended me, influenced my future questions and interest, but also increased my indexikalitet. I have, however, chosen to exclude private statements from my empirical material and only chosen to actively analyze public band-pages.

My overall relationship to the metalheads was inspired by Graham Harvey's term *guesthood*. A guest–researcher positions him, or, herself in the middle ground between the usual binary of either being an “insider” or “outsider”, and acknowledges a different power-relation between the researcher and the informant (Harvey 2003).

Guest-researchers recognize the powerful priority, sovereignty and intellectual rights of the host [...] They recognize that knowledge is gained in relationships, performance, negotiation and that these require active presence and a fuller participation than that available even to those who deem themselves participant observers. (Harvey 2003, 142)

For my study, this meant that I tried to spend as much time as possible with the metalheads. When I traveled to concerts or made short visits to other cities, I tried to stay with people connected to the scene.

In the end, my study has benefited from the contribution of twenty-four people affiliated with the black metal scene in Turkey. The majority of these, (20), were between 22–32 years old and all but four of them were actively playing in bands at the time of the interview. The rest were slightly older, the oldest being 42 years old. Three out of twenty-four were women with a long-standing connection to the scene. All but one of the metalheads either had a university degree or were attending university at the time of the interview.

## **Material**

Gathering material for this thesis has been a process of roughly four years (starting in the spring of 2014 and ending in the spring of 2018). However, the majority of the material was gathered during two extended field trips in 2017/2018, one between September–December 2017 and the other between January–March 2018. Inspired by Stjernholm (2011, 29–36) I also “followed the field”; and the material, therefore, includes, besides the material gathered in Istanbul and Ankara, concert observations in Copenhagen (June 2017), and Wermelskirchen in Germany (September 2017). In total, I have been at sixteen black metal concerts, as well as numerous rehearsals, hang-outs, and other social gatherings and I conducted eighteen in-depth interviews. My material has also been strengthened by a great number of informal talks with other people connected to the

scene at concerts or other gatherings. During my observations, I wrote extensive field notes which are also part of my material.

### *Transcription and Coding*

Transcribing *is time-consuming*. In total, I estimate that I spent 150 effective hours transcribing interviews. In order not to miss exciting patterns later on, I transcribed everything with the exception of stutters and “fillers” such as “hmm”, “umm” “yeah”, or repetitions when deemed not emphasizing what had been said (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Even though time-consuming, transcribing the interviews provided me with a deeper insight into my interviews. The only exception to what I have described above was an interview done in Turkish which was transcribed and translated by the same person who had translated during the interview. Since I approach this study from an *inductive*<sup>24</sup> perspective, I carefully read my 492 pages of transcribed interviews to identify themes (and counter-themes), color coded them, and then started to properly theorize.<sup>25</sup> My extensive field notes were coded in a similar fashion. I have corrected the material I have chosen to include in the written text (I corrected grammar mistakes and patched up broken sentences), unless the corrections risked altering the meaning of the quote.<sup>26</sup> To further increase the anonymity of the metalheads, the quotes will appear unmarked, unless in a dialogue with me.

### *CDs, Posters, Pins and other Favorite Things*

Audio, visual, and other material were gathered throughout the period of this thesis. Due to the fact that many of the black metal<sup>27</sup> CDs, tapes, and vinyl are produced in limited quantity, I gathered them through several different channels. During my visits to Istanbul I made a habit of always visiting record stores to see if they had any new material available, the same goes for shows that at

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<sup>24</sup> Inductive work is characterized by emphasizing data, rather than theory, in the initial phase of the research in order to avoid being “blinded by theory”. That does not mean that I considered myself “free from theory” which I think is impossible, but rather that I reflected on how my theoretical background influenced data collection. By using an inductive approach when gathering my data, and a critical perspective while analyzing, I hope to have avoided the “pitfalls” of both approaches. For more info, see Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2017, 177–187.

<sup>25</sup> To code interviews according to theme is well established method, see Nordin 2004, 61; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 217–235.

<sup>26</sup> I am aware that I open myself up for critique by “purist”, however as Kvale and Brinkman (2009, 193–235) argue, since I am not conducting a linguistic research an exact transcription is not necessary (or even wanted). The study is sociological and therefore focuses on meaning and on how it is created in the interview situation, therefore pauses and changes of “roles” were observed. Similar argument can be found in Silverman 2014, 331–335.

<sup>27</sup> The question of what constitutes authentic black metal, usually under the discussion of “true black metal” (Kuppens and van der Pol 2014), is not something I myself is interested in (even though I am interested in how others define it). I have therefore not selected my material from a musicological perspective (exclusion via audio), but rather a discursive one. To this end I chose the material depending on three criteria, 1) it needed to have been produced by a band from Turkey, 2) the band (or record shop owners) needed to have categorized it as some sort of black metal, or if not categorized as black metal, 3) the band needed to have dealt with themes relevant for my research (Islam and Turkish society).

times have merchandise-stands with older albums and the like. I also ordered several new (and old) releases online from distributors from all over the globe (Russia, the US, Poland, Denmark, Spain, Indonesia to name a few). In addition, I copied demos and other material from metalheads I visited, and searched online sources, such as YouTube, Bandcamp, Spotify, and SoundCloud, in order to get digital copies of recordings I could not get a physical copy of. At times I could only get hold of lyrical material, and at other only audio material. This was, however, an exception rather than the rule (for a fuller discussion see chapter five). In the end, I was left with a wider and more inclusive collection of Turkish black metal (95 albums, demos, or EPs) than many of the metalheads in this study. A full list is featured at the end of the thesis. I also collected posters, pins, and merchandise; this was exclusively gathered in Turkey. The material was then listened to, read, and visually examined, and then categorized after a few themes relating to religion, Islam, and Turkish society (see chapter five). Almost all Turkish black metal bands have titles and lyrics in English, not Turkish, making them easily accessible to me. The lyrics have also been kept intact, that is, I have not corrected grammatical or printing mistakes but chosen to reproduce them the way I found them.

### *Ethics and Storing Material*

“My best advice for you is to become really paranoid” - a professor said to me while discussing ethics and safeguarding material, so I did. All of my interviews (except the one done by mail) were recorded with a six-digit password protected iPhone that was kept in flight mode during the entire fieldwork. Once an interview was finished I transferred it to an encrypted external hard drive protected with a 23-character password (when the transfers took place my computer was disconnected from wi-fi). The hard drive was then stored in my room at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul (henceforth SRII). The room was locked with a key and the compound where SRII is located is considered Swedish territory and is therefore off limits for Turkish authorities. This limited the window of opportunity for accessing my material to when I either did an actual interview, or when I was on my way back to the institute, and even then, the interview was still stored at the protected iPhone. A later occasion to access it would be when I was leaving the country. Furthermore, field notes from observations and concerts were done on the iPhone (in contrast to the usually accompanied notebook) and immediately transferred to the hard drive when I was back home. CDs, vinyl, tapes, and other objects were also stored in my room at the SRII until transferred to Sweden. Even though not impossible, I deem the chances for someone to access my material to have been as small as possible. Back in Sweden I stored the hard-drive containing the original interview-files in a safe place.

# Chapter Three

## A Journey Through the Dark: An Introduction to (Black) Metal

No fun, no core, no mosh, no trend. – Euronymous from the band Mayhem on black metal.

### What is Metal Music?

As with any genre, the birth of heavy metal is difficult to pinpoint.<sup>28</sup> Bands originating from the industrial cities of America and the United Kingdom in the early 1970s, such as Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin, are commonly referred to as the formative bands of the genre (Weinstein 2000, 14–18, 2011, 37–41). However, according to the sociologist Deena Weinstein, it was not until Judas Priest's *Sad Wings of Destiny* (1976) that all of heavy metal's verbal, sonic, and visual iconographies were incorporated in one album; including distorted guitars, guitar-solos, powerful vocals, and distinctive band logos, to name a few.<sup>29</sup> The 1980s saw the emergence of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM), which included bands like Diamond Head, Saxon, and Iron Maiden. Megadeth, Metallica, Anthrax, and Slayer from America would pioneer the genre of thrash metal in the 1980s, and after extensive touring by above named bands, heavy metal music had by the end of the 1980s spread from the original Western context, to central Europe and “behind the Iron curtain”, in a process that Weinstein (2011, 43–44) refers to as the first globalization wave of metal. Like many other globalized commodities, heavy metal first spread from more economic and technically developed areas to less developed ones. By the early 1990s, metal's second phase of globalization, had not only spread the genre to the rest of the globe, but also saw the formation of local scenes all over the world (Weinstein 2011, 45–47). Furthermore, with the help of new media such as the internet, the power dynamic in how metal music spread changed from a one-way communication (West to the rest), to a transnational exchange in music between countries and scenes (Weinstein 2011, 47). Today, metal music is a global phenomenon.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that a genre only derives its name a few years after its actual formation. During the formative period, the lines between the new style and the old, are blurred and it is not until a genre's crystallization period that a more distinct style can be identified. However, musical genres are not static but are always in a dialectic relationship with fans and musicians and therefore always evolving. Weinstein (2000, 21), divides the evolution of heavy metal in five phases, the start in 1969–1972, start of crystallization in 1973–1975, full crystallization 1976–1979, growth and diversity 1979–1983, and finally fragmentation in subgenres after 1983.

<sup>29</sup> The characteristics of heavy metal are quite complex due to the never-ending evolution of the genre and therefore includes more aspects than those stated above. For an excellent overview, see Weinstein 2000, 14–43. In her later article “The Globalization of Metal”, Weinstein (2011, 37) describes Judas Priest's album *Sad Wings of Destiny* as “watching the first land creatures emerge from the primordial ooze”.

<sup>30</sup> The reader *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World* (Wallach, Berger, and Greene 2011b) includes studies made in several countries such as Brazil, Indonesia, Slovenia, Iceland, Norway, Japan, China, Malaysia,

If one of heavy metal's main features is the music's ability to establish itself in different countries and cultures, another is the constant controversies and moral panic the music provokes. Most famous of these might be when, in the wake of the American Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) attack on heavy metal, a court in Nevada filed a case against Judas Priest in 1990. Two teenagers had attempted to commit suicide (one succeeded) after listening to Judas Priest and the band's album *Stained Class* (1978) was accused of containing "subliminal messages" promoting suicide.<sup>31</sup> Unsurprisingly, the band was acquitted, but that have not deterred politicians and interest groups from defaming heavy metal and the genre continues, to this day, to spark controversies (Kahn-Harris 2007; LeVine 2008; Street 2012).

## **Metal Studies**

Metal music has since the early 1990s been an interest of study for academics and scholars. In the reader, *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World* (2011) Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene argue that Deena Weinstein *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture* (Weinstein 2000), Donna Gaines *Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead End Kids* (Gaines 1998), and Robert Walser and Harris Berger's *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Walser and Berger 2014) , constitutes the foundational academic works on metal culture (Wallach, Berger, and Greene 2011a, 9). However, as Andy R. Brown shows, these works are not the first ones on metal culture, but rather account for a "second phase" of sociological studies that nuanced the previous psychological and criminological studies which portrayed metal music as a gateway to delinquency and self-destruction (Brown 2011). The pioneering sociological works focused on the early part of metal music's history in the West (the 1970s to late 1980s), and participation in metal culture was explained as a response from working-class men to deindustrialization, and to a changing social and economic reality.<sup>32</sup> In line with this reasoning, Weinstein has announced the "Weinstein hypothesis", that extreme metal is the music for the

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Singapore, and Nepal. LeVine's study (2008) includes Morocco, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Iran, and Pakistan. Another work worth mentioning is Banchs' (2016) book covering heavy metal music in Africa, including countries such as Botswana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, and South Africa.

<sup>31</sup> The Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) was founded in 1985 and the board included several wives of American senators, including Tipper Gore (wife of Al Gore). The PMRC led campaigns to have record labels mark "offensive, sexual, satanic, and dangerous" lyrics and they had several hearings with metal musicians, among them Dee Snider of *Twisted Sisters*. The well-known "Parental Advisory" sticker, found on records, is partly the result of PMRC lobbying. PMRC also made a list called, "the filthy fifteen", which included (in their opinion) the most "dangerous songs" in America and the list included eight metal bands. For more info, see Weinstein 2000, 249–275.

<sup>32</sup> Wallach, Berger, and Greene, summarizes the effort of many metal studies to explain the emergence and popularity of heavy metal to a change in social and economic situation in former industrial areas in the 1970s. The frustration felt by metal heads has been explained by a change in economic and social situation such as unemployment, economic insecurity, weak unions and crumbling civic infrastructure. For more info, see Wallach, Berger, and Greene 2011a, 15–17. Another study on metal culture with a similar argument is made by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (1996), in his study on American metalheads.

working-class all around the world.<sup>33</sup> For different reasons which will be further explored in chapter eight, Weinstein's analysis does not hold true for Turkey or, I would argue, the wider Middle East. During the last decade, a third phase of metal studies has emerged, focusing on specific aesthetics or subgenres of metal music (Purcell 2003; Kahn-Harris 2007; Brown 2011, 215–16; Vasan 2011). Black metal, relative to its size, have in recent years received much attention by several academic disciplines, including religious studies.<sup>34</sup> The religious scholar Per Faxneld (2015) argues for instance that “orthodox black metal-Satanism” comprise a new religiosity in Sweden, partly enabled by the secularized character of Swedish society. But what is black metal?

## **Black Metal**

Emerging during heavy metal's era of fragmentation, black metal, commonly referred to as the most extreme subgenres of metal, would become the genres dirtiest offspring (Weinstein 2000, 21). Black metal had its formative period during the 1980s and critics and fans generally include bands such as Bathory, Celtic Frost, Venom, Hellhammer, and, Merciful Fate in this era (Patterson 2013). Despite the differences between the above-mentioned bands, they were all challenging conventional heavy metal by playing faster, harder, and “dirtier”, than previous metal bands (Patterson 2013). Musically, the genre can be distinguished for its fast drums (blast beat), tremolo-guitars, and screamed/growled vocals (if not previously introduced to the genre these audial characteristics might come across as pure noise) (Hagen 2011). Furthermore, lyrics and visual aesthetics focused almost solely on Satanic, occult, and anti-religious themes. Venoms first album *Welcome to Hell* (1981) included the now iconic Baphomet head in a pentagram, and their second album *Black Metal* (1982) has been credited for naming the genre (Patterson 2013; Hecker 2012). To take the position as an enemy of God that is in allegiance with the Devil is an important aspect for the genres meta-narrative and during the formative period, it was kept strictly figuratively.<sup>35</sup> However, during the genres crystallization period and the so-called “second wave of black metal”,

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<sup>33</sup> Weinstein argues that extreme metal music has failed to achieve popularity in the rural communities of the developing world and that the majority of its listeners can be found in industrial, or former industrial areas among the working-class youths. In short, extreme metal is the music for people who live under conditions of modernity but that are excluded from its benefits. For full argument, see Weinstein 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Brown (2011, 220–221, 232), shows that studies on black metal are almost twice the size of that of death metal even though the genre is less popular on a global scale. This observation is reflected in the amount of academic work focusing on black metal, see for example Bossius 2003, 2006; Granholm 2011; Lucas, Deeks, and Spracklen 2011; Phillipov 2012; Olson 2013; Kuppens and van der Pol 2014; Masciandaro and Connole 2015; Venkatesh et al. 2015, 2016; Faxneld 2015, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> A meta-narrative refers to an overarching account of, in this case, what black metal is. It works similar to a discourse in which certain ideas and narratives have precedence over others (such as black metal is aligned with the Devil rather than God) which governs and aids people to “correctly” partake in a genre. It can also be contested by other narratives and events altering or adding other dimensions to the meta-narrative, or have an aesthetical dimension to it such as sounds and images.

the narrative would have severe implications and provide the genre with world recognition. In the early 1990s members of the Norwegian black metal scene, most prominently from the bands Mayhem and Burzum, were affiliated with several violent incidents including arson, murder, and suicide (Moynihan and Söderlind 2003; Johannesson and Klingberg 2011, 72–74). During 1992–1995 more than 44 churches either burned down or suffered extensive damage from arson, including the 700-year old Fantoft church in Bergen (its burned ruins can be found on the cover of Burzum's *Aske* (1993)) (Moynihan and Söderlind 2003, 106ff). The extreme violence that erupted was short-lived and after the main protagonist were either in jail (or had killed one another), it quickly died down (Kahn-Harris 2004). Today, the controversies connected to metal and black metal in Europe and America are few (although sporadic connections to fascism, Satanism, and racism create controversies at times), but that is not the case for metal music in the Middle East (Kahn-Harris 2007).<sup>36</sup>

## **Metal in MENA**

Metal music is today found all over the Middle East and North Africa, including in countries such as Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi-Arabia, and Algeria (LeVine 2008; Crowcroft 2017). As have been the case in the rest of the world, fans and musicians of the genre have suffered from prejudice about Satanism and moral depravity, at times leading to harsh treatment from the police and governments, something that continues to this day (LeVine 2008; Crowcroft 2017). The accusations of Satanism leveled at metal-musicians in the Middle East are in many cases unjustified.<sup>37</sup> However, when it comes to black metal it is not so easy. The Lebanese black metal band AYAT<sup>38</sup> have in interviews stated that they are despised by the rest of the metal community in Lebanon because they embody the things the government are scared of, namely Satanism, atheism, and subversive behavior (Crowcroft 2017). Due to the genres overtly anti-religious profile, black metal musicians in the Middle East do usually use pseudonyms, live performances are extremely rare, and some bands are strict “studio projects”.<sup>39</sup> The Saudi based band Al-Namrood, one of the most well-known black metal bands in the Middle East, does not play live due to the risks involved and the need to keep strict anonymity (Crowcroft 2017). In other words, black metal

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<sup>36</sup> In 2010 Adam “Nergal” Darski from the Polish black metal band *Bebemoth*, was charged with blasphemy after he had torn pages of a bible on stage in Warsaw and stated that the Catholic Church is the most murderous cult on the planet. Charges were later dropped. For more info, see Sobti, Kaur Navjot 2010.

<sup>37</sup> LeVine (2008) shows that many metal musicians have an ambivalent relation to religion and do not see their music and as a conflict between being a “metalhead” on the one hand and “religious” the other.

<sup>38</sup> AYAT means signs or miracle in Arabic and is used as a name for the verses in the Quran (Jeffery 2012).

<sup>39</sup> To use pseudonyms is quite common in black metal and is not solely confined to the Middle East. It does, however, coincide with another purpose, namely anonymity. A few examples are; *Hellhammer*, *Dead*, *Euronymous*, *Inferno*, *Ghaal*, *Nocturno Culto*.

bands can be found all over the Middle East, but I would argue that it does not exist a black metal *scene* similar to the one found in Turkey.

## **Metal Music in Turkey**

Initially reaching the country through tape-trading (metal music did not get official distribution until the late 1980s), metal established itself in Turkey during the genres “second wave” of globalization (Hecker 2012, 40–48). Emerging from a history of Anatolian rock music in the 1970s, Pierre Hecker (2012) distinguishes two waves of early heavy metal in Turkey. The first wave was pioneered by bands as like Axe, Whiskey, Devil, Ra, and Dr. Skull that played classical heavy metal inspired by European and American bands.<sup>40</sup> The second wave, emerging in the late 1980s, was influenced by thrash metal and were accordingly heavier and faster than the previous generation of bands and included Pentagram, Turkey’s most successful band to date, as well as Kronik, Metafor, Metalium, and Hazy Hill (Hecker 2012, 62–68). Following Pentagram’s famous show in Moda<sup>41</sup>, which kick-started the Turkish metal scene, the early 1990s saw the establishment of several rock and metal bars, including *Kemançı köprüi altı* (the fiddler under the bridge), notoriously known as “the first metal bar in Istanbul” (Hecker 2012, 68–78). The Akmar passage located in the Istanbul neighborhood of Kadıköy, became from the late 1980s an important space for metal-fans and musicians to socialize, due to the possibility of attaining bootlegged CDs and tapes. Today, Istanbul’s main store for metal music Hammer Müzik, (which also serves as a record label and distributor) is still located there even though the Akmar passage lost its central position after several police raids in the late 1990s (see below).<sup>42</sup>

## *Black Metal in Turkey*

Black metal music found its way into Turkey surprisingly early. Mayhem’s show in Izmir the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 1990 has become an important historical event for the Turkish black metal scene.<sup>43</sup> However, two years before that, in 1988, *Witchtrap*, usually acknowledged as the first black metal

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<sup>40</sup> Hecker 2012, 37–78. And the documentary movie *Gri Değil, Siyah: Ankara Rocks! (Black, not Gray: Ankara Rocks!)* (2017).

<sup>41</sup> The “legendary Moda concert” took place the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1988 in an old cinema hall in Moda, Istanbul. Besides Pentagram, Kronik, Metafor, and Metalium played for a crowd of approximately 1,800 even though the venues capacity was 600. Attendees of the concert have reported that it was a key moment for the Turkish metal scene and after the event several bands were formed, and a sense of community was established. Now, the concert serves as an important collective memory for the Turkish metal scene. For more info, see Hecker 2012, 66–67.

<sup>42</sup> Hecker 2012, 38–40. The importance of Akmar has also been reflected in many of my interviews and many of the metalheads stated that they got hold of their first metal-CDs there.

<sup>43</sup> According to Pierre Hecker (2012, 132–133) there was several things that made this show famous, amongst other Mayhem was the second foreign metal band to ever play in Turkey, the band had its original line-up (including Dead and Euronymous), and the police raided the show forcing it to quit. The importance of the show is also reflected in the fact that more people say they attended the show than there actually were.

band in Turkey, was formed in Ankara.<sup>44</sup> Together with *Infected*, *Pagan*, *Ehrimen*, and *Ebonsight*, they constitute the first generation of Turkish black metal bands and, as is the case today, the scene was mostly confined to the bigger cities of Turkey, such as Izmir, Ankara, and Istanbul.<sup>45</sup> Thematically these earlier bands kept themselves in line with the rest of the international black metal scene and accordingly focused on anti-Christian or Satanic themes (discussed below), instead of Islamic, when dealing with religion (Hecker 2012, 136ff.). To include Islamic semiotics in Turkish black metal is a fairly new expression and will be analyzed in chapter five. As was the case with metal music, black metal first entered and spread in the country through tape trading and illegal copying (which intensified with the internet).<sup>46</sup> Scene-related news also travelled slower than they do today and as one of the metalheads I spoke to recalled, he and his band did not hear about the controversies connected to the Norwegian scene until a local Rock-magazine reported about it. At that time, they had already recorded songs and started with corpse paint, and Turkish bands were producing black metal demos in the early 90s.<sup>47</sup> In other words, black metal was already on the rise in Turkey when news about the controversies surrounding the Norwegian scene reached the world. However, the first official black metal record in Turkey, Witchtrap's *Witching Black*, was not released until 1997 by Hammer Müzik, but it was soon followed by others and by the end of 1999, several Turkish black metal albums, EPs, and demos were in circulation.<sup>48</sup> The period of the early to late 1990s, was described to me by one metalhead as a "glorious time" but a few controversies loosely connected to metal music would change that and temporarily put metal, and black metal on hold in Turkey.<sup>49</sup>

## Satanic Scare

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<sup>44</sup> Precisely who were the first black metal band in Turkey is hard, if not impossible to find out. Most commonly referred to by other and by their own definition, Witchtrap, is the most likely candidate. For more info, see Hecker 2012, 135.

<sup>45</sup> Hecker 2012, 134–136. Home recordings and access to internet have made it easier for people to put out solo-projects enabling black metal bands to take shape outside of the big metropolitan cities. On metal archives (an internet-based database where bands can self-register) black metal bands are also found in other Turkish cities such as, Balıkesir, Mersin, Denizli, and Adana.

<sup>46</sup> When illegal downloading entered the arena it quickly became a popular and easy way for fans to get a hold on foreign black metal albums which commonly was not imported and if they were, to a high cost. Instead, as one of the metalheads recall, they could enter their local record store and ask them to download whatever album they wanted to get a hold on and they would burn and copy it in the store.

<sup>47</sup> Some of the early demos include, Witchtrap – *The Witch* (1992); *Incubo & Succubo* (1993); Ebonsight – *The Ocean Ebon* (1994); Pagan – *Rehearsal Tape 96* (1996); Ehrimen – *Diabolical Carnage* (1996); Satanic Verses – *Dark Anatolia* (1996).

<sup>48</sup> See for example, Infected – *The Lost Looser in Dreams* (1998); *Breathless Kiss on the Lips of Melancholia* (1999); Ominous Greif – *Reborn into the Light* (1999); Satanic Verses – *Over the Palace of God* (1998); Ebonsight – *As the River Runs Through the Pain* (1998); Ehrimen – *il Aderrissa* (1998); Saboath – *Epic of Turks* (1998).

<sup>49</sup> According to one metalhead the early days of black metal in Turkey were "glorious" but the scene "flat lined" after the events of 1999 and it never became the same after that.

“... the cops were literally hunting ANYONE wearing ANYTHING black.” – metalhead.

The suicide of the sixteen-year-old Lara Falay in January 2002 shocked the whole nation. Attending one of the elite schools in Turkey, growing up in a wealthy family, and described by friends and teachers as a tender and warm-hearted character, Turkish press doubted that someone like her could actually commit suicide. Satanism, which at this time was synonymous with metal music (see below) was found to be the driving force behind the act (Hecker 2012, 104). This was, however, not the only time metal music had been a source of controversy in the country. The controversies, described by Pierre Hecker as the “Satanic scare”, stretches throughout several years. Below is my summary of key happenings and some of the consequences that were felt by the metal community.<sup>50</sup>

Mapping the media discourse about metal music and Satanism from the 1990s to the mid 2000, Pierre Hecker (2012, 79–128) shows that the first time metal music made it into the news was after a concert in Istanbul 1990, when the popular journalist Engin Ardiç wrote in the Turkish daily, *Sabah*, that metalheads are the new plague of the land. Depicted as showing several traits of deviant behavior (sexual, social, religious, political), participating in black masses, drinking alcohol, and “copulating like dogs”, Ardiç’s polemic piece set, according to Hecker (2012, 82ff), the standard for how metal music and Satanism would be portrayed by Turkish press in the future. A series of teenage suicides, culminating in the joint suicide of two teenagers in 1998, which media connected with metal music and Satanism (despite the protest from family members and teachers that instead emphasized the youngster’s affiliation with Islam), had already shown signs of a *moral panic*<sup>51</sup> in regard to metal music in Turkey (Hecker 2012, 89–90). So when a young woman was found raped and murdered in a cemetery in Ortaköy, Istanbul, in September 1999, the scene was already set to throw the country into a full-scale moral panic (Hecker 2012, 91). The young woman, Şehriban Çoşkunfirat, was on her way back home from a rock bar in Beyoğlu, Istanbul, when Ömer Çelik, Engin Arslan, and Zinnur Gülşah Dinçer, the three youths that had accompanied her that night, raped and murdered her in an act they later described to have been “ordered by Satan”, and pictures of them posing with a beheaded cat began to circulate in media (Hecker 2012, 91–92). The incident, which Hecker (2012, 102ff) describes as moral panic on its own, became for a short while

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<sup>50</sup> For a full analysis of these events, see Hecker, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda list in their *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (2009, 37–43) five criteria that needs to be met in order for something to be labeled as a moral panic; concern, hostility, consensus, volatility, and disproportion. The last one is the most important element since it means that the seriousness and perceived threat, moral decline, scale of damage, and number of people active in the deviant behavior, are exaggerated to such an extent that it raises the other factors such as concerns, hostility, and consensus. For more on moral panic, see Critcher 2003; Hall and Jefferson 2006; Cohen 2011.

one of the most reported incidents in Turkey. Pressure arose to find the source of this moral deprivation and, not surprisingly, metal music was portrayed as the main protagonist. The witch hunt that followed was intense and metal bars were raided and closed down, bands dissolved, fanzines went bankrupt, parents quit their children's guitar-lessons and burned their metal albums, and some even cut their long hair because of the fear of reprisals. Black clothes, metal music, long hair and earrings were, and still are, somewhat associated with Satanism and the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet* even published a manual for parents on how to “detect a Satanist”.<sup>52</sup> Also the murder victim became a subject of bad press and her moral integrity was questioned due to the late hour she had been present at the rock bar (Hecker 2012).

Because no substantial evidence surfaced that a “Satanic terrorist organization” existed in the country, most of the media lost interest after ten days. That is, until the mentioned suicide in 2002 when the media circus started all over again, only this time the government became more involved in the “Satanic problem”. A police unit specialized in combating Satanists was formed and the Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü (Security General Directorate) released a rapport claiming that there existed 3.500 Satanist in Turkey aged between 14–25 and that “rock bars” were the places where they recruited new members (Hecker 2012, 106). A Turkish parliamentarian even compared the threat from Satanists to that of Hizbollah or PKK (Hecker 2012, 107–108). The extensive harassment towards metalheads (or people looking like one) has toned down since then. That said, the majority of the metalheads I spoke to stated that they had experienced prejudice and slurs directed towards them while walking on the street, such as “cat-killer” and “Satanist”, which indicates that being a metalhead is still contested within the Turkish public sphere.

During the Satanic scare religious institutions like *Diyanet İşleri Reisliği* (Presidency of Religious Affairs, henceforth Diyanet) took notice and Mehmet Nuri, the head of the Diyanet at the time, said that the reason behind the youths' delinquency was a consequence of “moral emptiness” and encouraged Turkish families to provide religious education for their children and teach them the values of Islam (Hecker 2012, 99). Today, rock music is still somewhat controversial for the Diyanet which in 2014 debated whether an Imam who plays in a Sufi-rock group could be allowed to continue as an Imam or not (Middle East Eye 2014). As illustrated here Satanism, and more importantly accusations of Satanism, is an important part of the general narrative of black metal music in Turkey. The term is, however, complicated and I believe that a further exploration of the term and the metalheads relation to it is appropriate before I move on.

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<sup>52</sup> Miliyet's manual included nine common features of Satanists which (amongst other) included; that they are from rich and wealthy families, they listen to heavy metal and black metal, have long hair and shabby black clothes, have sex at graveyards drenched in blood, drink the blood of cats, and they have a particular aggressiveness against religion and Islam. For more info, see Hecker 2012, 54, 79–107.

## *Satanism*

A subject worth addressing is that of Satanism and Turkish bands adoption of Christian eschatology rather than Islamic. Why, as Hecker (2012) noted, is Satan and Lucifer used instead of Shaytan or Iblis? Does proclaiming Satans victory over God correlate with an actual worship of the Devil as Turkish medias claim? Or is it simply metaphorical? To start this discussion, the following quote sums up the majority of the metalheads position in the matter:

I am not a Satanist you know, I don't believe in religion. I don't believe in any God or Satan or something like that but if anyone believe in God, I am a Satanist. Ok?

Satan is the best way for blasphemy against Islam or other Gods.

As can be seen in the quotes above, Satanism and support for Satan, should primarily be understood in a metaphorical sense, or in the emic understanding of the word. Satan, or other references such as Devil, Lucifer, and demon, are used as a symbol in order to attack God. Satan, was for many of the metalheads the character that best represented a rejection of God and religion. In that sense, black metal adheres to a long tradition of utilizing Satan in order to voice religious and societal critique (Faxneld and Petersen 2013).

However, their understanding and usage of Satan sprung from a dualistic understanding of God and Satan. If God is good, Satan is evil, and if God is light, Satan is darkness. This makes perfect sense if the ambition is to communicate an opposition to God and religion. This binary relation between God and Satan is, however, more likely sprung from Christian eschatology, rather than traditional Turkish Sunni-Islam. Although al-Shaytan, or Iblis, and the metaphors of light and darkness are mentioned in the Quran, the characters have traditionally not been interpreted in the same way as in Christianity. Iblis is the proud and disobedient angel who refused to follow Gods command to prostrate before Adam, and were therefore expelled from paradise.<sup>53</sup> Al-Shaytan is the seducer who tries to lead man astray and disobey God, but in contrast to the Christian version of Satan, al-Shaytan does not have the power to challenge God, and usually does his bidding through the work of *jinn*s (Hecker 2012, 136–137; Wensinck and Gardet 2012). As Hecker (2012) previously noted, and as my material gives support to, it is mainly the Christian version of Satan that is referred to in lyrics and in conversations. I just found three examples in my material where

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<sup>53</sup> Interesting to note is that among certain Sufi-communities, Iblis has gained status as the ultimate monotheist because he refused to prostrate before anyone else than God. It is therefore not always a negative character. See Wensinck and Gardet 2012.

Iblis, al-Shaytan, or Deggial/Deccal [Dajjal] were used instead of Satan, Lucifer, or the Devil, but even in those cases the Christian understanding that Satan has the power to challenge and be triumphant over God remained.<sup>54</sup>

Two metalheads identified themselves as Satanists but they did so as part of a philosophical endeavor. That is, they did not practice any sort of ritual or performed prayers to Satan, instead to be Satanist was for them equivalent to “go their own way” and live an individualistic life. Satanism and voiced support for Satan should, in contrast to how Turkish medias have reported it, not be understood as a practicing belief or engagement in dark masses and rituals. Instead, Satanism offers a narrative that can be utilized because of its transgressive and symbolic character of defying God. That the Christian version of Satan (that is Satan equipped with the powers granted to him by the Christian tradition), is used instead of the Islamic version could have several possible explanations, some of them simple. Firstly, the metalheads I spoke to viewed Satan as a general symbol of opposition to God, and therefore not confined to the Christian tradition. Satan, instead of al-Shaytan, is more communicative since the former is known in both Turkey and abroad, whereas the latter might not be (although it probably would be recognized as a word for Satan). The former is also an integrated part of the contemporary black metal narrative, whereas the latter is not, at least not to the same degree. Lastly, the theological differences between the powers of Satan and al-Shaytan, are not contemplated by the metalheads. Instead, they gave support to the idea that Satan is mightier than God, which the lyrics, as we will see, give support to no matter which version of Satan they use.

As can be seen from the discussion above, metal, and more specifically black metal music, has, in Turkey, had a history full of controversies. The “Satanic scare” and the prejudices directed towards metal music are of course not unique to Turkey, but they do provide a necessary and interesting backdrop to the context in which this music is made. In the following chapter I will further explore the context of Turkey, which, in the last two decades, has undergone major changes, not least in relation to religion.

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<sup>54</sup> For instance, in Sarinvomit’s song “The Glorious Might Of Deccal”, Deccal, accompanied by infidels and demons, are raping and killing Muhammad, al-Mahdi, and Jesus – signaling their victory over Gods forces and thereby changing the traditional narrative where Deccal is destroyed. For more info, see Madelung 2012; Abel 2012. Other examples are Nihil Kaos’ songs “Spawn of Devastating Chaos” which include the line “Marching with the congregation of Iblis”, and the song “Katharsis In Ashes” with the line “Congregation of Iblis, hordes of Shaitan”, from the album *Noxkult* (2015).

# Chapter Four

## The Turkish Context and the Rise of Pious Conservatism

The aim of this chapter is to try to contextualize contemporary Turkey and its relation to Islam from a social, political, and juridical point of view. With this in mind, I believe that, following a brief history of the founding of the Republic and the changes in relation to religion that followed as a consequence of it, the 2002 election and AKP's rise to power serves as a relevant starting point. After reviewing existing literature on the subject, I hope this chapter will have equipped the reader with a necessary backdrop on the contemporary context of Turkey from which, I argue, the new cultural production of the Turkish black metal scene needs to be examined in.

### Atatürk and the Early Modern Republic

After a long period of political and economic decline, modern Turkey sprung from the ashes of the former Ottoman Empire (ca 1299–1922) (Cinar 2015; Zürcher 2004). In the aftermath of the First World War, in which the Ottoman Empire had sided with the Germans, the Empire found itself in a position of humiliating defeat. Being forced to sign the treaty of *Sèvres* meant that the empire lost a significant part of its territory and, although already in its wake, a nationalistic group, led by the young officer Mustafa Kemal Pasha (1881–1938) – later adopting the honoree title Atatürk (father of the Turks) – started a war of independence on several fronts (1920–1923) that laid the foundation of what today is known as Turkey (Zürcher 2004). The new republic, proclaimed on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 1923, was supposed to be built on modern values (which at the time were believed to be Western), and efforts were made to break with the, in their eyes, the degenerate Ottoman Empire (Azak 2010, 11–12).<sup>55</sup> A new national identity was to be constructed.

One year after proclaiming the new republic, Atatürk abolished the Caliphate, and thereby terminated the Islamic institution that had been in place since 1517. Within the coming years Atatürk implemented several reforms under the prerequisite of secularism, or *laiklik* (Zürcher 2004; Bottoni 2014).<sup>56</sup> Religious schools and Sufi-orders were outlawed and Islam lost its place as the official state religion. Religious affairs were to be handled by the newly formed *Diyanet İşleri Reisliği*

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<sup>55</sup> It should also be mentioned here that a westernization and secularization process was already underway by the end of the Ottoman Empire. It was, however, a difference between the Ottoman and the Republic process where the end goal of the Republican elite was *laïcité* and bringing religion under government control. For more, see Gözaydın 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Secularism is not an unproblematic term, it has its own genealogy and development, see Asad 2003; Asad et al. 2013. Here it needs to be understood as referring to the Turkish version of secularism where, instead of separating state and religion, religion is under state-control.

which was an administrative bureau in the cabinet, not a ministry, symbolizing the ruling elite's effort to break the otherwise potentially sacred significance of the Diyanet (Gözaydın 2014). Furthermore, the courts were brought under a modified version of the Swiss legal code, rather than the Islamic *Sharia* and *Kanun* (Azak 2010, 8–12). Besides reforming the state apparatus under secular principles, the social sphere was also affected by the secularization project. *Fez*, the popular headgear for men since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, was outlawed and men were required to wear the European hat, the alphabet changed from Arabic to Latin and was simultaneously stripped of words with Arabic or Persian origin. The calendar was furthermore standardized after the European model, as well as measures, weights and numbers, making it harder for coming generations to connect to the Islamic and Ottoman past (Azak 2010, 11).

This did not mean, however, that the new republic and Atatürk disregarded religion and Islam completely, but rather that they tried to promote a new, more “modern” version of Islam, compatible with how they imagined the new Turkish citizen to be.<sup>57</sup> In her book, *Collective Memory and National Membership: Identity and Citizenship Models in Turkey and Austria*. (2015), Meral Uğur Cinar, examines how the new national identity was transferred, mainly, through the educational system. Two aspects of this new, albeit still active, national identity are of particular interest here; the unspecific religiosity of the Turk, and the Turks' historic relationship with Islam. Whereas the Ottoman Empire had used the *millet* system to categorize communal rights depending on ethnoreligious group belonging, the new Turkish Republic emphasized that a Turk is a Turk, no matter their ethnic or religious belonging, prerequisite that they accept the state definition of Turkish culture (Cinar 2015, 33). Since 1926, textbooks on Turkish history have to be approved by the Ministry of Education, leading to a continuation and unification, to this day, on literature regarding Turkish history.<sup>58</sup> These state-financed textbooks describe the Turkish peoples' adoption of Islam as one of conscious choice, not of conquest, and they only accepted it after carefully examining it, realizing it already harmonized with the Turkic ethos (Cinar 2015: 29–30). In this regard, the political and public debates, that have surfaced time to time over Turkey's national identity, should not necessarily be seen as one between “secularism” over “Islam”, but rather, as Umut Azak argues, between what constitutes a “good” or a “bad” Muslim.<sup>59</sup> Disrespecting Islam,

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<sup>57</sup> Interesting to note is that Alevism was at times discussed, and to some extent campaigned, to become the “new Islam of the republic” and even Atatürk expressed admiration for some of the, what he saw, progressive practice relating to Alevism, such as not practicing gender segregation in their *cemivi* (place of worship). For more see Azak 2010, 139–173; Cinar 2015; Bottoni 2014.

<sup>58</sup> The textbooks were originally prepared and produced by Türk Tarihi Tetkik Heyeti (TTTH – Committee of the Study of Turkish History) formed in 1930 and its goal was to produce and popularize a usable past for the new regime. For more info, see Cinar 2015, 18–20.

<sup>59</sup> Here Azak, simply put, argues that the “good” Muslim is viewed as one that have understood that religion is supposed to be in the private sphere, whereas the “bad” Muslim is portrayed as a fundamentalist, willing to let Islam dictate politics and social policies in Turkey. Furthermore, state neutrality towards religious faiths was never

or openly voicing non-religious beliefs has, as we will see below, remained controversial in Turkey. Today, Atatürk still enjoys an almost messianic status and portraits and quotes of him are still visible in most stores, schools, offices, and government buildings. In fact, slandering his memory is a crime in the Turkish penal code.<sup>60</sup> The social engineering project of the Kemalist elite (the so-called “white Turks”) has, according to Selen Korad Birkiye (2009), historically alienated the rural population of Turkey, whom never could identify with the elite – leading to a lingering resentment that AKP later could capitalize on.

### *AKP and the Rise of Pious Conservatism*

... now the government are Islamic-fascists too. Thirty years ago, only people were Islamic-fascists, but now people plus government are Islamic in Turkey. – Metalhead.

In 2002, the newly formed *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or Justice and Development Party (AKP) won a convincing victory in the Turkish national election. The party was formed by a merging of different conservative parties (among them the previous Islamist party *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party) that was closed down by the constitutional court in 2001 (Şen 2010). The party, which ran on an agenda to stop corruption, promote liberal economic reforms, and social justice, attained 34.3% of the votes and two-thirds of the seats in parliament, enabling AKP to form the first single-party government since 1987 (Kaya 2015; Zürcher 2004). Furthermore, this was the first time an Islamic affiliated party enjoyed a majority position in government, and thus, for some, marked Islam’s comeback to the political arena in Turkey, although others would trace the start back to the 1980s.<sup>61</sup> The party, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was, by Turkish measures, a sunshine-story and hopes were raised that the political chaos that had haunted Turkey in previous decades would be broken.<sup>62</sup> During a five years period (2002–2007) the poverty rate in Turkey dropped, according to the World

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practiced. Instead of wanting a complete separation of state and religion, the state rather promoted their own version of Sunni-Islam, that would be compatible with the secular state. For an extended argument, see Azak 2010.

<sup>60</sup> There have been many instances when people have been sentenced to prison for defaming the memory of Atatürk, one of the latest occurred the first of November 2017. For more, see *Hürriyet Daily News* November 1, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Mustafa Şen argues in his article that the revitalization of Islam into the political arena was promoted by the post-military que government during the so called “third Republic” in the 1980s. The government tried to dismantle the political opposition of the left, and right, by emphasizing Islam as the national identity. For more info, see Korad Birkiye 2009; Şen 2010. Worth mentioning here is also Jenny B. White and her book about Islamist mobilization previous to the AKP electoral victory. For more info, see White 2005, as well as Delibas 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Since 1960 Turkey has experienced three military *coups d'état* (1960, 1971, 1980) and one military memorandum in 1997. AKPs time in power has proven to be the longest lasting period of democracy in Turkey so far. Although the period was led by Erdoğan he was not initially allowed to become prime-minister after the election due to a previous court ruling. He became prime minister in 2003. For more info, see Zürcher 2004.

Bank, from 30.3% to 8.4% (that number was down to 1.6% in 2015<sup>63</sup>) and in the 2007 election AKP outdid their previous result and got 46.6% of the votes, and 341 seats in parliament, a trend that continued in the 2011 general election as well as the 2004, 2009, and 2014 local elections (Kaya 2015). Besides maintaining their majority in parliament, the party could now consolidate its power since the former president and outspoken ally to the *laicist* army, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, often refused to sign bills promoted by the Parliament (Kaya 2015). This time political reforms were not stopped in their wake, and several democratic reforms were executed in order to meet the Copenhagen Criteria, demanded by the European Union for accession, including limiting the military's power, and allowing other languages than Turkish in local radio and television.<sup>64</sup> Although conservative, the positive results and vision of the party (Turkey would become an EU member) gave them a broad electoral base, harvesting support from conservative rural areas and liberal intellectuals alike.<sup>65</sup> Their time in power has, however, not been welcomed by everyone.

In 2010 when AKP announced to lift the veil-ban on universities in Turkey (and in 2013 in certain public institutions), it ignited a national debate over the question of what constitutes the national identity.<sup>66</sup> AKP, who had advocated to lift the ban already in 2007, framed it in a discourse of human rights and democracy, their critics, however, accused them of Islamizing the country, stating that lifting the ban would undermine the secular nature of the republic (Bottoni 2014). An unsuccessful attempt to dissolve the party, on the basis of them breaking with the constitutional amendment, was even made in 2008 (Bottoni 2014). By the end of the decade the EU-accession process had come to a halt and, either as a result of this, or just by coincidence, it coincided with a shift in AKP politics, which since then have become increasingly autocratic.<sup>67</sup> In 2012, Erdoğan declared that the goal of his government was to raise a “pious generation”, and similar to the social engineering project by the Kemalists, education was targeted as the main area (Karakaya-Stump

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<sup>63</sup> The World Bank.

<sup>64</sup> It should also be mentioned here that the process of EU accession had already begun in 1999 when EU gave Turkey candidate status. Some progress was made before, such as abolishing the death penalty, but the majority of the progress to meet EU's demands was made during the AKP government between 2003–04, for more info, see Legendijk 2012; A. S. Karlsson 2017.

<sup>65</sup> In her dissertation about liberal intellectuals in Turkey, Andrea Sophie Karlsson (2017) shows that many liberals actively supported and voted for AKP during their earlier years, partly because of the work they did to improve democratic institutions.

<sup>66</sup> The requirement that heads had to be uncovered inside public institution buildings, was accepted already in 1925 and was a part of the Kemalist project to “modernize” Turkey. In this regard they reproduced the orientalist discourse of liberating women from “the shackles of the veil”. Later on, a more relaxed attitude towards the ban was practiced, and veiled women worked in both universities and public institutions. This changed with the military's takeover in the 1980s. As a defender of the Kemalist Republic, the military forcefully acted upon the ban, leading to the dismissal of thousands of women working in the public sector. Between 1998–2002 over five thousand civil servants were forced to resign because of the ban, despite having clear records. For more info, see Bottoni 2014. For more on the debates over national identity, see Howe 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Ingmar Karlsson, former Consul General at the Swedish General Consulate in Istanbul (2001–2008), makes a reflection in his book (I. Karlsson 2015) of whether Turkey's autocratic turn, although impossible to know, could have been avoided if the EU-process had continued as planned.

2018, 59; Lüküslü 2016). By the end of the same year, a new educational system was introduced, enabling children to enroll in the religious *imam-hatip* school at secondary level, instead of waiting until high school.<sup>68</sup> Three additional religious classes were added to the curriculum, and although optional, they are in reality mandatory.<sup>69</sup> The centrally administrated exam, which, depending on the result, enables students to enter renowned private high schools and universities, now include questions of religion (i.e. Sunni Islam). The majority who fails to receive top grades on the test, are placed in state-financed high schools which, up until the new reform, were based on a secular curriculum. The new system has, in many places, made the *imam-hatip* schools the only option and the number of schools has risen by 73% in the last five years (Karakaya-Stump 2018). The recent school reform, where the evolutionary theory has been delegated to the University instead of elementary school, should be seen as an extension of the same policy.<sup>70</sup>

Other reforms – such as enforcing stronger regulation on alcohol,<sup>71</sup> coupled with subtle “Islamization”,<sup>72</sup> and the neoliberal economics of AKP (which have enabled religious NGO’s to establish themselves in the medical and educational sector) – have, according to political scientist Ayhan Kaya (2015), led to a political and social climate where religion and Islam are more prominent.<sup>73</sup> President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, also frequently utilize and make references to Islam and Muslim piety in his speeches, and the budget of Diyanet has increased significantly since AKP came to power.<sup>74</sup> The high arts and cultural sphere, seen as a bastion of Kemalist ideology, have

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<sup>68</sup> The new system is based on a 4+4+4 year model with a division of primary, secondary, and high school with the objective to enable students to enroll in the religious Imam-hatip schools earlier than high school. For more info, see Karakaya-Stump 2018. It should, however, be mentioned that the imam-hatip schools underwent major changes already in the 1970s, and the number of students enrolled in the schools tripled from 48,475 in 1971 to 148,690 in 1979. This was related to the fact that the Islamist National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi) was included in the 1970s coalition government. According to Mustafa Şen, the Imam-hatip schools have played a crucial role to spread and legitimize Turkish Islamism. For more info, see Şen 2010.

<sup>69</sup> Under the pretext that the schools are lacking recourses to offer any alternative courses, the religious courses are often imposed on the students. For more, see Karakaya-Stump 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Altuntaş 2017; Gumrukcu 2017; *Hürriyet Daily News* March 1, 2017.

<sup>71</sup> Besides the above-mentioned reforms, AKP has also tried, and failed, to enforce other laws with an Islamic conservative background such as criminalizing fidelity. For more info, see Kaya 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Subtle Islamization refers here to projects such as constructing shopping malls with neo-Ottoman or Islamic aesthetics. Utilizing “Islam” as a marketing tool towards tourism is another dimension to this. For more info, see Kaya 2015. The last decade has also seen the creation and broadcasting of several Turkish TV-dramas set to the Ottoman Empire. These are widely consumed in both Turkey and abroad, leading some scholars to regard it as a form of neo-Ottoman foreign policy. For more info, see Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi 2013; Berg 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Apart from opening up the educational and medical sector for religious NGO’s, AKP has not been interested in welfare politics, such as economic redistribution or higher taxation. Instead it has relied on municipalities and faith-based (Islamic) voluntary associations to fill the void, enabling religious organizations to establish themselves in sectors where they are historically strong. For more info, see Kaya 2015. On religion and welfare, see Kennedy and Bielefeld 2006; Heist and Cnaan 2016; Netting and O’Connor 2016; Sager and Bentele 2016; Queen 2017.

<sup>74</sup> In his speeches Erdoğan has made frequent references to Islamic faith and morality, not least concerning women whom he has encouraged to have a minimum of three children. He has also said that the natural role for women in Islam is that of being a mother, and in 2014 he said that men and women are not equal. The rhetoric of AKP and Erdoğan has on several occasions targeted the “secular” and “elitist” family whom they accuse of neglecting their duties towards the third-generation family. For more info, see Yazıcı 2012; Kaya 2015; and, *The Guardian* November

also gone through radical changes during AKP's time in power, including decreased state-funds, and the appointment of artistic directors loyal to the governments political and ideological vision.<sup>75</sup>

It should be clear by now that the understanding of what constitutes a correct approach to Islam from the government, has changed during AKP's years in power. That does not mean, however, that every religious community or belief, have enjoyed the same privileges. I will now turn to juridical concerns regarding religion, and freedom of speech in Turkey, starting with article 216.

### Article 216

In 2012, the then prime minister now president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, called for the international community to improve their efforts to protect religious values and sensibilities, proclaiming that Turkey would become the beacon the world could follow. The statement which followed the release of the American produced movie *Innocence of Muslims*<sup>76</sup>, also stated that the freedom of thought and belief ends where the freedom and belief of others start.<sup>77</sup> Later at a press conference in Ukraine, Erdoğan further stated that insulting the high values of Islam or the prophet Mohammad, could not be within the limits of freedom of speech.<sup>78</sup> The statements also coincided with an increased number of legal cases where article 216 in the Turkish penal code, was used. Steadily increasing since 2012, the article has been used in several high profile cases.<sup>79</sup>

Several laws in Turkey limit the possibility of freedom of speech and although the country does not have a clear-cut blasphemy law, article 216, “Provoking the Public to Hatred, Hostility, or Degrading”, under the fifth section, “Offenses Against Public Peace”, of the Turkish penal code could be seen as one since it regulates hate crimes, blasphemy, and religious insults.<sup>80</sup> The third and

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24, 2014. The budget of the Diyanet has increased from 771 million in 2003 to 5.4 billion Turkish Lira in 2014. For more, see Karakaya-Stump 2018.

<sup>75</sup> In her article about cultural policy under the AKP rule, Selen Korad Birkiye (2009) examines how the cultural policy has affected theaters in Turkey. Korad Birkiye observes several key changes that have affected theaters possibility to operate autonomously including; cutting state funds for private theaters, appointing directors loyal to the government, removing “edgy” plays critiquing social, political, or economic issues from the repertoire, moving culture centers from the city to the peripheral areas, and avoid government responsibility for maintaining and financing theater.

<sup>76</sup> *Innocence of Muslims* is a movie, or rather a 13-minute-long movie trailer, uploaded on YouTube in 2012. It has since then been removed but it keeps being uploaded on various sites, including YouTube. The movie was allegedly made by an Egyptian-American and in the movie the prophet Mohammad is depicted as stupid, sex-crazy, and violent. The movie sparked outrage around the world and big demonstrations were held in several Muslim majority societies. For more info, see Bradshaw 2012.

<sup>77</sup> Harrod, 2012. Erdoğan's statement occurred during a period when blasphemy and protection of religious values, were debated and discussed by the international community, amongst them the United Nations. For more info, see Otterbeck 2011.

<sup>78</sup> *Hürriyet Daily News* September 14, 2012.

<sup>79</sup> European Commission for Democracy through law.

<sup>80</sup> The European Commission for Democracy through law highlights particularly four articles that have, and could be used, to limit freedom of speech in a negative way; Article 216, 299, 301, and 314. 216 is explained above, the others

last paragraph of article 216 states that: “A person who publicly degrades the religious values of a section of the public shall be sentenced to a penalty of imprisonment for a term of six months to one year, where the act is capable of disturbing public peace”.<sup>81</sup> Articles 213, 215, 217 may also be used in a case regarding blasphemy. The European Council of Human Rights have leveled critique for the way article 216 is formulated, stating that it should “not be applied to punish blasphemy, but [be] limited to cases of religious insults that intentionally and severely disturbs public order and calls for public violence.”<sup>82</sup> As we will see, that critique is yet to be accommodated. One case where the paragraph was used received a lot of media attention: the case against Fazıl Say.

In 2012, the Turkish world-renowned pianist and composer Fazıl Say, tweeted<sup>83</sup> lines attributed to the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Persian poet Omar Khayyam, in which religious hypocrisy is targeted (Şirin 2014). Say, a vocal critic of the AKP government, was brought to court, and sentenced, under charges of blasphemy stating that Say had insulted the values held sacred by *religion* (Şirin 2014). That the values of a *religion*, rather than the values of its practitioners, were found to be the victim of Say’s slandering is, according to the human rights scholar Kerem Altıparmak, important to note since the former does not enjoy any protection under human rights, whereas the latter does.<sup>84</sup> The court initially sentenced him to ten months in prison, Say’s lawyer, Meltem Akyol, appealed the sentence. In the 2013 retrial, Sey was once again sentenced to prison but due to his clean record, he would avoid imprisonment under the prerequisite that he did not commit any crime the coming two years. Sey appealed once more and finally, the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, the Supreme Court in Turkey acquitted Sey of the charges by a majority vote, stating that his tweets should be regarded as freedom of thought and expression.<sup>85</sup> Another case where article 216 have been mobilized was against a young student in the city of Eskişehir. During the May Day demonstration in 2014, the convicted student had, inspired by the hardcore punk band *The Exploited*, graffitied “Fuck your religion” on walls in the city. The prosecutors accused the defendant of “humiliating all religious values of a pious country”, stating that the graffiti could “disrupt public peace” and the court

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criminalize “Insulting the President of the Republic” (299), “Degrading Turkish Nation, State of Turkish Republic, the Organs and Institutions of the State” (301), and “armed organization” (314). For more info, see *European Commission for Democracy through law*. It should also be mentioned that instead of having a separate law regarding blasphemy, a common trend has been to include it under laws controlling hate-speech. For more info, see Otterbeck 2011.

<sup>81</sup> European Commission for Democracy through law.

<sup>82</sup> European Commission for Democracy through law.

<sup>83</sup> A “tweet” is a short message on the micro-blog Twitter consisting of 140 character (although they are currently trying out the option of writing 280 character messages).

<sup>84</sup> Şirin 2014, 77–78. It should be mentioned here that in 2008 the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution were religion *de facto* enjoyed protection. This resolution was accepted in the UN in 2010 during the 65<sup>th</sup> meeting of the general assembly. 76 delegates voted in favor of the resolution, 67 against, and 40 delegates passed on voting on the bill. In 2011, following an extended discussion on freedom of speech, freedom of consciousness, and blasphemy - jurists from the HRC vetoed the resolution. For more info, see Otterbeck 2011; United Nations.

<sup>85</sup> Şirin 2014; *Hürriyet Daily News* September 20, 2013; *Hürriyet Daily News* September 7, 2016.

sentenced the student to five months suspended prison sentence (Saymaz 2014). Similarly, the Armenian writer Sevan Nişanyan, was sentenced to thirteen months in prison for defending the movie, “Innocence of Muslims”, as freedom of speech (Watson & Tuysuz 2013).

Although only the final example led to imprisonment, the cases above illustrate the derailing status of freedom of speech and expression in contemporary Turkey. For years, human right organizations and democratic institutions, have produced alarming reports over the declining rate of democracy in Turkey.<sup>86</sup> In EIU’s (Economist Intelligence Units) Democracy Index, Turkey has steadily declined since 2012, ending up with 4.88/10 in 2017.<sup>87</sup> To make matters even worse, Turkey remained in a state of emergency since the failed coup attempt the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2016, allegedly orchestrated by AKP’s previous ally, *Fethullah Gülen* and the *hizmet* or *gülen* movement<sup>88</sup>, until the recent presidential election. Erdoğan won the 2018 election and due to the new constitution, the powers granted to the president are in many regards similar to the ones during the state of emergency.

After the coup-attempt the government initiated an extensive purge, initially targeting military personnel and civil servants but then mechanistically applied to anyone having any sort of connection to the *hizmet* movement, leading to over tens of thousands of arrests and over a hundred thousand detained and dismissed.<sup>89</sup> Turkey is, according to the international organization *Committee to Protect Journalist*, the country that jails the most journalists in the world (Beiser 2017).

### *Alevism, Religious Minorities, and Freedom from Religion*

When it comes to providing religious services and rights for Turkish minority groups, legislation leaves much to be desired. Özgür Heval Çınar and Mine Yıldırım observe that “Policy in the field of religion is formulated on the assumption that 99 per cent of the population is Muslim while the rest are non-Muslims who enjoy special protection under the Lausanne Treaty”, furthermore “...there is tremendous diversity within the Muslim community which is not officially recognized”, and “individuals who are non-believers are rarely taken into account in policies concerning religion

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<sup>86</sup> See for example, *Amnesty International Report 2017/2018*; *Freedomhouse 2017*; *The European Commission for Democracy through law*.

<sup>87</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index.

<sup>88</sup> The *hizmet* or *gülen* movement is an Islamic revivalist movement led by its founder Fethullah Gülen (1941–). Founded in Turkey the movement is now well established internationally with schools and projects in North America, the Balkans, and Central Asia. Supporters of the movement claims that it is advocating a modern version of Islam compatible with human rights and democracy, whereas its critics in Turkey are accusing the movement for creating a parallel society. For more info, see Balci and Miller 2012; Yavuz 2013; Marty 2015; Yavuz and Balci 2018.

<sup>89</sup> According to the journalist-run site “Turkey Purge” there have been 170,371 people dismissed, 141,558 people detained, and 80,147 people detained as of 22 of July 2018. Furthermore, over 3,000 schools, dormitories and universities have been shut down, 6,000 academics have lost their jobs, 4,000 judges and persecutors have been dismissed and 189 media outlets have shut down. For more info, see [www.turkeypurge.com](http://www.turkeypurge.com).

and religious freedom” (Çınar and Yıldırım 2014, 3). One of the communities that have suffered from these policies is the Alevi-community.

Numbers differ but the common estimation is that approximately 15-25% of Turkey's 80 million population is Alevi (Tekdemir 2018). Alevism, at times used interchangeably with Bektashi Sufism, pays additional attention to Ali and the twelve Imams and Alevis do not recognize the five pillars of Islam, and they have non-gender segregated spaces for prayer. These unorthodox practices have historically, and contemporary, made Alevis easy targets for the polemics of Sunni-orthodoxy, who brands them as heretics. During the Ottoman Empire Alevis faced major persecution under Yavuz Selim who reigned between 1512–1520 (Karakaya-Stump 2018). Although the situation has improved slightly under AKP (they are now allowed to register as cultural associations) Alevis places of worship, so-called *cemevi* houses, are still not acknowledged by the state or financed through the Diyanet. Diyanet treats Alevism as a part of Sunni-Islam, denying any special status to it.<sup>90</sup> Part of the state's ambivalent dealing with the Alevi community could be explained by the fact that many Alevis do not primarily consider Alevism a religious identity, but rather a cultural one.<sup>91</sup> With that being said, Alevis still face major discrimination in Turkey. Mosques are deliberately built in Alevi villages and requests to change the identity box on the ID-card, from “Islam” to “Alevi”, are repeatedly shut down under the pretext that they are part of “Sunni-Islam” (Yıldırım 2014; Şirin 2014). Furthermore, during the Gezi-park protests in 2014, AKP and Erdoğan said, on numerous occasions, that it was an orchestrated “Alevi-revolt” triggering public violence and resentment towards Alevi-communities (Karakaya-Stump 2018).

Similar to Alevis, atheists and non-believers do not enjoy any constitutional protection and, as Tolga Şirin notes: “especially in recent years, the limits of tolerance for critiques towards Islam [...] have been enormously narrowed”, and, “... the religion of Islam is virtually protected in Turkey” (Şirin 2014, 76). This was showcased in the previous examples but what should be added to the case of Fazıl Say is that one of the nine tweets he was persecuted for simply stated that he was proud to be an atheist (Şirin 2014). Other religious minorities and communities face similar discrimination, and especially the Christian communities are perceived as “fifth columns” that try to undermine the national unity.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Although the AKP government changed the previous restriction, limiting the establishment of places of worship to mosques, to the more inclusive “place of worship”, the practice still remains the same and many religious communities are not included in the new restriction, including the Alevi *cemevi* houses. For more, see Yıldırım 2014.

<sup>91</sup> For a discussion of Alevi identity, see Olsson, Özdalga, and Raudvere 1998; Markussen 2005, 2012; Aydın 2018; Tekdemir 2018.

<sup>92</sup> During the war of independence, religious minorities were perceived as enemies of the emerging republic and efforts were made to create a homogenous (i.e. Sunni) population after the foundation of the republic. As a showcase, during the First World War a fifth of the population living in what would become Turkey, was Christian. Due to massacres, genocide, and forced migration, only 100,000 Christians are estimated to live in Turkey today. Religious minorities are still not allowed to educate their own religious leaders and to register property is still

## Summary

The modern Republic of Turkey was founded as a secular republic and efforts were made to break with the Ottoman past through, among others, the educational system. The new citizen was supposed to be, modern, western, and secular and to this day these ideals are, at least for some, part of the national identity. AKP and its pious conservatism have challenged that identity, and the Turkish population is divided over concerns regarding the proper place for religion in the country. Although the party initially brought democratic change in the country and was supported by liberal intellectuals, the last decade has seen an increased Islamization in both the social and political sphere. The regime has become increasingly autocratic and the space for freedom of speech and thought are at alarming levels under the new presidential system. Although religion has been increasingly important and visible in the public and social sphere, it is confined to one type of religion, Sunni-Islam. Alevism and other religious minorities still struggle to claim their basic rights, and freedom from religion is still not guaranteed. However, Turkey is not as monitored as Iran or Saudi Arabia, and there still exists a certain amount of freedom of expression regarding religion in the cultural products such as, novels, films, comics, and music. But efforts are made to infringe these areas as well.<sup>93</sup> The recent developments in the Turkish context have, as we will see in the next chapter, implications for how the members of the Turkish black metal scene, act, say, and self-identify.

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difficult. This can partly be explained by the government's ambition to hinder, from state perspective, heterodox Islamic groups to organize. For more info, see Cagaptay 2004; A. S. Karlsson 2011.

<sup>93</sup> The famous Turkish singer Zuhale Olcay was in March 2018 sentenced to ten months imprisonment for insulting the president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at a concert in 2016. For more info, see *Reuters* March 22, 2018

# Chapter Five

## Spreading VX-Gas over Kaaba: Islamic Semiotics in Turkish Black Metal

None of the lyrics of Turkish black metal bands that I came to know include a direct desecration of Islamic symbols. Blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammad, the Holy Koran, and God seems to be a taboo. At least publicly, this boundary has not been challenged. – Pierre Hecker 2012, 139.

Scorched Mohammad's dying in front of convicted God, inverted cross is burning in the ass of Jehova. – "Mazochistic Abuse to the Nailed Holy Ones" from Impuration – *Sanctities We Raped* (2012) Ars Funeris Records.

What is obvious from the two quotes above is that something has happened with the Turkish black metal scene's cultural production. After finding a CD with similar expressions as Impuration's above in an underground record store in Istanbul, while at the same time remembering Hecker's findings, I started to wonder. How, and when did these public types of explicit references to Islam surface? How widespread are they? Is every reference to Islam done in a demeaning manner or is it possible to find positive references to it as well, similar to the "white metal" bands of America and Europe?<sup>94</sup> Could it be that Hecker, despite his great effort, could not get hold of some CDs or demos, and therefore missed earlier references? I have partly answered these questions earlier (Mattsson 2015, 2016; Otterbeck, Mattsson, and Pastene 2018), but below follows my greatest effort so far in mapping the Turkish black metal scenes' cultural production. After an introduction of my theoretical framework, this chapter will showcase and analyze parts of the Turkish black metal scene's cultural production, and more specifically, the semiotic resources or expressions utilized within it. The following chapter will add a personal dimension to these expressions by listening to the scene itself and their motives behind their music.

### It's not just Noise – Black Metal Music and Social Semiotics

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<sup>94</sup> White metal, also known as Christian metal, is a sub-genre of metal music that visually and musically is like any other metal band. Lyrically, however, the bands promote a Christian message and an evangelistic agenda. Famous bands within the genre are Strider, Messiah Prophet, Saint, and Leviticus. For more on white metal, see M. Moberg 2009, 2013.

Before I start to present parts of my material, it is important to address the question: How is one to study music, or rather, how is one to study the combination of the sounds, images, and lyrics of (black metal) music? Evidently, there are many possible answers (Mitchell 2011; Pink 2012; Krippendorff 2018), here I would like to draw attention to a few concepts taken from the field of semiotic studies: connotation, semiotic resource, and multimodality.

In *Introducing Social Semiotics* (2005, 37ff), Theo van Leeuwen discusses Roland Barthes usage of the terms *denotation* and *connotation*. Barthes, who was the first to apply these terms outside of linguistics, applied them to his analyzes of photographic images. Images, like languages he said, have two layers of meaning. The layer of denotation is the layer that tells us who or what is represented in the picture. The layer of connotation is the one that communicates ideas and values through *what* is represented in the picture and in *what way* it is represented. The terminology is also sensitive to context and acknowledges that different statements, or pictures, carry different meanings in different context. That local circumstance in some way determines how we perceive cultural acts, and that these in turn can be preceded by active choices in, for instance, picture composition, is important to note. Furthermore, the picture utilized in a composition is an example of a *semiotic resource*. Semiotic resource is a central concept in the field of social semiotics and, according to Leeuwen, it can be defined broadly as “the actions and artifacts we use to communicate” (Van Leeuwen 2005, 3). A semiotic resource also carries a *meaning potential* based on how the resource has been used in the past and the needs and interests of the perceiver. Needless to say, different perceivers can have different needs and thus the semiotic resource can have different meanings. But that does not mean that the semiotic resource is like a blank page, it is governed by *semiotic regimes* – that is, how a semiotic resource is utilized in a specific context. Similar to Barthes terms, a semiotic resource, say a Church, is governed by semiotic regimes which in different context carry different meanings which in turn, depending on how the semiotic resource is utilized, can communicate different messages.

Furthermore, a semiotic resource can be communicated through different mediums or *modes*, for example images, music, text, and gestures, all of which help to shape and create meaning. Black metal music with its interplay of text, audio, and visual aesthetics is by default a *multimodal* expression and depending on which semiotic resources are utilized and how these are composed, it is not only possible to analyze black metal, but also to understand why, in my opinion, it is such a powerful mean of communication.

The forthcoming analyses have been preceded by a careful reading of and listening to 95 albums, demos, and EPs from Turkey. As already mentioned, I have tried to collect and analyze as much material as possible produced by the Turkish black metal-scene up to this day. The material,

therefore, stretches from 1992–2018 and, although not complete, this is as close to a full discography of Turkish black metal I could get. Once collected, I listened to the recordings, read the lyrics, looked through the booklets, and thereafter I categorized them according to a few themes to identify different semiotic resources relating to religion, Islam, and Turkish society. The categories are:

- A) *Explicit references to Islam or Muslims.* This category includes obvious words or images that associate to Islam such as Mohammad, minaret, mosque, Quran, imam, hajj, Mecca, Medina, Allah, Kaaba but also Arabic words such as dajjal, djinn, and other words or images connecting to an Islamic or Turkish cultural context rather than the religion itself, such as Ottoman, Turk, or sultan.
- B) *General references to religion(s) and specific references to other religions.* This category includes more general terms or images associated with religion, but especially the other Abrahamic faiths, such as God(s), Jesus, church, temple, sanctities, believers, angels, demons, soul, faith, and the like.
- C) *Explicit references to sex or sexual violence.* This category could contain words such as whores, ejaculate, rape, sodomize, fist-fuck, fuck, and so on or sexualized images or sounds.
- D) *Explicit references to Satanism and “devil-worship”.* Words or images in this category mainly include statements sympathetic of hell, Satan, devil, left-hand path, Lucifer.
- E) *Explicit references against political authority.* Here I include words such as government and ruler, as well as Turkish references like AKP, Atatürk, or images or sounds expressing the same.
- F) *References to Islam or Muslim culture in sounds.* Examples of this could be audio samples of the adhan (call to prayers), Quran-recitation, suras, shouts of Allahu akbar, or preaching in Arabic, but also instruments associated with the Middle East, or a Turkish context as well as scales with an “oriental feeling”.

Needless to say, lyrics and artworks are usually not easily categorized. For instance, if references to category A were found, it would also be included as a reference to category B since it deals with explicit reference to religion. This might seem a bit confusing, but my aim is to show the frequency of these *explicit* references and not construct a perfect categorical system with separate boxes. Similarly, *implicit* references that might have a religious undertone are not included since they are

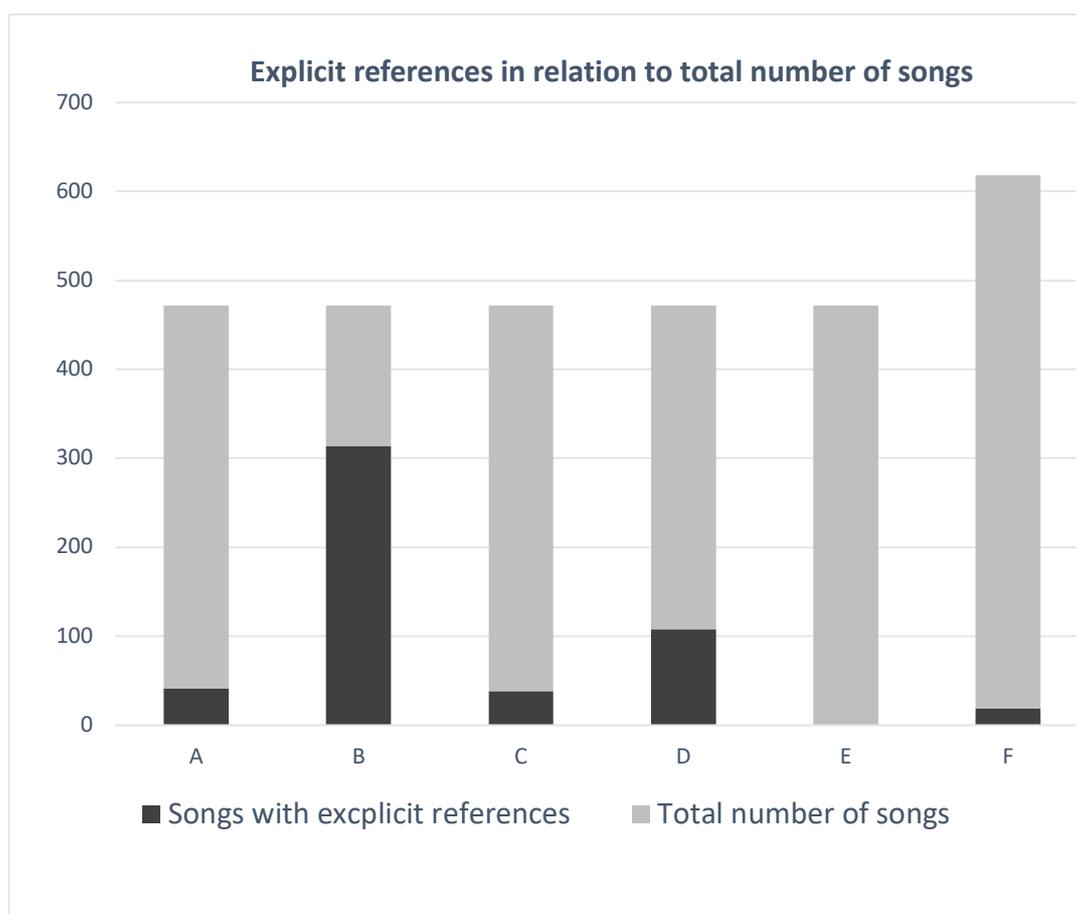
not as easily deciphered and therefore not as effective in conveying a message. Let me illustrate with two examples:

MUSLIMS, CHRISTS, JEWS, WERE NAILED TO THE SULPHUR WALLS

The above example is taken from the song “Profaneblast of Godwhipper” by the Turkish band Impuration (2012). Besides lashing out against all Abrahamic faiths, previously in the song, references are also made to category D “in honour of lucifer” [sic.] and C “profanes waited to volley the asshole of God”. The song would, therefore, end up in category A, D, and C. The second example is taken from the song “Eternal of Nothingness” by another Turkish band, Black Omen (2012).

I'M HURLING IN INFINITY TO UNCERTAINTY I'M THE ONE  
SWALLOWED BY NOTHINGNESS I'M EVERLASTING AND ETERNAL

Although the song could be said to have religious references “I’m the one” and “eternal”, these are, in comparison, implicit and therefore not included in the different categories since I am looking at the *explicit* references. As previously stated not all of the CDs, demos, or EPs I got hold off included lyrics in a booklet, were available online, or given to me. Category A, B, C, D, and E are therefore in relation to the 472 songs where I had access to lyrics. Category F, which examines audio, is based on 618 songs. Below follows a graph illustrating the frequency.



Several things are worth noting here. First of all, explicit references to Islam (category A), does now have a presence amongst the material (albeit a small one 41/472 songs) and therefore mark a new era in Turkish black metal. The first example of when an explicit Islamic semiotic resource was utilized in lyrics is the song “Storm of the Ancient Wrath” from the album *Infernal Hordes Of The Ancient Times* (2003) by the band The Sarcophagus. The lyrics include the lines “blasphemous Anatolian graves are ready for the war, and waiting for to see the mosques in holocaust and blind the eyes with their smoke”. The majority (28/41) of the references to Islam are found between the years 2012–2017, with a steady increase from 2015. This raises the question as to *why*, which will be addressed in the following chapter. For now, it suffices to notice how small the phenomenon is.

Another point worth noting is that explicit references to *religion* as a subject, and more specific, religious critique or anti-religious sentiments, are not prominent all the time. 314 out of 472 songs had clear references to religion but some of them are not even critical towards religion, but rather share a positive understanding of it. Consider for example the following extract from Adutym’s song “Misconception and Pain” from the demo *False Was the Promises of Darkness* (2005):

NO MERCY FOR ARROGANCE AND BLASPHEMY

BLIND AND DEAF HUMAN KIND DESERVED THIS  
TO LATE FOR REGRET, FLAME HAS NO MERCY FOR SINS

THOSE WERE THE COMMITMENTS  
WE GOT CARRIED AWAY WITH LUST  
DENIAL IS EASIER THAN BELIEF  
NOW DARKNESS OVERCAME LIGHT

Although explicit references to religion, such as sin and blasphemy, are present, these are not used in a context of critiquing religion, but rather to critique non-believers and sinners.<sup>95</sup> However, due to the sonic characteristics of black metal, it is still possible that the band might be associated with religious deviance (see later in this chapter), but at least lyrically this is not the case. Furthermore, references to Satanism and devil-worship (category D), often a cornerstone of black metal's meta-narrative, are only prominent in 108 of 472 songs, the majority of these are produced within the last thirteen years.<sup>96</sup>

The coming section will showcase and analyze four lyrical, four visual, and one audial example, where explicit Islamic semiotics have been used in an anti-Islamic way. The examples are given because of their explicit nature.<sup>97</sup>

## Lyrics

“Medina” from Zifir – *Kingdom of Nothingness* (2017)

I AM THE DEVIL,  
COME AND STONE ME,  
PAY MONEY TO THE ARAB,  
COME AND STONE ME,  
REVOLVE AROUND A STONE,

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<sup>95</sup> In the Aduty material I have managed to get hold on a similar attitude of divine punishment is present. They do, in other words, not explicitly critique or ridicule religion and God which otherwise is common in black metal. Other examples of “pro-religious” lyrics are found in “The Seal Appeared in Your Brow” from Exile – *Exile is Eternal* (2007); “Crescent” from Mytes Gradel - *Burning Inside The Fate Globe* (2004); “Filthy and Fallen World” from Groza – *Life After Life* (2005); as well as Gargoyles full album *March of Heroes* (2006).

<sup>96</sup> 91 of 108 songs were produced between 2005–2018 and 46 of these were produced between 2015–2017.

<sup>97</sup> Other examples with explicit references to Islam are, “Ölü Orman” from Ohol Yeg – *Ölü Orman* (2017) and, “A Cold Winter for the Civilizations, from Ohol Yeg – *Ohol* (2015); “Total Eradication” from Death Ritual – *Usurper* (2017); “Pillars of Dismay” from Persecutory – *Towards the Ultimate Extinction* (2017); “Antiscene 666” from Hellsodomy – *Chaostorm* (2016) and “Masochistic Molestation” from Hellsodomy – *Masochistic Molestation* (2014); Sarinvomit full EP *Declaring the Supreme Profanity* (2013); “Storm of the Ancient Wrath” from The Sarcophagus - *Infernal Hordes Of The Ancient Times* (2003); the full EP *Sanctities We Raped* (2012) by Impuration; “Kafir/Heathen” from Zifir – *Split* (2012); “Death Fucking War” from Deggial – *Confronted with Deggial's Wrath* (2013); “Khatarsis in Ashes” and “Spawn of Devastating Chaos” from Nihil Kaos – *Noxekult* (2015) to name a few. Other examples worth mentioning are “Total Disgust” from Hellsodomy – *Chaostorm* (2016) which include references to “*hordes of bearded swines, feeding their shit to the masses*”, which read in the light of other lyrics by the band, refer to religious preachers. It did however not make the list of explicit references.

FIND ALLAH,  
ONCE YOU GET OUT OF THERE,  
COME AND STONE ME,  
HEAT, DIRT, SWEAT AND SHIT,  
GET CLOSER TO ALLAH,  
THEN COME AND FIND ME,  
NO MATTER HOW YOU TIRE YOUR ARM  
THE STONE YOU THROW WILL NOT TOUCH ME,  
NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU BEG,  
ALLAH WILL NOT SEE YOU

The first example is the song “Medina” by the band Zifir (pitch black in Turkish) and as can be seen, already in the title an Islamic semiotic resource is featured. Following Mecca, Medina is usually considered the second most holy city in Islam and is the place where, according to Muslim historiography, the prophet Muhammad’s sought refuge after he was forced to leave Mecca. The city, therefore, occupies a special place among many Muslims and evokes feelings of respect and reverence (Hammoudi 2006). Entry to Mecca and Medina are also strictly limited to Muslims, emphasizing the religious identity of the city. Although the title refers to the city, the song is actually about and describes the ritual act of stoning the devil at Mina (a neighborhood east of Mecca).

The act, which is part of the obligatory *hajj* (pilgrimage) commemorates Ibrahim’s, Hajar’s, and Ismael’s rejection of Shaytan (Satan) and is performed by stoning three pillars representing the temptation to disobey God (Hammoudi 2006). The hajjis (a pilgrim performs *hajj* and becomes a *hajj* [masc.] or *hajja* [fem.] when rituals are over), then precede to shave their heads, symbolizing ritual cleanness (also questioned in the song by emphasizing the “heat, dirt, sweat and shit”)(Hammoudi 2006). The significance of the act of stoning the devil should therefore not be underestimated and, as in this case, positioning the narrator as the Devil and rendering their efforts useless, is edgy, to say the least. The economic aspects of pilgrimage are also critiqued “pay money to the Arab” (while at the same time possibly masking a racist attitude towards Arabs), which alters the purpose of the pilgrimage to one of economy, rather than devotion. The title of the song, in addition to the narrative and the inclusion of the word Allah, is easy to decipher for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, although the theological significance of it requires some previous knowledge of Islamic history. The song also declares the hajjis’ efforts to stone the devil useless and, what should ideally constitute a high point in their religious life, are neglected by Allah. According to the band the song should be seen as part one of two, which we will turn to now.

“769” from Zifir – *Kingdom of Nothingness* (2017)

THOSE THAT CAME TO STONE ME,  
I HAD THEM TRAMPLING ON EACH OTHER,  
I SHOWED THEM THEIR VERY SELVES IN MY OWN IMAGE,

I RELEASED FIRE INTO THOSE WHO CAME TO BECOME CLOSER TO THEIR GOD,  
AND THEY FLOWED BEFORE MY EYES TRAMPLING ON EACH OTHER,  
THEY PAID THE PRICE OF STONING ME,

WITH THE BLOOD SQUIRTING FROM THEIR CRAMMED BODIES,  
I BUILT A ROAD WINDING TO HELL OUT OF THEIR DEAD BODIES,

THE REEK CAME OUT OF THEIR IDEAS, NOT THEIR DEAD BODIES,  
AND THEY UNDERSTOOD THIS NO MATTER HOW HARD IT WAS.  
THE WEAKLINGS RUNNING AFTER LIGHT MEETING WITH DARKNESS,  
I BLINDED THEM WITH THE STONES THEY THREW TO BE FAVORED BY GOD,  
EVERY STONE THROWN AT ME DIMINISHED A RAY OF LIGHT IN THEIR EYES,  
THEY DIED AWAY ON THE DARK ROAD LEADING TO ME,  
THEIR DESIRE FOR HEAVEN TURNING INTO ASHES IN THE FLAMES OF HELL

The first thing worth noticing is the title. 769 might seem to not carry a religious meaning at all, but it refers to a tragic incident during the 2015 *hajj* when, due to a stampede, 769 pilgrims were trampled to death and 934 were wounded (Dearden, 2015). Of course, in order to make the connection between the number and religion, one is required to know of the incident at hand and it can therefore not be said to be an overt explicit reference like those mentioned above, but rather a covert explicit reference. In a conversation with the band, however, I learned that they were hoping that 769 would evolve from a personal association of hatred towards Islam to a general one, in other words, “create” a new overt semiotic resource. Their ambitions aside, if the title leaves us ambiguous about the meaning of the song, the lyrics does not. Read together with the previous song on the album (“Mina”), the narrative has evolved from a fruitless attempt to stone the Devil, to suffer terrible consequences for trying to do so. Despite the inconsistencies that the stones now hit (paid the price of stoning me), rather than missed (not touch me), the message of the narrative is still clear. The *hajjis*’ attempt to come closer to Allah, led to their own demise. Another line worth noticing is “the reek came out of their ideas, not their dead bodies”, which attack, at a minimum the *hajjis*’ idea of “stoning the Devil”, at most the whole underlying concept of Islam and the rituals associated with it. Now to another example.

“Pierce Through the Light” from Ohol Yeg – *Ölü Orman*<sup>98</sup> (2017)

PENETRATE THE SOURCE  
OF THE HUMAN EMOTIONS  
LET THE LIGHT WITHER  
WITH THE WARDEN OF LIFE

HALLUCINATES THE SHEPHERD  
OF THE HEAVEN’S MIND-RAPED FLOCK  
SPILT ARE THE LIES AMONG  
THE WORTHLESS CROWD

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<sup>98</sup> *Ölü Orman* is Turkish and means “Dead Forest” in English.

PRAYERS TO ERLIK KHAN  
FOR THE POWER  
TO BURY ISLAM  
TO BURY RELIGIONS  
TO DEMOLISH THE CRESCENTS  
AND TO BURY MORALS  
DEEP TO THE UNDERGROUND!

DARKNESS ABSORBS THE LUSTER  
AND THE CRAVEN FOLLOWERS OF THE LIGHT  
PALLID THORNS OF THE CROSS  
BURNED THE STARS

PIERCE THROUGH THE LIGHT  
AND THROUGH THOSE WHO LACK NATURE  
PIERCE, MY SPEAR  
PIERCE WHO PRAISES THE PRUDISH GOD

A GRAND FEAST  
TO CAST A SHADOW, OVER THE SUN

BLED WITH DARKNESS  
DWELLED WITHIN  
WITHOUT A GLEAM

LORD OF THE UNDERWORLD  
DEAD FOR CENTURIES  
AN UNHOLY CAVE

BLACK AND COLD  
GOD'S OBLIVIOUS GAZE  
CREATED THE SHADOW  
AND THE LIGHT FADED AWAY  
PIERCED AND FORGOTTEN

The most prominent references to Islam are of course the word for the religion itself. The song states that Islam, together with other religious beliefs, shall be buried and the Islamic crescent shall be demolished. Although Islam is particularly targeted the song is not solely anti-Islamic, but rather anti-religious.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, believers are portrayed as brainwashed (“heaven’s mind-raped flock”), that follow a prude God whose morals should be buried underground. The phrase “prayers to Erlik Khan” is interesting because it communicates some sort of pagan belief rooted in a Turkish context as Erlik Khan is the God of death in Turkic and Mongolian belief.<sup>100</sup> In my material, however, I found pagan references to be uncommon.<sup>101</sup> The last lyrical example is particularly interesting due to its explicit and extreme content.

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<sup>99</sup> Other bands that attack all religions are for example Persecutory, Hatevömit, Impuration Death Ritual.

<sup>100</sup> Büchner and Doerfer 2012.

<sup>101</sup> Two bands that utilize shamanic references are Pagan in their song “Shamanic Flames” from *Heathen Upheaval* (1998) and Sirannon in their song “Magna Mater” from *Semper Caliga* (2011).

“Spreading VX Gas Over Kaaba” from Sarinvomit – *Baphopanzers of the Demonical Brigade* (2015)

INFINITE AEON BEGAN FOR HELLISH NUCLEAR DOMINANCE  
PANDEMONIUM ORDERED TO DEVASTATE THE HOLINESS  
GOETIC DEMONS GATHERED, TUBES OF VX GAS WERE FILLED  
DURING THE CIRCUMAMBULATION KAABA WAS ENCIRCLED

PLEASURES OF MASSACRE, ESCAPE OF WORSHIPPERS  
SHAMEFUL RELIGIOUS SUPPLICATION  
DROWNED IN THEIR VOMIT WHILE THEY'RE PRAYING  
PARAMOUNT VIEWS OF DEPRAVATION  
ISLAMIC SCRIPTURES WERE TOTALLY DESTROYED  
BY THE SACRILEGIOUS ABHORRENCE

EJACULATION OF GOATLORD WHO STANDS ON DEAD PROPHETS  
HADJIS ARE AGONIZING UNDER THE RADIOACTIVE MASS

SUFFERING GABRIEL ARE SUCKING IMPURIFIED BLOOD  
OF THE DEVIL-STONERS IN MINA  
EMBLAZONED GOATS ARE INSEMINATING THEIR WIFES  
WITH SEMEN MIXED WITH VX GAS  
GENOCIDE WEAPONS CREATED MIASMATIC BLACK SKY  
END OF FUCKING SANCTIFIED LIVES

TEMPESTUOUS LETHAL GAS FOR THE VICTORY OF SLAUGHTER RITES  
PHENOMENAL DEVASTATION WAR AGAINST THE HUMAN KIND

CELEBRATION OF CHEMICAL ARMAMENT AGAINST THE DEVOTEES  
BEFOULED DIVINE BODIES EXPLODED AND SPILLED OUT AROUND  
THOSE WHO FLED TO SHELTERS WERE IMPALED ON POLES IN HEAT  
SPREADING VX GAS OVER KAABA, LUST OF MASS POISONING

SPREADING VX GAS OVER FUCKING KAABA  
FINALLY COMING OF RADIATIONAL WHIRLWINDS  
SPREADING VX GAS OVER FUCKING KAABA  
COLLAPSING OF FUCKING MUSLIM EMPIRE

In my opinion, this is the most explicit and extreme example of how Islamic semiotic resources are utilized to convey an anti-Islamic message, to date. Starting with the title, it already makes a clear reference to the Islamic faith. Kaaba, which importance is mentioned above, is according to the title covered by deadly nerve-gas (VX gas). The lyrics are a detailed description of how demons, demon-goats, and Baphomet<sup>102</sup>, surround the Kaaba during the *hajj* and proceed to, kill, and slaughter *hajjis*. Women are raped and inseminated with VX-gas and goat-semen, the ones who try to escape perish in the fire. Furthermore, the archangel Gabriel (who according to Muslim tradition was the first to inform Mohammad about his prophethood), is suffering and has in a wicked turn started to suck the “impurified-blood” of the devil-stoners. Islamic scriptures are destroyed, ejaculating and victorious goat lords are standing on dead prophets, and the song ends by

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<sup>102</sup> Baphomet is a common reference in black metal. Synonymous with Satan, his goat-human body is a well-known symbol in popular-culture Satanism (Lewis 2001).

proclaiming that the Muslim empire is destroyed. The message of the song could not be clearer. Islam is to be destroyed.

As showed in the examples above, most Islamic semiotic resources that are utilized in the lyrics – like Muhammad, Kaaba, Gabriel, and *hajjis* – are of central importance for many Muslims. Furthermore, these particular semiotic resources are, except for perhaps *hajjis*, widely known, rendering it easy to decipher for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It should be mentioned that not every song utilizing explicit references to Islam revolve around the pilgrimage. In other lyrics Muslims, Allah, or Muhammad, are targeted. Many lyrics lack such a clear scenic scenario, as the pilgrimage, but rather rely on explicit references and clearly hateful, murderous, and humiliating contexts in order to convey a message. One tendency is that “the message” of Islam is targeted, Imams and bearded preachers’ tongues are cut out and ideas, morals, and scriptures are destroyed. It is hard to understand the message as anything else than one of hatred towards religion, and especially Islam. However, due to the sonic characteristics of black metal it is almost impossible to understand what they say without the aid of printed lyrics, making the anti-religious elements easy to hide (if wanted to). The artworks, on the other hand, are not so easily hidden and can, as will be shown below, be quite harsh.

### Artworks

As with lyrics, explicit visual references to Islam in cover art and booklets are rare. Only 8 out of 95 had explicit references from category A.<sup>103</sup> Category B, usually in combination with category D, was more common (20 out of 95).<sup>104</sup> But a majority (67 of 95) of the covers were more ambiguous and did not have explicit references to religion. Instead, they incorporated other aspects of the black metal meta-narrative, such as nature scenery, skulls, or a “dark ominous feeling”.<sup>105</sup> The overt explicit references to Islam that I found in some of the artworks, are balanced by a more covert approach when advertising shows and performing on stage. To this end, none of the posters I

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<sup>103</sup> Of these, four are featured below and will be discussed separately. Other examples are Hatevömits album *Necrövömit* (2015) Underground Resistance that includes drawings of slaughtered Muslims and Christians. Ravenwoods album *Enfeebling the Throne* (2011) Code666 records, includes a picture of two naked men kneeling in the *sujud* position. The first version of the cover to Sarinvomit’s *Malignant Thermonuclear Supremacy* (2018) Deathrune records, includes a slaughtered Imam holding a Quran hanging upside down by a monster. Gargoyle (2006) mentioned before, will be discussed separately. Another album cover worth some attention is Ohol Yeg’s debut EP *Ohol* (2015). The cover is a black and white photo depicting a woman on her knees taking up the left part of the cover, while the bands logo is visible on the upper right corner. The woman in the photograph is Farkhunda Malikzada, a 27-year-old Afghan woman who were murdered by a mob in Khabul after being wrongly accused of burning a Quran. The murder made national and international headlines and in its wake women’s situation in Afghanistan and the legal system of the country became of national and international interest. In an interview, the band explained to me that the murdered symbolized Islam and a typical Muslim behavior. For more on the case, see Rubin 2015.

<sup>104</sup> See for example Ehrimen (1996); Sagaris (2006); Deggial (2010); Godslaying Hellblast (2011); Cosmic Funeral (2015); Persecutory (2016); Zifir (2017).

<sup>105</sup> See for example Gravehome (2004); Episode 13 (2008); Sirannon (2011); Black Omen (2012); Engulfed (2017).

found that were used to advertise concerts, utilized explicit references to Islam, neither did any backdrops or artifact on stage (neither in Turkey nor abroad). The posters did, however, include other references to religion and since the band logos (an important aspect of black metal aesthetics), were included on the posters and on stage, it created an exciting tension between overt and covert which will be discussed in the next chapter. Below follows four visual examples when Islamic semiotic resources were utilized in an anti-Islamic way.



*Pictavian Kara Metal*. Armée de la Mort Records, 2011. Artwork by Sickness 666.

The cover above is the first example I have found that utilizes references to Islam in order to attack it.<sup>106</sup> It is from the Turkish band Godslaying Hellblast and their split record with the French band

<sup>106</sup> Nationalist or pro-Islamic references in artworks or booklets are rather rare in the material I found. There are, however, three examples worth highlighting here: Gargoyle's *March of the Heroes* (2006), Mytes Gradel's *Second Era*

Manzer called *Pictavian*<sup>107</sup> *Kara Metal* (*kara* means black in Turkish). It was released in 2011 by the French label Armée de la Mort Records. The drawn cover has a burning mosque in the background while a Baphomet, armed with a scimitar (curved sword) and an automatic gun, hinders anyone trying to get away and cutting the throat of a fifth victim, making it hard to interpret the cover as meaning anything else than death to Islam and Muslims.

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(2005), and Moribund Oblivion's *Türk* (2015). The first two examples are both visually and in the case of Gargoyle, lyrically, making explicit, admiring, references to the Ottoman empire. In this regard, their nationalism is rooted in an appreciation of the historical Ottoman empire, a legacy which the last couple of years have received a lot more interest in Turkey. The nationalism found in Moribund Oblivion's *Türk* (2015), on the other hand, is based on more recent and classic Kemalist sentiments, with song titles such as "Turk", "Red Flag Fluttered", "Soil", "Great Leader", and, "No Rebellion", making clear references to the Turkish people, their nation, soil, their leader (Atatürk), and unification rather than fragmentation. The timing of the album is also worth highlighting since it was released on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign where Atatürk earned the status of national hero. The campaign is regarded by scholars (Zürcher 2004) as the foundation for the independence war and the booklet is also filled with pictures from the campaign.

<sup>107</sup> The band Manzer is obsessed with adding "Pictavian" to their song titles and albums, deriving the word from the Pictaves, an ancient people in France.



Sarinvomit, *Baphopanzer Of The Demoniactal Brigade*. Seven Gates Of Hell, 2015.  
Artwork by Chris Moyon.

The second cover is an image drawn in black and white by French Chris Moyon, a well-established artist in the genre of black metal covers. The cover, belonging to Sarinvomit's album *Baphopanzer Of The Demoniactal Brigade*, includes the previously mentioned song "Spreading VX Gas over Kaaba" and the cover is obviously inspired by the same song. In the image, the hybrid creature, Baphopanzer – half tank, half Baphomet – destroy the Kaaba area and murdered pilgrims are visible on the ground. The representation does not try to be realistic since the mosque, *al-masjid al-haram*, surrounding the Kaaba is not present, not even as rubble, nor is the city of Mecca. Furthermore, the moon is full, not half or formed as a crescent and the night sky further adds to the feeling of "darkness triumphing over light (day)". The three sixes in a circle (symbolizing the

number of the beast) on the front of the baphopanzer, as well as the pentagram on its side, should also be noticed.

With that said, the composition mainly draws attention to two things, the destroyed Kaaba and the triumphant Baphopanzer. The importance of Kaaba has been stressed before so the communicated value of destroying it will not be repeated again. It suffices to say that the simplicity of the cover, combined with the easily recognized references, render the message of the cover to be as easily understood as the lyrics, death to Islam.



Hellsodomy, *Masochistic Molestation*. Deadbangers Records, 2014. Artwork by unknown.

This black and red composition is found on Hellsodomy's first demo-tape, *Masochistic Molestation* released by the Danish label Deadbangers Records in 2014. Drawn on the cover is a three-armed (at least), winged demon, about to demolish a mosque with a pole and a crooked sword. Similar to the cover of *Pictavian Kara Metal* the mosque is in flames, making the message clear.



Impuration, *Sanctities We Raped*. Ars Funeris Records, 2012. Artwork by M.A.

The last cover art to be examined is taken from Impuration's debut EP *Sanctities We Raped*, released by the French label Ars Funeris Records 2012. Once again, we are faced with a black and white composition interrupted only by the band logo and album title, both in red. In the center is a smiling demon, armed with two machine-rifles, one shotgun, and one chain. Surrounding the devil and hanging from slaughter hooks, are skulls and corpses from priests, Imams, and orthodox Jews. The macabre cover, with its combination of semiotic resources, is interesting, clear, and non-discriminatory, all the Abrahamic faiths are equally targeted, humiliated, and defeated.

Audio

As previously stated, while I was working my way through the audio-material, I paid special attention to sounds connected to “Islam” (category F). I did this because whereas the usual growling and screaming vocals of black metal render it almost impossible to decipher references to Islam without the aid of printed lyrics, a sample of, for instance, the call to prayer (*adhan* or *ezan* in Turkish) would, on the other hand, most likely be recognized. Furthermore, the multimodal context wherein the sample is placed has the potential to alter the original purpose of the sound (calling people to prayer).

The song “W.A.R.” from Ehriman’s 2009 EP *Unholy Metal*, features a drum break where a sampled *adhan* is fitted into the soundscape. The break is preceded by lyrics, forcefully delivered with growling vocals and aggressive music, of how a war is approaching and the chorus reminds the listeners that they should not forget which side they are fighting for. The *adhan* ends with a bomb blast, suggesting that the target was the mosque. Here, the Islamic semiotic resource of the *adhan* is transferred from a context of worship, to be used as a symbol of Islam that one can turn against with a message of hate. Such sonic semiotic recourses are, as of now, extremely rare and only three of the songs features this type of sampling.<sup>108</sup> As in the case of the lyrical and visual examples, this is a new phenomenon with the first example found in 2007.

Another way Turkish black metal places the listener in a Middle Eastern context is by utilizing “oriental scales” and traditional instruments, such as the *ud* in songs, thereby blurring the line of between “western rock music” and “Middle Eastern music”.<sup>109</sup> To adopt local sounds, and mythologies, and to glocalize<sup>110</sup> black metal, could be seen as one of the characteristics of the genre (Wallach, Berger, and Greene 2011b; Hagen 2011; Wong 2011). Although these types of instruments and scales are at times used by other black metal bands from the Middle East (Otterbeck, Mattsson, and Pastene 2018), in my material I found it to be an exception rather than a rule, and only four out of ninety-five albums utilized it.

It should be mentioned that it is possible that the growled, or screamed, vocals of black metal could be perceived as “anti-Islamic” in of itself since the vocalist sounds to be possessed by, or is, a demon or *jinn*. Many of the metalheads stated that they had been frightened by the sonic characteristics of black metal when they first came across it. The audio landscape of black metal

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<sup>108</sup> Other songs that include these types of references are Zifir’s song “Common Insanity” from *Kingdom of Nothingness* (2017). In the song the band have made three samples of one imam, one rabbi, and one priest making a religious recitation. The other song is “Ashab-I mes-eme” also from Zifir and the album *You Must Come With Us* (2007). In it they have sampled a Quran recitation.

<sup>109</sup> See for instance Raven Woods two albums *...and Emotions are Spilled* (2006) and *Enfeebling the Throne* (2011). Both of them use traditional instruments. Also see Mytes Gradel - *Burning Inside The Fate Globe* (2004) and, Dishearten – *Portal of Anatolia* (2017).

<sup>110</sup> Glocalization is a term referring to when a global phenomenon, such as heavy metal, merge with local circumstances, creating something new. For more on glocalization, see Robertson 1995.

could, therefore, be seen as an example of sonic transgression, which will be further discussed in the following chapter.

## Summary

This chapter has categorized, showcased, and analyzed the material I have been able to collect from the Turkish black metal scene. Covering the period from 1992–2018, several important observations were made. Firstly, to publicly utilize Islamic semiotics in an anti-Islamic way, is a new and highly unusual phenomenon. The first lyrical example that I could find where overt Islamic semiotics were utilized in an anti-Islamic way, was from 2003, the first visual example was from 2011, and the first audial example was from 2007. It complicates Hecker's previous observation that black metal in Turkey did not publicly use explicitly Islamic semiotics in their music to produce anti-Islamic expressions.<sup>111</sup> At the same time, the scarcity of these expressions and the fact that many bands still avoid them (only 41 out of 472 lyrics utilize it), also validate Hecker's previous conclusion. Furthermore, the majority of these expressions were produced the last seven years when Hecker had already completed his time in the field.

We also learned that the Islamic semiotic resources that are utilized are often of a well-known, and significant character, rendering it easy to decipher for Muslims and non-Muslims as "Islamic". Furthermore, the contexts in which these Islamic and religious semiotics appear, are often violent, humiliating, and terrifying, sending a clear message to the receiver about the bands attitude towards religion, and especially Islam. At first glance, the members of the Turkish black metal scene seem to harbor an uncompromising hatred and intolerance towards religion and religious people. However, in conversations and interviews, other attitudes were introduced. Although most of the metalheads I spoke to said that they hated religion, the hate was directed towards specific aspects of religion, and many motivated their use of such hard expressions, as those analyzed above, differently. These motives, as well as a discussion of their transgressive quality in Turkey, will be the theme of the next chapter.

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<sup>111</sup> In interviews and conversations with black metal musicians in Turkey Hecker (2012, 138–139) found that some of them had written lyrics cursing against Islam and some had even produced posters of metal concerts held in the holy city of Mecca, but these were not circulated in public.

# Chapter Six

## Black Metal as Transgression

To see the Kaaba burn gives me an emotional erection. – Metalhead.

As shown in the previous examples, Islamic semiotic resources have been publicly used by parts of the Turkish black metal-scene since at least twelve years back, but is it a transgressive phenomenon? As we saw in the introduction, Keith Kahn-Harris, defines transgression or transgressive practice, as something that “occurs on the edge of acceptability, at the edge of society...” (Kahn-Harris 2007, 29–30). What is deemed acceptable, however, is determined by the location one finds oneself in and the social, political, legal, and religious constraints and expectations there. So, is proclaiming the destruction of Kaaba, Islam, mosques, and advocating (in lyrics) the murder of Muslims and believers a discursive transgression? The simple answer is: yes such black metal in Turkey is transgressive. However, as Hecker (2011, 2012) has argued earlier, metal music in Turkey is from the very outset, to some extent, already transgressive in relation to Islamic notions of morality. Excessive drinking, socializing between the sexes in morally corrupt venues (rock bars that serve alcohol), toppled with accusations of Satanism (to name a few), render, according to Hecker, metal music in general, not only black metal, a transgressive practice in Turkey. This is an understanding of metal music in Turkey I only partly (see below) adhere to. So wherein lies the difference? As Hecker (2011, 57–58) also argued, transgression is not static but dynamic and what might be considered transgressive today, might not be transgressive tomorrow. But transgression is not only relational to society at large, but different transgressive practices are also relational to *one another*. With this in mind, I argue that the examples above mark a *new form* of transgressive cultural production in Turkey. Important to note is that simply including references to Islam or Muslims is in itself not necessarily a transgressive practice. For example, the popular pious folk musician Mehmet Emin Ay makes multiple references to Islamic faith and morality in his songs without any transgression taking place (Stokes 2014). The references, therefore, require a context in order to attain a new meaning and it is in this regard a multimodal reading of these expressions becomes useful. Multimodality also encourages us to examine sounds in relation to lyrics and artworks, which as I have shown, constitute a discursive transgression. So regarding sounds, does black metal music constitute a sonic transgression in Turkey and in relation to Islam?

Once again, there is no easy way to answer the question. Metal music has a long history in the Middle East and especially in Turkey, it can no longer be considered an “alien” sound. Even

some of the sonic characteristics of metal music, such as screaming vocals and heavily distorted guitars, have to some degree gained a mainstream acceptance and artists who engage in it, such as Hayko Cepkin, are played on Turkish radio.<sup>112</sup> In that regard, the sonic landscape of metal music is not particularly transgressive in Turkish society today. Black metal, however, with its combination of tremolo guitars, blast beat, and growling vocals (played in an extremely fast tempo of 220 bpm and over) is, I would say, transgressive in the sense that it challenges popular perception of what can be regarded as music (Harris 2007; Hagen 2011). Furthermore, neither I nor any of the metalheads I spoke to have ever heard extreme metal played at commercial broadcasting radios, whereas for example Hayko Cepkin, is. Furthermore, besides that the general soundscape of black metal could be considered transgressive in Turkey, the audio references analyzed in the previous chapter pushes the sonic transgression even further.

One more dimension of Khan-Harris three ideal types of scenic transgression remains to be discussed, here I will stick to clothing and fashion, leaving other bodily activities, such as mosh-pits and headbanging, to be discussed later. If we extend our understanding of the body to also include what is on the body, it is possible to talk about clothing as bodily transgression. As Hecker (2010, 2011, 2012) previously noted, Turkish metalheads way of dressing, with their leather jackets, army boots, and long hair, effectively separated the heavy metal scene from the rest of society. But today's consumer-culture, with its emphasis on fast-fashion, have in recent years popularized the "rock style". Almost every reseller of clothes stock leather jackets and although the designs differ, they still signal some sort of "rock look".<sup>113</sup> The classic subcultural metal-look, can therefore not be seen as being equally transgressive as, for example, ten years ago.

If leather jackets can be considered to belong to the ordinary, there are other dimensions to the metal-style that separate extreme metal, such as black and death metal, from the classic "rock look". By adding pins and patches to jackets, and sporting provocative t-shirts (often) from extreme metal bands that clearly promotes an anti-religious agenda (quotes and phrases such as "hammer of hell", "temple of demonic torment" were common, often in combination with pictures of inverted crosses, demons, or devils), demarcate a subcultural belonging. Furthermore, those clothes

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<sup>112</sup> Hayko Cepkin is one of the artists who have used screaming vocals to a higher degree and uses a distorted heavy metal sound. Furthermore, in the 2010 edition of the Eurovision Song Contest, Turkey was represented by the heavy rock band maNga, revealing the mainstream potential rock and "lighter" versions of metal music have in Turkey. The band was also featured in the documentary movie Gri Değil, Siyah: Ankara Rocks! (Black, not Gray: Ankara Rocks!) (2017).

<sup>113</sup> The Swedish clothing brand Hennes & Maurits (H & M) stock for instances t-shirts with bands such as Metallica, Iron Maiden, Nirvana, and AC/DC. They also sell "worn-out jeans" and different type of leather jackets (many of them made out of synthetic leather) and could generally be said to "market the rock-look". For more info, see [www.hm.com](http://www.hm.com).

are rarely seen in regular retailers, and apart from being purchasable on the internet, only a handful of stores in major Turkish cities stock the clothes.

The way my metalheads dress has also led to many of them experiencing accusations or slurs about “being a Satanist” while walking down the street. The provocative potential of the black metal style is sometimes actively pursued. One metalhead recalls the reactions she got while wearing a t-shirt of Sarinvomit’s cover (analyzed above) in the conservative neighborhood Fatih: “They got shocked and couldn’t believe what I was wearing”. In this case, the discursive transgression has merged with the bodily transgression in a piece of clothing.

Similar to leather jackets, tattoos and earrings cannot be said to be as transgressive as they once were (although some social stigma remains regarding tattoos). What might be transgressive are the motives. Skulls, demons, snakes, goat-heads (or goat-demons), and corpses, were common motives of the tattoos I saw on the metalheads’ bodies and which, in a Turkish context, are transgressive. One metalhead recalls the following from a conversation he had about tattoos with his colleagues:

Sometimes they say to me tattoos are not good for Islam and if you put a tattoo on your skin the water cannot go inside and you cannot pray.

In this case, having tattoos is considered to be in direct conflict with Islam and the metalhead’s ability to pray.<sup>114</sup> It should be noted, however, that this probably has more to do with differences between generations, since the same metalhead also recalled that no one was bothering him about his tattoos anymore because “even Muslims have tattoos now”, a fact the Diyanet has reacted against in 2007.<sup>115</sup> Sometimes the tattoos were not deciphered properly. One metalhead recalled that when he showed his new tattoo of a Satanic symbol to his grandmother, she misunderstood it as a version of the *nazar* or *nazarlık*<sup>116</sup>. Other metalheads decided to not explain what the Satanic motives on their tattoos meant to their extended family and instead preferred it to go unnoticed.

Although tattoos have become more common in Turkey, long hair and earrings on grown up men are, however, still challenging traditional understandings of how a man “should look”, making it transgressive. Many of the metalheads I spoke to had experienced comments about how they were “looking like a girl”, or that they were not allowed to have long hair at work.

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<sup>114</sup> In his article about Islam and tattoos, Göran Larsson (2011) notes that there exists a discrepancy between ideal and practice, that is – the majority of Muslim theologians consider tattoos haram (forbidden) but many Muslims still get tattoos. The common arguments against tattoos are as follow: 1) Tattoos causes unnecessary pain; 2) mixing blood and dye means that tattoos are affected by filth; 3) tattoos alter Allah’s creation without necessity

<sup>115</sup> In 2007 the Diyanet decided to ban tattoos, judging it to be contrary to Islam. For more info, see Larsson 2011.

<sup>116</sup> The *nazarlık* or *nazar boncuğu* is a popular symbol and amulet that is supposed to shield the bearer from the “evil eye”. For more info, see Marçais 2012.

To sum up, although many of Hecker's previous observations about metal-music's transgressive quality still holds true for Turkey, some things have changed, at least in the bigger cities of the country, since the time he conducted his research. Mainly regarding clothing and tattoos, but also certain sonic qualities of metal music. However, some of the expressions found amongst the black metal bands I have analyzed have taken the practice of transgression further than many previous and contemporary black metal bands in Turkey. Now I will turn to the question why.

### **The Motives Behind Participating in Transgression**

"Why would anyone, ever want to listen to this type of 'music'? Why would anyone PLAY this type of music? I don't get it," the middle-aged academic woman looked at me with a face of utter confusion. She had asked me what my research interest was at a reception in Istanbul and after a few minutes of small talk, I decided to play her a song from one of the Turkish black metal bands. Black metal and extreme metal can at times be hard to grasp – so why engage in it? Keith Kahn-Harris, as we have seen, approaches it from a perspective of transgression, stating that it "captures the central elements of the extreme metal practice [...] they are excessive, testing and breaking boundaries, invoking the joys and terrors of formless oblivion within the collective, while simultaneously bolstering feelings of individual control and potency" (Kahn-Harris 2007, 30). Matthew P. Unger, on the other hand, claims that "defilement" lies at the heart of extreme metal and becomes "a significant symbolic node around which most extreme metal musicians make their aesthetic decisions" (Unger 2016, 2), whereas Nathalie Purcell (2003) uses Aristotle's concept of *catharsis* in relation to American death metal. The three authors' perspectives, although more complex in reality, do highlight three different dimensions to the study of extreme metal and of why people engage in it, namely a social, an aesthetic, and a psychological one. The sections that follow will touch upon each one of these three dimensions.

In my own research, I found that the question of *why* these expressions are used is neither easy to answer or suited for simple explanations. The sections that follow aims to provide a voice to the metalheads that are participating in this subculture and the artists behind the newly transgressive expressions previously analyzed. Needless to say, the motives behind participating and being active in a subculture like black metal can differ widely and the following analyses should therefore not be seen as a homogenous account of the entire black metal community in Turkey. With that said, a few themes kept surfacing during my discussions, interviews, and observations with the metalheads and I will account for those below. When important discrepancies occurred in regard to certain issues, I have included those as well.

### *Transgression, Authenticity, and Subcultural Identity*

One of the most recurring arguments, and part of the reason for this new form of transgression, relates to the metalheads' constant appeal to notions about authenticity and their self-reflective subcultural, and subversive identity. In discussions about how other expressions that attack religion, such as anti-Christian sentiments, were perceived, it became obvious that to incorporate Islamic semiotic in lyrics were connected to a discussion of authenticity. One metalhead expressed it this way:

Because it is our originality I mean, if we used inverted crosses and... churches being burned in our covers it would mean nothing in this country. I mean these symbols have not any meaning like if you put an inverted cross in Turkey and you are walking around the street. They would think that you are Christian, not anti-Christian so it's just meaningless. And since we are from here since we are against... we are provocative against the traditions of this country and this society, so it is very normal actually for me to use traditional symbols of this country and the religion of this country, yeah.

Besides stating that to utilize Islamic semiotics in an anti-Islamic way is connected to a sense of originality and authenticity, the quote also gives an insight to one of two common understandings held by some of the metalheads regarding anti-Christian symbols. On the one hand, they argue that inverted crosses are not deciphered as an attack on religion, but rather as an embracement of Christianity, and to use such symbols are therefore not an effective way to convey the intended message. It also shows that the intention behind the expressions is to communicate to a wider (national and international) audience, since the black metal community in Turkey would indeed decipher it as an attack on religion. However, as Hecker (2012, 140) noted, wearing a cross, inverted or not, could also be regarded as leaving Islam, effectively branding yourself as an apostate, and could, therefore, be viewed as transgressive. That was, however, not a reflection that the metalheads I spoke to made. The other understanding of anti-Christian symbolism is that instead of being deciphered as an attack on religion, anti-Christian sentiments would be understood as an attack on Christianity which would be supported, not denounced, by many in Turkey. Whether or not this is an accurate analysis is up for debate but as we saw in chapter four, there still exists a widespread resentment towards Christians in Turkey. In either case, the *perception* is that the transgression and provocation sought for, would not occur if they used anti-Christian expressions. Furthermore, to include anti-religious and Satanic themes in music and lyrics, was for the majority of the metalheads

*the* defining factor of what could be regarded as black metal or not. Black metal, I was told, is not only music, more importantly, it is an ideology:

Okay I'm stating that very clear, the ideals of black metal have to be anti-religious, that's all.

So it's the first important parameter for black metal, anti-religious and Satanism.

The lyrics are extremely important of course. No matter how good a band sounds, without Satanic concepts dealing around themes like destruction, evil, desecration, fanaticism and devil worship, it will never be a real black metal band in my eyes. Black metal has become more than "just music". One has to provide more than just some riffs and shrieks to be considered a black metal band.

As can be seen, it does not suffice to have the right "sound" in order to be regarded as black metal, the lyrics are for many at least as important as the music, if not more, and bands without explicit anti-religious lyrics, were excluded from the metalheads' definition of black metal. Some even refused to spend time with metalheads who remained "Muslims".

[...] so just basically we were more anti-religious than other peoples before us and we just said, "fuck off" to Muslims, Muslim people in metal. Just show our fuck offs to them. Yeah it started like this then it [the scene] became stronger and bands started to form.

It is in itself nothing new that members of subcultures impose an internal categorization system, creating their own hierarchy of "insider and outsider" (Williams 2011, 126–144), which within black metal usually surface during discussions of what can be regarded as "true black metal" (Kuppens and van der Pol 2014). What is interesting here is that it is not the music but the bands' and the fans' approach to religion, and especially to Islam, that serves as the main divider. Put differently, a band's or a scene member's ability to participate in discursive transgression forms the core in the construction of a subcultural identity. It is also a way for the scene members to gain what Kahn-Harris calls transgressive subcultural capital.<sup>117</sup> This change is also noteworthy because it indicates a clear shift in the attitudes towards religion in the Turkish metal and black metal community. Where many previously regarded themselves as "secular Muslims" with a belief in God (Hecker 2012, 139), all but one (who said he was agnostic) of the metalheads I spoke to said that they were

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<sup>117</sup> Kahn-Harris (2007, 121–139) discuss two kinds of subcultural capital connected to the extreme metal scene. Mundane subcultural capital is gained through a long-term commitment to the scene and working hard for scenic institutions whereas transgressive subcultural capital is gained by transgression and celebrating individuality. The two forms of capital is, however, dependent on one another since transgressive capital is gained in comparison to a "scene" which in turn is depending on people getting involved in the scene, harvesting mundane capital. Black metal has from the start tried to achieve transgressive subcultural capital.

atheist and had no belief what so ever.<sup>118</sup> Relating to this, I never saw, and I was also told, that none of the metalheads celebrated religious holidays, not even by sending text messages. Instead, they used the days off to drink beer in the street. I was also told that the attitude towards religion is what separates the new generation of bands from the previous ones, a change they also use in their marketing.<sup>119</sup>

As we will see in the next chapter, not all of the metalheads went so far as to not socialize with Muslims, but many did differentiate between themselves and “regular metalheads”. They would for instance refrain from going to many rock and metal bars “that play shitty music”, and prefer places they know are playing black and extreme metal. This was also visible at many of the concerts I attended where I rarely saw people from the different “communities” at each-others shows.<sup>120</sup> One metalhead was disturbed by the fact that people associated him with a “regular rock guy” that listens to Metallica:

[...] like when they see my beard, or hair, or earring, which I don't have now, they all say “oh you're a Metallica listener?” or these regular Turkish society guy, “oh this is a Metallica guy” or “you listen to rock I guess?” or “you look like a rocker or something” and I really don't like it because I don't want to be included in those stereotypes.

The desire to be separated from “the ordinary metalheads” is quite common in black metal (Kahn-Harris 2011). But here it serves an additional purpose since many in the black metal community perceive the average Turkish guys, even the “metalheads”, as Muslims.

To clearly distance themselves from Muslim metalheads was also perceived to be important when they communicated with international record labels or concert-organizers. Some felt a need to “prove themselves” authentic by explicitly, through lyrics, artworks, and actions, exemplify that they really were an anti-religious black metal band. This is related to assumptions about metal music in the Middle East, which will be covered below. Consequently, I was, on several occasions, advised not to go to certain metal-bars, or some bands' concerts because the crowd, or the band playing, were “false metalheads” or “posers”, unfaithful to the “true underground music”. Interesting to

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<sup>118</sup> To have a belief in God and identify as secular Muslim, rather than atheist, is an observation made in other parts of the Middle East. See LeVine 2008,2009; Crowcroft 2017.

<sup>119</sup> In the split album *TKM Death squad* (2007) the following can be read in the booklet “All the bands in TKM play oldschool Satanic black fucking metal exclusively; so anyone who thinks black metal is something else than Satanic propaganda should better keep the fuck out of it!”

<sup>120</sup> During my time in the field I repeatedly went to different concerts in Istanbul (not just black metal). One observation I made was that I rarely saw the crowds associated with the different venues at each other's concerts. Many of the metalheads from the extreme metal scene refused to go to the other venue because of the bands they booked (mostly cover bands) and the crowd that usually went there. Similarly, in conversation with one musicians that used to play at the hated venue, he was not aware of the existence of the “other scene” – indicating that the two communities rarely mix.

note is that whether a person listened to black metal or not, was in these cases not essential since, in reality, there was a lot of cross-genre socialization between members of the extreme metal, and for example the punk-music, communities. However, the person or the band still needed to embody the right ideal of the underground.

Although explicit anti-Islamic expressions in lyrics and artworks were appreciated by everyone I spoke to, not everyone went as far in their artistic transgression. As shown before, only a handful of covers and lyrics fall under category A and most bands avoid explicit references to Islam. The reasons are manifold. Artistic and stylistic preferences were mentioned; some regarded it as “too simple”, preferring more implicit and philosophical lyrics. In a conversation with the lyricist behind some of the most extreme anti-Islamic lyrics, I learned that he, for his band’s new album, changed his lyrical style to a “more advanced style”, where he had spent many hours researching physical laws, and the biological consequences of a nuclear apocalypse. It supports the conclusion that black metal lyrics, far from only being a random collage of obscenities (although they look like it at times), may be seriously approached and carefully put together. That the bands are self-reflexive about their lyrics, also explain why some avoid explicit anti-Islamic expressions; some do simply not regard such lyrics as safe:

[...] I think I will never use some Islamic things in my lyrics because I don’t know what will happen in the future [...] it might be a big problem for us.

We were discussing when we were writing [song name], which have a lot of religious verses, so when we were putting the title of the song we said, “ok one thing that makes it safe is that we are an underground metal band so it’s not likely that we will be on the top of the agenda”, but as I said there is always a chance. We agreed that this thing could happen [...] but of course it is a serious thing because it is explicit [references], this is very important because you can say to a guy that knows nothing that if you have a reversed cross or something you can say you “are so nationalist that you hate Christians” and everything and that is why you attack them, and they say, “ok cool”, but for us, there is no chance.

The metalheads articulate that they are aware of the problematic potential of incorporating references to Islam in their music. It is experienced as especially problematic in the context of contemporary Turkey (covered in chapter three and four), causing many bands to avoid the subject. With that said, it does not mean that most bands considered overtly anti-religious or Satanic lyrics and artworks as “safe” (even though some did), but rather it was perceived to not be as big of a risk. Still, some bands decided to take a calculated risk and include anti-Islamic expressions because they thought it to be the only way to stay authentic and true to themselves. Since black metal, at

least partly, is connected to an ambition to transgress boundaries and liberate oneself from the discursive normal, to censor lyrics, would, in this case, fail to live up to some bands own demands for authenticity as well as remind them that they are not (discursively) free. To attack Islam becomes, in this case, the only logical consequence in order to be true to themselves. One band had even prepared lyrics to be released in case one member of the band would die due to the fact that he played black metal. Revealing an awareness of the possible risks as well as what the band thought they needed to be prepared for in order to be authentic. This was, however, not a common position held among the metalheads.

Utilizing anti-Islamic expressions or voicing attitudes towards Muslims in black metal, have also undergone a change internationally in recent years. Although Kahn-Harris observation in 2007 that “Islam (...) has never been the object of aesthetic transgression” (Kahn-Harris, 2007: 48), needs to be altered to “seldom been the object”, Islam and anti-Islamic references are now increasingly discussed and used by different black metal communities in Europe.<sup>121</sup> The discussion is often, as Faxneld (2017) noted, one of contestation which can be demonstrated by the experience of one of the metalheads during a black metal show in Germany. The metalhead was standing by the merchandise-stand of one German band when a person from the audience approached and questioned a patch the band sold.<sup>122</sup> The patch depicted a mosque that was crossed over, and the motive caused the person from the audience to ask if the band was Islamophobic. This upset my metalhead whom, coming from Turkey, had another perspective on it. Consequently, the two of them got into an argument whether the patch’s motive was a symbol for anti-religion or, in the Germany context, a symbol against minorities. This discussion is interesting, but I will not develop it further here. What is important to note, however, is the *double transgressive quality* of utilizing anti-Islamic expressions and that these seem to be received differently depending on who is behind them. If the above mentioned German band was discredited by some concerts-attenders for their anti-Islamic expressions, the opposite could be said about the Turkish bands. The Turkish bands rather gained transgressive subcultural capital for “daring” to utilize anti-Islamic semiotics, and at times they were credited for simply playing extreme metal in a “Middle Eastern country”. One metalhead recalled a conversation he had after playing at a metal festival in Bucharest. After their show, a member from another band playing at the festival had come up to him and asked if they really were a black metal band from Turkey, remaining unconvinced until he could see their

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<sup>121</sup> In his article Faxneld (2017) draws attention to the similarities between the anti-Islamic discourse produced by Swedish black metal bands and the ones produced by far-right parties. He states that it created a debate within the scene over which expressions constitute accepted critique of religion, and which ones are unaccepted expressions of racism. For more info, see also Venkatesh et al. 2016.

<sup>122</sup> A patch is a piece of fabric that varies in sizes, from small ones to full backpieces, so called “back-patches”. The motives may also vary but are usually of a band or album that the wearer likes.

passports. Similar stories were told by other metalheads as well. From my own observations in the field I got the impression that many people abroad were surprised and impressed by the fact that there were black metal bands from Turkey. When I asked the bands if they felt that they received extra attention because of their country of origin, I got many answers like these:

All of people came for us when we're on stage because we are from Middle East. And they are wondering about us – “a Satanic band from Middle East? Wow!”

No. I don't think it [is an] advantage, but of course it takes people's attentions like you [Laugh]. I wouldn't think that a Swedish guy like you would do a research about Norwegian black metal scene in again 2017 maybe. Yeah, being a Turkish black metal player is kind of advantageous thing to reach out foreign countries, but not in Turkey.

Besides affirming the fact that coming from Turkey is associated with some advantages in terms of foreign attention and curiosity, the quotes also reveals that the aspects that grant them extra attention abroad are also what is believed to cause risks in Turkey. This double-edged sword that Turkey becomes might be obvious, but it is nonetheless important to note. Similarly, many of the foreign album-reviews that I have come across stress the fact that the bands hail from Turkey, a country in which they did not believe that black metal existed (Mality 2017; Gizmo 2017; Metal Maniack 2017; Ekdahl 2018). In that sense, it needs to be acknowledged that to gain transgressive subcultural capital, both nationally and internationally, is not only limited to a band's level of musical innovation, but can, as in the Turkish case, be awarded because of the geographical circumstances a band operates in.

### *Transgression and Subcultural Resistance*

Since the use of Islamic semiotic resources in an anti-Islamic way becomes transgressive in a Turkish context of pious conservatism (i.e. breaking a homogenous understanding of what one can do), I believe a closer look at Patrick J. Williams theory of subcultural-resistance is valuable. Resistance is always in a dialectic relation with some sort of power, either a dominant type of power relying on force, or a subtle form of power, derived from hegemony.<sup>123</sup> More specifically hegemony refers to a “... form of control in which subordinate groups accept the ideas and values of a dominant group, not because they are forced to do so, but because they *choose* to” (Williams 2011, 90). Furthermore, these ideas and values are communicated to society through social institutions

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<sup>123</sup> The term of hegemony was first developed by Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) and refers to the process where the interests of those in power is maintained by having the public voluntarily share those same values and interests. See Williams 2011.

such as school, family, religion, and popular media (Williams 2011, 90–91). It is against the form of power achieved through hegemony that subcultures offer a form of resistance: “Subcultures do offer alternative frames of reference wherein young people learn to think outside the box, or at least learn to think inside a different box” (Williams 2011, 91). Although the concept of resistance has been part of subcultural studies for a long time, the concept is not easily analyzed or categorized. After examining a wide range of literature on the subject from different disciplines, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) observe that, although the majority of the literature agrees that the core of resistance has to do with opposition and action, it disagrees about whether resistance has to be intentional or recognized. As a response, they create a typology in which they identify several types of resistance, such as: overt, covert, unwitting, target-defined, externally-defined, missed, and attempted (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). Williams, while acknowledging Hollander and Einwohner’s work, also criticizes it for having a one-dimensional approach to the study of resistance. Instead, Williams insists that:

Resistance is a multidimensional concept in the sense that any particular action or event identified as resistance may be simultaneously analyzed as relatively passive or active, micro or macro, and covert or overt. Neither subcultures, nor their participants – and not their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors – are fixed at any certain point on these dimensions. (Williams 2011, 105)

I find Williams approach to theorize and analyze resistance valuable and useful. Here I will argue that black metal in Turkey enables its participants to engage in subcultural resistance against societal hegemony by engaging in different types of transgressive practices. For example, one important aspect of black metal was how the medium enabled the metalheads to participate in discursive transgression. That is, many of the metalheads said that they, through black metal, could voice opinions about life, and more specifically about religion, that they could not express otherwise. For instance, in a discussion with one of the metalheads, he said that he, if he wanted to, could say that “Mohammad was a child-rapist” in his lyrics, whereas voicing the same opinion in public would be impossible. Similarly, proclaiming the death of Islam, declaring the stoning of the Devil in Mina to be fruitless, or wishing for lethal nerve-gas to be released over Kaaba, are all statements that, as we saw in chapter four, if voiced in public, could have severe social and juridical consequences. However, expressing them in their own lyrics, or listening to foreign bands voicing critique and hate towards religion, is deemed possible. One might argue that since the public dimension is lacking it should not be regarded as *actual* resistance since few outside of the subculture *actually* hear it. But as Williams (2011, 95) argues, what needs to be paid attention to is how the subculturalists themselves perceive their actions. In that sense, to transgress a perceived – and clearly widespread

– hegemonic societal respect for Islam in lyrics, should be regarded as a form of (c)overt resistance. It is covert in the sense that the *channels* it is communicated in – such as online-metal forums, or the booklets of records that can only be found at special locations – as well as *how* it is usually communicated (growled or screamed), render the possibility of outsiders finding out about it unlikely. At the same time it is overt because it creates a subcultural interconnectedness where these types of attitudes towards religion are not only voiced, but to a large extent encouraged and recognized by the rest of the scene as resistance towards religion.<sup>124</sup> The pseudonyms used by many in black metal further adds to this (c)overt dimension. In that regard, the cultural production of Turkish black metal enables the participants to engage in (c)overt resistance similar to the one Kirsten Schilt (2003, 81) noted in her study of *Riot Grrrl* fanzines, where she says that the zines enabled girls “to overtly express their anger, confusion, and frustration publicly to like-minded peers but still remain covert and anonymous to authority figures”. This dynamic was also visible at hang-out places and concerts which I will discuss later on.

If utilizing Islamic semiotics in an anti-Islamic way is, as I argue, partly connected to an ambition to engage in social, aesthetic, and catharsis motivated subcultural resistance, the next question would be what are they resisting and why? I argue that the new scenic expressions are partly related to the rise of AKP and its pious conservatism (covered in chapter four). The majority of the metalheads I spoke to either grew up or spent their early teens in an AKP governed Turkey. Furthermore, the incorporation of these explicit anti-Islamic and anti-religious expressions coincide with, and intensified during, AKP’s time in power and the increased visibility of religion in the public and social sphere. That the rise of AKP and its pious conservatism inspired these new expressions can be seen in the following quote. I asked the members of one of the bands why they started to include explicit references to Islam in their later work since they had not done so previously:

So, he [the lyric writer] started to write it, that’s one thing and then in our lives things also started to change because of the environment in the country. Like 2012, 2013 there had been, you know the issues, 2014 and more and more we got pushed. Then we say ”ok, think of us as a tank, let’s say: ok, we put the barrel of the gun pointing here [pointing straight] and then someone is shooting us from here [shows the side] so we need to focus on this [the side]. It was always in our minds but because of the [change in] environment, and the politics, [the] demographic [in this] country, we started now.

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<sup>124</sup> As we saw previously, some regarded explicit anti-Islamic references as too risky. But the majority said that they, if they did not do it themselves, at least supported the ones who did.

Because I live in here and I started to [be] anti-Islamic because it's important now. Twenty years ago it was not important in here, ok? But it is important now. Because twenty years ago in Turkey we didn't see any pressure here, they didn't push me you know? But they push me now.

For this band, to start writing anti-Islamic lyrics is directly related to the recent years of AKP rule and the rise of pious conservatism in Turkey. The band members, who say that their main-fight is with God generally, rather than Islam specifically, still felt that the recent societal and political change in Turkey required a response in their music. In this regard, black metal in Turkey needs to be acknowledged, at least partly, as an active and conscious act of subcultural-resistance to recent years of political and social change, without, however, providing a political alternative. It is interesting because besides the quotation above, many metalheads said that they were not playing black metal for political reasons, or that their band was a political band (none of the lyrics I found had explicit political references), while they at the same time recognized the political potential of including anti-Islamic references in their music. This discrepancy could be explained by the fact that many black metal bands and musicians position themselves and their music as a-political, making labels such as protest music difficult to apply (Peddie 2006; Kahn-Harris 2007; Street 2012; Scott 2013). Although refraining to declare themselves or their band as political, many of the metalheads used strong expressions when they described their personal opinion about the AKP government:

Yeah they stole my life. Since 2002 I think they are in the government and in 2002 I was 15. They stole 15 years, and my best 15 years between, 15 and 30, my best years are gone because of them.

No, we hate them. We hate them since the very beginning. I mean I don't want to say like I hated them in the beginning because I was too young [laugh] and at the same time. They seemed like kind of Christian Democrats in Europe, I can... since we are talking right now I can admit that I didn't really think of them as this dangerous to be honest. In the beginning I thought, you know, when I was studying political science and I thought like "ok whatever maybe they are like the Christian Democrats in Europe" or like center-right whatever, and you know they were just like pro-Europe and even when you go back to the interviews of Erdoğan he would say that "just we need to grant LGBT's rights in the constitution" so no one thought that this was coming but... I think this government is the worst government since the beginning of Turkish history, I mean Turkish republic history.

They have ruined... they managed to ruin a lot of things they have managed to create a heard of sheep violent sheep violent... sorry not violent, aggressive brainless sheep that's somehow ignorance has become the new "IT" they are very sure of themselves and braver the more

ignorant they are the braver they are. They feel entitled to everything now some, a random guy on the street feels entitled to direct my life comment on my life just tell me what's right and what's wrong and ah or attack me, violently attack me because they think their leader has given them the right to do so. They are destructive.

As can be seen, the government is blamed for many of the things regarded to be wrong in Turkey. Furthermore, their supporters are thought of as stupid, brainwashed, and dangerous, which is similar to how many of the metalheads describe general Muslims, whom they regard as ignorant, hypocritical and violent. As we will see in the following chapter, this understanding of Muslims is a bit more complicated. In terms of providing a political alternative on how to organize society, or engaging in governmental politics, (black) metal is indeed a-political (Scott 2013). But if we use a wider understanding of politics to include statements that have a broader social impact (the death of religion), black metal is political. Furthermore, simply stating that their music is a-political does not mean that black metal could not be *perceived* as political, or *become* political, in a contemporary Turkish context. Indeed, some people within the scene even regarded black metal as a political tool: “if religion produces this much of a propaganda, there need to be that kind of harsh propaganda back”.

This contradiction between making transgressive statements with political implications while at the same time self-identify as a-political can, according to Kahn-Harris, be explained by the extreme metal scenes practice of reflexive anti-reflexivity. According to Kahn-Harris (2007, 145) reflexive anti-reflexivity is “[...] ‘knowing better but deciding not to know’. [...] defined as anti-reflexivity practiced by members who are capable of producing reflexive practice within the reflexive space of the scene”. That the bands acknowledge the political potential and danger of using explicit anti-Islamic lyrics is an example of how the bands, on the one hand, reflect over the lyrical content, while they at the same time, with the exception above, declares it to be a-political. To stay in the fringe area and underground is in this sense crucial for enabling this position of reflexive anti-reflexivity, to take place and actions that could disrupt it are, as I will show later, heavily condemned. Now I will turn to a discussion of what can be regarded as the focal point of scenic transgressions and subcultural resistance – concerts.

### Concerts and ‘Hang Out Places’ as Transgression

*“Hail Satan! Hail Satan! Hail Satan!” - Hellsodomy barely had time to finish their song before the audience started chanting, eagerly anticipating the next song to start. The venue, located on the fourth floor in a popular bar in central Istanbul, is packed to the brink and a distinct smell of beer, sweat, and cigarette-smoke fills up the dark room. Approximately one hundred people, almost solely dressed in black band t-shirts and leather jackets, fill up the*

*rectangular room. The stage, located at one of the short-sides while a bar is at the other, is, besides the backdrop, the band, and the equipment, empty. No overtly Satanic, anti-religious, or blasphemous stage-prop is present – making the music and the crowd the only recognizable factors of a black metal show. As with many of the other concerts I have attended, the women made up roughly 20–25% of the audience, while the rest were male. When Hellsodomy starts the next song the crowd in front of stage explodes into a mosh-pit, running and jumping into one-another in a (controlled) frenzy while at the same time keeping an eye out for incoming stage-dives. As usual, mainly younger males participated in the mosh-pit, while the women often preferred to stand at the central-flanks in front of the stage or in the back. There are, however, exceptions to the rule and this night proved to be one of them when a young woman threw herself into the mosh-pit, head-banging and body-slammng together with the others, creating a whirlwind of hair and bodies. The chaos continues until, as if someone had pushed a button, it ends together with the song and a moment of calm take hold of the venue, but it is instantly disrupted when the chanting returns.*

Concerts are one example of where all three of Kahn-Harris ideal categories of transgression occur – sonic, discursive, and bodily. Starting with the obvious, the concert venue is a place where the sexes can mix, meet, and socialize, without the curious gaze of outsiders, since the venues, at least the ones I attended, were kept underground or on top floors with no windows, creating a sort of centralized periphery or backspace (Goffman 1966). Furthermore, even if someone would make it to the venue, it is usually dark which makes it easy to be sneaky, if wanted to. The venues also serve alcohol, play music, and allow people to participate in physical activities (mosh-pit, head-bang, stage-dive) rarely performed in public. In this sense, the concert allows for the reshaping of the venue into a new social *space* (Certeau 2013), temporarily governed by the black metal community, and in which physical activities that challenge a traditional sense of Turkish morality, are allowed and pursued.<sup>125</sup> The discursive transgression is also reinforced and amplified at concerts, leading them to become a focal point for catharsis and a place where the scene can meet and indulge in all levels of transgression, discursive, sonic, and bodily. The concert also creates an interesting dynamic of (c)overt resistance:

TEB1 - It's a big risk. Sometimes as you know people are yelling: "Hail Satan, Hail Satan".

D - Yeah what do you think about that?

TEB1 - Yeah, its ok for me but... as you know some civil police [can be] inside the building or if they hear something about this.

D - yeah.

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<sup>125</sup> I am aware that socializing between the sexes in a dark venue that serves alcohol and plays music is also done in clubs, but to this day I have never experienced a mosh-pit at a house club. It should also be noted that mosh-pits are not unique for extreme metal shows since it also occurs at other metal, punk, and hard-core shows for example. See Hecker 2011, 2012.

TEB1 - It can be a problem.

D - Ah. Would you prefer them not to do it?

TEB1 – No, no, they can [laugh], they can.

D - Do you support them to do it?

TEB1 – Yeah, yeah. It gives power to [the] stage. When they yell “Hail Satan” you are playing more brutal.

That concerts enabled people to vocally participate in transgressive discourses was for many metalheads an important aspect of them. The catharsis sought for was, however, also associated with some form of risk-taking which, once again, leads to a tension between overt and covert resistance. For example, in “public”<sup>126</sup> advertising (such as posters for upcoming concerts), explicit references to Islam was avoided (although anti-Christian expressions were at times used) and the visual equipment on stage (backdrops and banners) did not include references to Islam either. In that sense, the advertising and visual experience of concerts constitute a more covert form of resistance than, for example, the artworks and lyrics previously analyzed. However, similar to Williams (2011, 104ff) observation of punk-concerts, the concerts also exemplify overt resistance since concert attendees know of the subcultural mindset and the lyrics of the performing bands. For example, at one concert of Sarinvomit, the front row of the crowd started to chant “kutuya yak! (burn the box!)” – referring to Kaaba and the band’s song “Spreading VX-Gas over Kaaba” (previously analyzed). To connect “box” and “Kaaba” might, for an outsider, be a bit of stretch, but for the ones attending the concert, it was crystal clear. Concerts were also deemed important for the scene’s future existence:

I hope that it will also develop because shows are what makes people come together, to enjoy and to have a chat, and the scene is growing and growing with new people discovering that type of music, not just for my band for many other bands as well. And I... it would be great to have a concert at least every other week you know? That would be so cool. But the limitation is that we do not have a lot of bands in the extreme style so... when each band performs in one concert, in like ten weeks you will finish, and you will just rewind all over again, so we need more bands, need more shows, need maybe more foreign underground bands coming here. It is always a great environment to be in a black metal or death metal show.

That regular concerts are important for a scene’s continuation has been argued before (Levine and Wallach 2013), and as can be seen, is acknowledged by the metalhead above. It is also an example

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<sup>126</sup> I use “public” because although posters are public in the sense that anyone can see them, they were only posted at institutions or places already affiliated with the scene. A big add in, for instance Taksim square, was neither afforded or wanted since it would attract too much attention to the events.

of what Williams (2011, 101) call *meso-oriented* resistance since concerts help to shape and share a collective identity. The quote also gives an insight into how small the black and extreme metal scene is in Turkey, revolving around “a few bands” and kept “underground”. During the 16 concerts I attended, the audience rarely surpassed 150 people (the average number was around 80–120) and most of the shows were organized privately. In a conversation with one of the show organizers, he mentioned that he never made a profit from concerts and that he calculated the ticket price on two premises: the costs involved to bring a foreign band to Turkey (flights, hostel, transportation, etc.), and that the show would attract approximately 120 people. In this regard, I think it is appropriate to label the scene as “underground” since it relies on private connections and social media (which importance for the scene was emphasized by many). The way shows were organized, advertised, and located, once again exemplifies the (c)overt dynamic of subcultural resistance since the shows are technically available for everyone, but in reality, only attended by people already affiliated with the scene.

As illustrated with the woman who engaged with the mosh-pit, and as it has been argued before (Purcell 2003; Riches 2011), concerts can also become a place where gender stereotypes can be challenged, which can be empowering:

I like the energy, I can, like you know, just realize how I feel. Like [it is] as if I am living in two different worlds. Going to work, and, like you know, being nice to everyone and everything, and I actually just want to put on my band shirt and, you know, hit my leather jacket and go to shows and completely discharge. So that’s kind of empowering for me, or like you know, go to a metal bar and just drink myself to death, it’s kind of empowering to me as well. Because I know that no-one judges me, no one would actually come and criticize me as a woman [...] even talking to people we don’t know so, actually in the metal scene there is just these good things about it, because if you don’t know any people in that community you can still go and talk to them. In another bar, if you do that as a woman, you would be considered as hitting on them or something. If you are like looking for sex. So in the metal community, I don’t think anyone would consider that as much, like everyone is speaking to each other.

Going to concerts or hanging out in rock bars becomes a sort of catharsis, a relief, and break from “everyday life”, enabling the metalhead to be who she “really is” which is empowering (the empowering quality of black metal was also stressed by other metalheads). Another aspect that is important to note is how she, as a woman, experiences to be perceived at different bars or environments. In this case, a metal bar is a place where she can go and socialize without being perceived as “hitting on someone” since the music is what brings them together, something not deemed possible at a “regular bar”. It is also consistent with how other women in the scene express

that they have been perceived as morally corrupt and sexually available subjects by parts of the majority society. In a Turkish context, this makes sense since one of the foundations in the previous polemics against metal music was, as shown in chapter three, that it leads to moral collapse and pre-marital sex. Furthermore, the fact that none of the women I met in the scene wore a headscarf – which declares the bearer as Muslim and signals sexual modesty – meant that many of them were subjected to sexual harassment due to the way they dressed. That said, it does not mean that the “metal environment” was a safe haven, but rather that it was not as bad as other environments and some female metalheads even claimed they had never experienced sexual harassment in the metal community. However, as Sonia Vasan (2011) showed in her study of American female death metal fans, in order to be accepted by the wider death metal scene they adopted “... patriarchal notions of appropriate female attire and conduct” creating “a sub-hierarchy of women within the scene” (Vasan 2011, 345).<sup>127</sup> This somewhat contradictory relationship between empowerment and submission was also visible in Turkey where many (but not all) of the females I interviewed, or met and talked to at concerts, felt that it was harder to be accepted because they were women, and thus needed to prove that they “really liked the music” and did not go to shows just as “the girlfriend support”<sup>128</sup>.

When I asked the metalheads (both male and female) about why they thought there is such an overrepresentation of males in the scene (both as fans and musicians), many mentioned the brutality of the music as an important factor, implying that it is more suited for men since it is “filled with aggression and testosterone”. Relating to this are the lyrics. As shown, some lyrics include explicit sexual references (category C), and the scenarios are usually violent and at times targeting women. Beforehand, I thought that this element would discourage some of the women of the scene, or at least have forced a reflection on their behalf, over certain lyrical content. However, when I brought the subject of sexist lyrics up, some women stated that they knew it was not really meant for them, and thus were not bothered by it. Some said that they disliked the element but that they were not bothered enough to quit listening to the music or stop participating in the scene. To reduce the importance of certain lyrical elements could also be seen as an extension of the strategy to downplay femininity and emphasize masculinity. Others mentioned the gender-stereotypes of Turkish society, where it is easier for men than for women to socialize in “morally

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<sup>127</sup> In her article, Vasan (2011) analyze the female participation in the American death metal scene from the perspective of “social exchange”. In order to harvest the benefits of participating in the death metal scene, they need to confirm to a patriarchal notion of appropriate female dress and behavior. In her study that meant downplaying feminine sides and emphasizing the masculine ones.

<sup>128</sup> The girlfriend support was a term used by some of my female informants to describe those women who attended shows in, what they perceived, the role of the “girlfriend” and who did not show up to shows if the relationship went sour. Implicit in this term is that they were not there for “the right reason” (the music). For a similar case, see Vasan 2011.

corrupt” places, naturally leading to the unequal division between men and women in the scene. In one way, participating and socializing in bars and concert halls is challenging gender-stereotypes in Turkey, especially of how women should be and behave. Thus, participation has a gender dimension to it, and women’s transgression is experienced as greater than men’s, and seems to contain more risks as to possible social costs.

Above I have analyzed and discussed some of the reasons for engaging in and utilizing transgressive discourses and behaviors. Below I will try to add another dimension to the discussion of transgression – when transgression is deemed to have been taken too far. I will start the following section with an anecdote from the field and from there on discuss what I call the limits of subcultural resistance.

### The Limits of Subcultural Resistance

*Although it was well late into the fall, the sun was shining bright and it was a lovely twenty-two degree outside. “Unusually hot for this time of year in Ankara”, my friends said to me, but coming from cold Sweden, I did not mind it at all. I had arrived at the Turkish capital of Ankara the day before in order to attend a two-day metal-festival which I was told, was “the best underground metal-festival in Turkey”. Many of the black and- extreme metal bands that I either had met, were planning to interview, or had gotten to know elsewhere, were going to play at the festival so I was in a good mood when I arrived at the venue. The semi-big venue, holding up to a few hundred people, was located just a few minutes’ walk from the biggest mosque in Ankara Kocatepe Camii (the irony of which was not ignored during the festival). The small street, filled with bars and restaurants that run just outside the venue, was already starting to fill up with longhaired rockers in jeans- and leather jackets, carefully covered with band-patches. Although it was just after one o’clock in the afternoon, the party had already started and the small liquor store across the venue was in for a busy weekend.*

*Like many others attending the festival, I went into the small liquor store, got a beer and joined some of the metalheads I had met the night before. They were standing outside, chatting, drinking, and smoking. To my surprise, many of the metalheads from Istanbul and Ankara had not met one another in person before, but only communicated online, and some did not know anyone from the other cities beforehand. “It’s like a united nation for metal here!” a friend exclaimed to me laughing. He was correct. Within two hours of my arrival, I had met people from all of the bigger cities in Turkey, including Ankara, Izmir, Istanbul, Eskişehir, and Bursa; and I was, once again, reminded of how important concerts and subcultural institutions, like the festival, are for the scene’s formation and continuation. After two beers outside I was ready to enter the venue to check out the merch-table, say hi to the organizers, and watch the first couple of bands that were playing. The stage-area was located one floor below ground and about thirty people were in the audience, giving their support to the band.*

*I was downstairs watching the local metal band Saspent play when I decided to take a quick break and head outside. Outside I met people that seemed a bit edgy and I asked a friend about what had happened. Apparently, a fight had erupted between a man and the venue's security guard. The fight had started when the man, after repeatedly being told to stop, had continued to kick a car that was parked outside the venue, forcing the security guard to intervene by head-butting and removing the man from the immediate area. Once the "threat" was removed, things quickly went back to normal, and after a cigarette I went downstairs to watch another band play. Although already "kicked out" from the festival, the man would later return and cause trouble. This time he got into an argument with members from an Istanbul-based black metal band that he, allegedly, accused of being "posers". Once confronted he denied it but it still turned into a big argument and many people I knew from the Istanbul scene got involved. After the argument, the man left the area and I did not see him again. Eventually, I learned that he was one of the perpetrators of the Ortaköy-murder in 1999. Done serving his time in prison, it seemed that he was now trying to make his way back into the black metal scene, something that was not appreciated by the people I knew from the scene. After the last argument, the people I knew from the Istanbul-scene had grouped up together to discuss the man's future in the scene. Everyone agreed that they did not want him back into the scene, or in any way to be associated with him or the crime he had committed back in 1999 and they decided that they would beat him up if he tried to re-enter the scene in Istanbul.*

*Besides the above-mentioned incidents, the festival progressed smoothly and the atmosphere, and the crowd, got increasingly excited as time passed. At the height of the evening, the venue was filled to the brink and it seemed like the rest of the evening would pass without further incidents. Then around ten o'clock at night, while I was talking with some people outside the small liquor store across the venue, I saw approximately twenty police-personal enter the venue and start to collect identification cards. Contrary to the advice from my friends outside, I went after them in order to get a better look at what was unfolding inside, leading to the confiscation of my own ID. Once they had checked everyone's ID and searched the place for – what I assumed, and later got confirmed – drugs, they gave us back our IDs and left the venue without anyone being arrested. The last three hours of the first festival-day passed, in comparison, without incidents.*

What can be learned from the anecdote above? The way many of the metalheads reacted to the presence and actions of the man from the Ortaköy-murder, shows that supporting and participating in discursive transgression, does not necessarily correlate with a desire for that discourse to be acted upon or materialized. When I in discussions and interviews talked about the Satanic Scare and the Ortaköy-murder, I was usually met with responses distancing themselves and the scene from the act, arguing, contrary to the popular Turkish media description, that it was the single action of a few idiots, and that murder had nothing to do with black metal. Objecting to murder might seem as a contradiction, especially since the lyrics and artworks explicitly mention it,

but as I have shown above, there are other factors in play behind these types of expressions, an expressed desire to “kill the believers” does not necessarily lead to action nor the desire of it. However, this does not mean that lyrics were regarded as unimportant, as some previous Turkish black metal bands thought (Hecker 2012, 137–138), but rather that the catharsis and subcultural capital sought for in these expressions does not necessarily correlate with an actual desire to see it materialized.

The other important thing to note is how minor transgressive actions, such as kicking a car, are heavily condemned, at least at shows, by the scene. According to the metalheads I spoke to, this is related to how the (black) metal scene is falsely perceived by the majority society as a community that will cause trouble, a perception not limited to Turkey.<sup>129</sup> One of the concert-organizers I interviewed stated that the available venues for arranging concerts were few, not because of a lack of venues, but because many owners had prejudices against the metal scene and did not want to organize metal-concerts, and especially not extreme metal because of the sonic transgression inherent in the music. Although I was told it was rare and not limited to the metal community, the police raid I experienced could be seen as strengthening this assumption. Consequently, at every concert I attended, people that behaved out of line was quickly disciplined so they would not risk ruining the relationship between the organizers and the few venues who let the scene arrange concerts. In line with this reasoning, taking the risk to embrace a former murderer was something they were not willing to do, neither did they want to be associated with such a person.

The two examples above of one “major” and one “minor” transgression, could also be read as examples where the balance between transgression and the mundane is disrupted. When someone from the scene fully embodies the transgressive discourse and murders someone, it endangers the reflexive anti-reflexivity position used by the rest of scene, begging a response condemning those actions so that the balance can be maintained. In the next chapter I will analyze another dimension of the limits of subcultural resistance as well as specify what it means to “hate Islam”.

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<sup>129</sup> In his article about Australian censorship regulations, Andrew Whelan observes that there appear to exist a prejudice against metal music in terms of having material censored. The Australian metalband Intense Hammer Rage had their album *Avogoyamugs* (2001) Razor Back Records, destroyed by the customs and were convicted and fined for importing prohibited material because of their lyrics about pedophilia and child-molesting. The same treatment has not yet led to legal cases against for instance erotic Harry Potter fan fiction or the Japanese manga genre Yaoi that depict sexual encounters between men who look like minors. For more info, see Whelan 2017. A similar argument was made by the PMRC in America, see Weinstein 2000.

# Chapter Seven

## **I Hate Muslims, but my Neighbor is ok: The Dynamics of Religious Hatred**

It should be clear after reading the previous chapters that many of the metalheads have, at minimum, a dislike for Islam and Muslims, at most, hatred. The new cultural expressions in the scene are usually even harsher, including images of and lyrics about murder and destruction. But what does it mean to hate Islam, and who are the Muslims they despise? These are some of the questions I aim to answer in this chapter.

### **What do They Hate?**

Whenever someone claims that he or she hates religion, questions arise. Do they hate every type of religion, or specifically organized religion, spirituality, dogmas, rituals, and so on and so forth? When I asked the metalheads about their attitudes toward religion, and especially towards Islam, I got many different answers. This is hardly surprising since everyone is shaped by previous experience and socialization. That said, a few themes kept resurfacing during our discussions about Islam, Muslims, and religion.

### *Islam and Muslims are Violent*

One of the most recurrent understandings of Islam is that it is *the most* violent religion of the three Abrahamic faiths, as can be seen in the following quote:

Because I have so much hate in my mind, also in my heart, to Islam and all religions but Islam [is] the most brutal one in my opinion. Ok I didn't live in any foreign country, in Europe or Christian country, or any other religious countries, I have only lived in Turkey for thirty years, but when I check the news on the internet, ok I also check the global news, all crimes and all murders and everything, terrorist attacks, is made by Islamic terrorists. Because in the book they are saying that you can kill a person if he is not a believer, even if you are a Christian or even if you are a Jew, any religion except Muslim, except Islam. I think we have to put Muslims and Islam out of this world.

Besides stating that Islam is the most brutal of all religions, the quote also gives an insight into why that is. Terrorism and violence in the name of Islam were for many of the metalheads the true expressions of Islam. Furthermore, many were of the opinion that “the book” (i.e. the Quran) was actively promoting and sanctioning violence and murder. The logical follow-up of defining Islam's essence as violent, is to claim that Muslims, too, are violent. That Muslims are violent, easily

provoked, and ignorant people, was a description I heard from many of my metalheads when I asked them to develop their thoughts about what constitutes a typical Muslim. Islamic terrorism and incidents such as the one in Sivas 1993, where Islamic fundamentalists deliberately torched a building, leading to thirty-seven people losing their lives (many of them Alevis), were regarded as a typical expression of Islam rather than an exception.<sup>130</sup> In this regard, the metalheads' view of Islam and Muslims are similar to the discourse about Islam found in right-wing and conservative parties in Europe,<sup>131</sup> but also to the newly surfacing anti-Islamic sentiments found in European and American black metal (Faxneld 2017). The irony of repeating the same discourse as parties hosting prejudices against themselves (people from Muslim countries), were acknowledged by some of the metalheads. Most of them, however, were not self-reflexive about it and produced a discourse with similar underlining messages. For one of the metalheads, however, the similarities in discourse created an ethical dilemma:

I sometimes think that I'm maybe just becoming an Islamophobic or something like that, which I don't want to be, but the conditions are leading me there [...] these people don't respect anything.

As can be seen, this metalhead does not want to become "Islamophobic" but due to the personal experience of living in contemporary Turkey, the metalhead might end up there. Although the majority of the metalheads I spoke to grew up in what they called a secular family,<sup>132</sup> they have all had negative encounters that have affected their perceptions of Islam and Muslims, either through the extended family, friends, or school (where religious education is mandatory). When I asked the metalheads when they came to the realization that they disapproved of religion, I got many different answers, but all originated from previous experiences. The following example is as good as any. The quote is taken from a discussion which followed after the metalhead had told me that he once carved a cross into his school-desk, inspired by the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*:

AC2U [...] I was about to carve a shield around it, so it was just a game for me, and one day I entered my class and saw that my cross was distorted.

D - Oh really?

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<sup>130</sup> *Hürriyet Daily News* 2008.

<sup>131</sup> Wilson and Hainsworth (2012) argue in their rapport to the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) that hostility towards Islam and Muslims has been a part of European far-right parties discourse in recent years. For more info, see the rapport.

<sup>132</sup> A few of my informants grew up in what they described as a more conservative or religious family.

AC2U - Really. And I started to shout, "who the fuck did that? who the stupid asshole?", I was not a fight-loving guy but I got mad, I remember that I got mad and started shouting "who the fuck went to my desk and did this, how dare you? Just come here who are you? Who did that?" I started yelling like that and some religious guy showed up and, "It was me who did that", one of my classmates, and I ask him "why?", because, he said "Because this is a Christian thing to do and you are living in a Muslim society", so according to him [I was] not allowed to carve a cross into my desk, so he did this "favor" for me by interrupting it or distorted it. So, I froze and just, as far as I remember it right, I was frozen and told him that "you are really one of the most stupid guys I ever met. Just carving a cross just because of a game, doesn't mean that I'm interfering with your religion, I am no threat to you but if you are going to act like that for all of your life then I feel sorry for you." I think these kinds of small events made me start to hate religions and beliefs in general, these fanatic believers.

As can be seen above, this was just one of many "small events" that led this metalhead to hate religion. Although the story most probably is a post-construction of how the event unfolded, the feelings it provoked are still the same. The actions of his classmate also fit the metalheads' description of how a typical Muslim would act (aggressively and ignorant), also implying that many of them are fanatic. Other experiences I was told revolved around being bullied for not knowing how to conduct the prayer or being threatened for not participating in the fast.

Many also combined their personal experience with an intellectual endeavor, pointing out inconsistencies in the Quran or stating the incompatibility with stories from the Muslim tradition in relation to modern science. One metalhead told me that he had concluded that Muslims were "false" after participating in the *laylat al-Qadr* ritual with his grandmother whom, after a full night of prayer, had gone back to "gossiping and bad activities". The interesting with the last example is the fact that his grandmother was thought not to be Muslim *enough*.

Another prominent understanding that was emphasized by the metalheads was that Turkey is a Muslim country, which was equal to backward and unmodern. An example that was mentioned was underage marriages in Anatolian villages. Read as backdrop to the recent years of political and societal change (covered in chapter four), this is hardly surprising, but it could also explain why I rarely found lyrics or artworks expressing national pride in the material I gathered.

Nationalist (at times tapping into fascist discourses) and paganist references are considered by many scholars as a widespread aspect of black metal (Gardell 2003; Olson 2013). But as Hecker (2012) noted, and my own observation supports, there exists a widespread aversion towards nationalistic sentiments amongst the Turkish black metal community. It is interesting because besides questioning the assumed relationship between black metal, nationalism and national pride, adopting a nationalistic discourse in Turkey (here broadly defined as being pro-Turkey and Turks)

was for the metalheads equal to being “pro Muslim” and pro- Islam, and thereby losing the transgressive element.

### *Islam and Societal Authority*

Another aspect, relating to the view of Turkey as Islamic, is that Muslims, or more importantly, AKP-supporters (which for many were understood as the default Muslim), are in control of many of the state institutions such as school, police, judiciary, and military. Once again, this cannot be disregarded solely as a conspiracy theory since, as we saw in chapter four, the AKP-government has strengthened its position in many of the mentioned institutions. For the metalheads then, both the political and social spheres are dominated by Muslims whom, as we have seen, are considered to be violent, ignorant, dangerous, and particularly repressive against subcultures like metal. Important to note is that their primary understanding of Islam is associated with the Sunni-Islam promoted by the state:

But I'm talking about just the Sunni, you know Sunni? Sunni, Alevi and Sufi, but the problem is Sunnis. Just the Sunnis.

As can be seen above, Sunnis, associated with the majority society and AKP, are understood as the problem. Interesting to note is the fact that the metalhead above is not acknowledging that many Sufi-orders consider themselves as part of the broader umbrella of Sunni-Islam, or that many Sunni-Muslim are engaged within Sufi-orders. The quote should rather be interpreted to target those Muslims who are not Sufis or Alevis, those are the problem. While Sunni-Islam was, for many, the main antagonist, others did not differentiate at all, and two were of the opinion that Alevis were the worst. Besides the quote above, there were several other cases when the hatred towards Islam and Muslims were modified and challenged, something which we will turn to now.

### **But Not 'All Muslims'**

The hateful attitudes towards Islam and Muslims that I initially met, were in later discussions often modified. Consider the following excerpt from one of my interviews; I had just asked if religion could be a positive thing:

MET5 - Yeah for some people maybe, a few, a few, very few people, maybe 1% in the society is good because of religion, if they live on a true way of the religion, which is not true for me, they are ok. But 99% is, I think their mind is blackened with the religion. They, ok I already read the book, but yes most things, about the ladies in heaven and jihadi [are bad] as you know, but a few

things if they, people, put correctly in their life, they can live better. If they are living in a religious mind, but not for me.

D - If you interpret it in a good way [M1 – Yeah] it can be good?

MET5 - Because in my last house I, my neighbor was an imam...

D - Ah.

MET5 - Yeah and I was always wearing a Morbid Angel t-shirt, and my beard was like this [long], and my hair was long, and when he saw me on the road he comes to me, puts his hand to my shoulder and he walks with me, he always loved me and we talked with him. This is... if they will believe something, they have to believe something like him.

D - Ah so it can be good if [interrupted].

MET5 - Yeah it can be good yeah.

D - But you think that most people don't do it [interpret it right]?

MET5 - No. But don't understand me like I'm a supporter of Islam, but if you checked the book and if you can take only the good parts, a few parts are good, because a lot of things are shitty and like an historical, not an historical, it's like a comic [laugh] or something. They can be a good person like the old imam that... like my neighbor, but most of them are understanding Islam in a brutal way - tattoos? - you are an atheist. Ok I'm an atheist but I don't want people to learn that I'm a non-believer. If I live in another country its ok for me but in a Muslim country, it's impossible.

Several aspects are important to note here. Firstly, it might seem like a big contradiction to alter the interpretation of Islam to one of tolerance instead of violence but, as I will argue below, this is not necessarily a contradiction. Secondly, most people still “understand Islam in a brutal way”, which is in line with previous quotes. Although many were eager to point out that they hated religion in general, and Islam in particular, Sufism and Alevism were, if not left out, at least not regarded as bad. Partly because many considered Alevism as culture and not religion, a view covered in chapter four. Similarly, Christians and Jews were not specifically targeted in the same way that Sunnis were (although they were included in the general hatred towards religion). This could also be seen as an example of the reflexive anti-reflexivity practiced by the scene. Although nuanced in interviews and conversations, Christians and Jews were not excluded from hatred and violence in lyrics and artworks. In other words, they are reflexive about Christians' and Jews' status as minorities in Turkey, but anti-reflexive in relation to the material they produce.

The examples above might lead one to think that minorities, in general, were excluded but that was not the case either. I heard many times that Arabs were causing problems in Turkey, and

many saw them as *the* Sunni. Interesting to note is that none of the metalheads mentioned Yezids which are regarded as “the Satanist of the Middle East” by Swedish esoterics and Satanists (Faxneld, 2017). This polemic towards Yezidis is also common around the Middle East.

### Family

It was not uncommon that a general hatred towards Islam and Muslims was nuanced by other, similar stories as the one above with the Imam. In relation to family members, most of the metalheads either hid or censored (did not tell them about the lyrics) their engagement with black metal if they knew that their families would be disturbed or disappointed by it. One metalhead even joined his father for the ritual slaughter of animals during the *Eid al-Adha*. When asking about the character of his upbringing I got the following answer:

HAX9 - Well it was kind of both actually. Because my mom is super-secular, but my father is super-religious I don't know how they ended up together [laughs]. I was attending to those Quran-courses when I was little I also know the, like how to pray, how to exercise other rituals and I also go with my dad sometimes, not to the mosque but sacrificing animals or something because he forced me to, but I am still ok with this because I don't want my father to know me as a heretic, but he knows inside, but he doesn't reflect it so.

D - So do you still celebrate religious holidays or stuff like that?

HAX9 - No not intentionally no... as I say my whole, the bigger family is super-Sunni. So, I kind of go to visit them with my father but if it's up to me I wouldn't, that's the point.

D - So you sort of played the part of you know... in order not to make a fuzz just...

HAX9 - Yeah why should I? I mean I don't lose anything I also love my father, so I wouldn't want to hurt his feelings... because he would be really devastated by that so why should I make a big fuzz about that? I mean I just get along, and that's ok with me I don't really care.

Although the metalhead hates religion, he takes a pragmatic position in relation to his father and extended family. Emphasizing, for me, his self-identified status as a “heretic” that only visit his religious family because his father forces him to, reveals the importance of ideal over praxis. That he is practically involved in (some) religious activities is not seen as problematic since he, if he could, would choose not to do so. Important to note is that his life as a heretic, is enabled by his knowledge of Islam and its rituals, making it possible for him to “play the part of Muslim” in certain environments. Similar attitudes were voiced in relation to other public environments such as workplaces, and many did not want their colleagues to find out about their black metal engagement, or their attitudes toward religion, since they thought it could jeopardize their position

at work. Similarly, sub-cultural clothing such as band t-shirts, was usually avoided in work-related environments. Furthermore, only one of the metalheads had gone through the trouble to actively change the religious box on Turkish identity cards to “blank” instead of “Islam” (Özenç 2014).

That many of the metalheads chose to have a more pragmatic attitude towards their families, friends, and, workplace, might at first seem like a contradiction, especially since the previous discussion about authenticity were connected to hosting clear anti-religious sentiments. However, according to Patrick Williams, this pragmatic attitude is common within subcultures. As we saw in the previous chapter anti-Islamic sentiments should be seen as a subcultural act of resistance. Resistance is also (c)overt and in that regard, it is important to note that even though “... resistance is intentional at the level of individual thought, the desire for recognition might not be.”(Williams, 2011, 103). That the metalhead above is participating in religious activities could still be understood as a form of resistance since the intention behind participating is not one of worship, but to conceal for his father his heretic thoughts. Of course, not everyone participating in religious activities are doing so from an intention of worship, but as in this case, to strongly voice an opposition to it for me, and for himself, helps to legitimize his participation in relation to his subcultural identity. What the metalhead’s story above also showcase is how his father tries to foster him to become a good Muslim or at least consciously or not puts social pressure on him to act Muslim in certain situations. The “forced compliance” (Hjärpe 1997) practiced by his father could be seen as an attempt to have his son, through the communal aspect of rituals, to engage with his Muslim identity, which can be resisted. It also showcases that everyday reality, as such, forces many of the metalheads to take a pragmatic stance in certain environments while at the same time not depriving them of their agency.

## Summary

This chapter has drawn attention to the fact that phrases such as “I hate Muslims and Islam” do not necessarily imply *all Muslims* and *all Islam(s)*, but rather take on specific meanings depending on previous experiences. Although Muslims, in general, are perceived as ignorant, dangerous, and violent, this was mainly connected to state-supported Sunni-Islam, excluding (for the most part) Alevis and Sufism. Similarly, the beliefs or religious engagement of the metalheads’ own families were, although disliked, not openly refused or disrespected, revealing a pragmatism from the black metal scene not always acknowledged by researchers or the scene itself. The anti-religious discourse practiced within the subculture is, when exported outside of the subculture, not actively pursued and in many cases avoided. It could even be said that some metalheads participation in a subculture as black metal, is dependent on that the subcultural discourse is kept internal. In that way, the reflexive anti-reflexive space can be maintained.

# Chapter Eight

## Concluding Remarks

This thesis has tried to bring attention to, and answer, several questions. Firstly, the religious semiotics resources that are utilized by the scene, is of multifaceted character. That is, the scene utilizes semiotic resources from all of the three Abrahamic faiths, but also makes pagan and Satanic references. In terms of Christian and Jewish references, it is primarily core-concepts, with a high symbolic meaning, or widely known semiotics, that are used – such as Christ, Jesus, God, Christians, Jews, Priests, Rabbis, Churches, and Crosses (although inverted). The Islamic semiotic resources found are of a similar character, albeit “richer” in terms of drawing on more specific aspects of the Muslim tradition, including references to specific aspects of the *haji* and Islamic doomsday scenarios. Furthermore, the majority of the scenarios and contexts, in which these semiotic resources are found, are of a clearly hateful, humiliating, and blasphemous nature. Since semiotic resources are generally ordered by semiotic regimes, the Islamic semiotics used, becomes, in the context of Turkey, particularly interesting.

Islamic semiotic resources are normally governed by Islamic semiotic regimes, such as that of Diyanet in Turkey. To make these Islamic semiotics part of anti-Islamic narratives, which are relating to an overall anti-religious discourse of the black metal subculture, is part of constructing a competing and subversive regime (or counter-discourse). But this conscious intervention by of the Turkish black metal subculture, is nonetheless dependent on that the dominant Islamic semiotic regime (of AKP and Diyanet), and the discourse it produces, is maintained. If not, the counter-narrative that emerges from the black metal scene would not be transgressive, and thus not provocative. If the narratives produced by the AKP and Diyanet are superseded by the black metal scene's, the transgressive element of religious, and more specifically Islamic, critique is lost.

As should be clear by now, many of the Turkish black metal bands are actively seeking to engage in transgressive discourses, and they do so for different reasons. For many of the bands, transgression was connected to their own demands of authenticity. In order to be black metal, one had to engage in a hateful, Satanic, and anti-religious discourse. Bands who failed to do so were ridiculed and excluded from many of the metalheads definition of black metal. To make use of Islamic semiotics in lyrics and artworks was, in this case, not mandatory and many bands avoid the subject due to the risks involved. But for some, utilizing Islamic semiotics in an anti-Islamic way, was the only way to be authentic and true to themselves and their black metal identity. This, of course, has to do with the context of Turkey, where anti-Christian symbolism, is ineffective to

convey the intended message of hatred towards religion. To communicate an anti-religious identity in Turkey, is to be anti-Islamic.

Another thing worth repeating here is the timing of when these Islamic semiotics starts to appear. Although I found exceptions, Hecker's observation that previous black metal bands in Turkey did not publicly use Islamic semiotics in order to attack Islam, is crucial to note. Does this mean that the previous generation of bands lacked a sense of originality and authenticity (which is a popular opinion amongst the bands today)? Maybe, but that would be to make it too simple. As stated before, a majority of the songs and albums that utilize explicit references to Islam was produced from 2012 and onwards. It does not only correlate with the ruling party AKP's, time in power, but more importantly, with its "autocratic turn" and an increased visibility of religion (Islam) in the social and public sphere.

Although, the majority of the bands stressed the fact that they were non-political, everyone I talked to from the scene was appreciative of the new scenic expressions, stating that they thought it was needed, or vocalized its empowering qualities of expressing opinions not deemed possible in the public. In that sense, the bands' self-proclaimed stance as non-political, does not derive from the fact that their music could be perceived as political, or consumed as an act of defiance. The newly emerged expression in the scene needs therefore also to be acknowledged as a conscious subcultural act of counter-hegemonic resistance, especially, when taking into account, the attitudes voiced by the scene towards the current ruling party and government.

It seems therefore that the American sociologist Deena Weinstein's hypothesis regarding metal music needs to be altered. Weinstein's assumption that extreme metal music speaks for the proletariat of the world insofar that the music becomes a "... recurrent cultural response to common structural tensions in capitalist economies." (Weinstein 2011, 56), does not, I argue, hold true for Turkey. Nor is it true for the wider Middle East region where for example (LeVine 2008; Hecker 2012; Crowcroft 2017), have shown that it is mostly people from the higher social strata (upper- and middle class) that are engaged with metal music, forming bands, going to shows, and rehearsing. These observations are also confirmed by my own research since an overwhelming majority of the metalheads I spoke to had middle-class background and were well educated and thus do not constitute what would typically be classified as working class. Furthermore, although they are mostly male, angry, and frustrated – that frustration is not primarily sprung from "proletarian living condition" but rather the societal and religious restrictions of Turkish society. Similar to Paul D. Greene, who states in his study of Nepalese metal that "Although broader social processes were undoubtedly at work behind the scenes, it is important to note that, in the experiences of my informants, Nepali metal raged against a machine that was distinctly local."

(Greene 2011, 111). The metalheads in this study are also “raging against a machinery that is distinctly local”, therefore, I agree with Greene when he continues to state that studies like these need to be approached ethnographically: “[...] notions of rebellion and conformity must be explored ethnographically in the immediate cultural setting in which the music acquires cultural force. What may be experienced as transgressive in one context may be normative in another.” (Greene 2011, 111).

Although transgression as an act of resistance is actively sought for, it is only done so in certain contexts and towards certain people. Well aware that the cultural material they produce could have severe legal and social consequences, the scene primarily engages in (c)overt resistance. The scene keeps the transgression within the subcultural and therefore “hidden”, while simultaneously vocalizing the resistance in “public” subcultural spheres, such as concerts or online. In workplaces, the universities, or while socializing outside of the subculture, the anti-Islamic discourse is avoided and for most of the time, the same goes for more “private spheres”, such as the extended and immediate family. This has, of course, many explanations, fear of losing one’s job, respect for one’s parents, or the desire to avoid unwanted conflicts, are some of them. But it is also related to whom, and what, are perceived to constitute the problematic Muslim. Parents’ religious identity, for example, did not provoke the same feelings of resentment and anger (unless it hindered them to engage with their subcultural identity), and neither did Sufism or Alevism. Instead, the anger leveled at Islam and Muslims, was primarily reserved for state-sanctioned Sunni-Islam. Sunni-Islam has been part of the Turkish state identity for a long time, and it is considered to be an important aspect of what constitutes a Turkish citizen. Through the AKP, the Diyanet and the educational system (where religious classes in practice are mandatory), Sunni-Islam is propagated to the people, which further strengthens the connection between religion and the state. Furthermore, the majority of the metalheads in this study have grown up in an AKP ruled Turkey and its politics of pious conservatism, and its supporters are thought of as the default Muslim. In contemporary Turkey then, Islam is the state and the state is Islam, and religious demarcations that fall outside of this paradigm, such as the “good neighbor” or a mom’s occasional prayer, is not subjected to the same kind of hatred and resistance. This dynamic of hatred towards religion is not available through an analysis of the black metal scene’s cultural production alone, but becomes accessible only after critically engaging with the scene and its people through fieldwork. Relating to this, the polemics leveled at (black) metal in Turkey and the accusations of Satanism that its adherents have to endure are, as this study has shown, unjustified.

Lastly, this thesis challenges the popular myth that there exists a homogenous respect for Islam in Muslim majority societies. It encourages scholars in the field of Islamic studies, to not only

occupy themselves with studying people who actively engage with Islam from a devout perspective, but also to study those who do so from a position of contempt. In that regard, black metal in Muslim majority societies, provides an interesting point of departure and is something future research would be wise to pay attention to.

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# Appendix One

## Letter of information about the research project: (Empirical Study of) Participants in the Black Metal Subculture in Turkey

### [ENGLISH]

My name is Douglas Mattsson, I am a Swedish Master's student at Lund University, Sweden. This research project is a part of my future master thesis. The aim of the thesis is to explore the subculture surrounding extreme and black metal in Turkey, with a special focus on Istanbul.

Through the usage of ethnographic methods as interviews and observations, the thesis hopes to provide better knowledge about an under-researched subculture in Muslim majority societies.

Apart from interviews and observations at concerts, I will also analyse albums, posters and other material outputs connected with Turkish extreme metal.

Participation by members of the extreme and black metal-subculture is voluntary and participation can, whenever and for whatever reason, be terminated and former participants can demand that data connected to them can be deleted. Participation is of course confidential and interviews and observations will be anonymized. As participation is voluntary, it is built on formally given, oral consent by the participant to the researcher.

Parts of the gathered material will be made public through a master's thesis and possible scholarly articles following that. The material may also be used in future research for example in a PhD research project.

Questions about the project or participation can be sent to: [douglas.gideon.mattsson@gmail.com](mailto:douglas.gideon.mattsson@gmail.com)

Kind regards,

Douglas Mattsson

### [TÜRKÇE]

Adım Douglas Mattsson; İsveç Lund Üniversitesinde yüksek lisans öğrencisiyim. Bu araştırma projesi, gelecek tezimin bir parçası olacak. Tez, özellikle İstanbul'a odaklanarak Türkiye'deki extreme ve black metal müzik altkültürlerini incelemeyi amaçlıyor.

Tezde röportaj ve gözlem gibi etnografik metodların kullanımı yolu ile, çoğunluğu Müslüman olan bir toplumdaki araştırılmamış bir alt kültür hakkında bilgi sağlanması hedefleniyor.

Röportajlar ve konserlerdeki gözlemlerin yanı sıra; albümler, afişler ve Türk extreme müziğine ilişkin yayımların analizlerini de yapacağım. Extreme ve black metal alt-kültürlerinde yer alan kişilerin katkıları gönüllülük ile olacak olup; katkıda bulunan kişi her an, her ne sebepten kaynaklanıyorsa ilişkisini kesebilir ve kendilerine ilişkin verilerin silinmesini isteyebilir.

Katkılar tabii ki gizlilik içinde olup, röportajlar ve gözlemler anonim olarak yer alacaktır. Katılım gönüllülük üzerine olduğu için; katkıda bulunan kişinin araştırmacıya vermiş olduğu resmi sözlü onaya dayanır.

Toplanan materyallerin bir kısmı yüksek lisans tezi ve akademik makaleler yolu ile kamuya açık olacaktır. Yine ileride, doktora tezi, gibi araştırmalarda kullanılabilir.

Projeye veya katkıda bulunmaya ilişkin soruları : [douglas.gideon.mattsson@gmail.com](mailto:douglas.gideon.mattsson@gmail.com) adresine gönderebilirsiniz.

Saygılarımla,  
Douglass Mattsson.

## Appendix Two

### **Interview Guide: about Black Metal – Music, Lyrics, and Identity.**

First contact with the music? – when, how? Inspiration? – Norway? Other bands in Turkey/Istanbul?

**Why BM?** – what is it in BM that you like? Is something better – if so, why? Relationship to other metal-musicians (elitism in BM)? The personal value attached to BM? Self-taught or professionally schooled musician?

**Lyrics** – are they important? Do they reflect personal opinions? If so, why? Part of genre-writing or what meaning are described to them? What do you mean when you write [insert example]? Earlier BM-bands such as [example] did not publicly use references to Islam or were overtly anti-religious in lyrics, why is that?

Do black metal serve a special “purpose” in society? If so, what?

Some find BM provocative and shocking, do you think that is an important part of the genre? If so, why, and what is it that is shocking? What do you think about the fact that BM musicians and fans are portrayed and at times regarded as Satanists?

Have BM-music in Turkey changed? If so, how and why? What are the biggest challenges to the scene today?

**Clothing** – symbols, inverted crosses, corpse paint?

**Satanic Scare** – scared of reprisals from the majority society? The accusations, what do you think about those? Blasphemy laws in Turkey – does it serve a purpose to be blasphemous? Subculture? Community?

**Records and semiotics (symbols)** – inverted crosses/crescents? Islamic symbols? Heterodoxy, non-mainstream symbols? Heathen symbols? Which contexts and why?

In your opinion - why are there so few women/girls in the scene? Both performing in bands as well as listens to this music. Some BM lyrics use explicit references to sex and sexual violence. Why is that element common do you think?

### **Personal information, family, religion, religiosity**

Age, job, education, occupation?

Growing up – secular? Religious? Socialization. What do your family think about BM? Sufism? Alevi's?

Do you pray? If so, when? Religious holidays? Religions role in society? Problem? What do you think/feel when you hear the Ezan? Associations? Personal belief? Do you go to the Mosque – when and why? AKP? Families religiosity?

Critical towards “the establishment” but not the religion in itself? Religious but not Muslims?