

Edited by Jan Charvát  
and Anna Oravcová

# OUT OF STEP

Politics and Subcultures  
in the Post-Socialist Space



edice **bod**

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in the Post-Socialist Space**

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### *Politics and Subcultures in the Post-Socialist Space*

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## Introduction

After the fall of communism in 1989, Czechoslovakia experienced a boom in new trends, which had until then been prevented by the communist regime. One of them was the rapid development of subcultures and their interconnection with (often) radical political agendas. Clashes between racist skinheads and anarchist punks were commonplace in the nineties. The formation of the far right and far left led to, among other things, the politicization of subcultures and their involvement in political activism. For many people, however, it did not always have to be aggressive and shocking, as in the case of the open adoration of historical Nazism in the case of racist skinheads. At the same time, issues of ecology, anti-racism, and women's rights were being closely linked to the subcultural space. Concurrently, there was a certain counterflow within the subcultures that rejected political activism and focused more on forms of entertainment. Over time, the original, strongly political ethos partially disappeared, and we have seen depoliticization; however, in some cases we have also seen a subsequent re-politicization of the subcultures. What is and what is not politics, and how it crosses its borders, it is still a long-standing question for many youth subcultures. This question is further complicated by the fact that subcultures in the post-socialist space often behave differently compared to their 'mother' forms in Western Europe. What caused this? What is the role of the post-socialist experience in the process of politicizing and depoliticizing subcultures? Moreover, what forms may subcultural politics take in the post-socialist world? These are the questions we focus on, while at the same time offering possible answers.

Rather than on the subcultures themselves, the central line of this book focuses on the question of politics in youth subcultures within the post-socialist space. The first two chapters of our book discuss the terms subculture, scene, and social movement. In the subsequent chapters we focus on the concrete form of subcultures as they developed in the post-socialist space of Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic. The chapters after that analyse specific subcultures and their forms of politicization. Overall, we identify the essential shared features that define Czech post-socialist subcultures.

### THE CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

In the Czech academic environment, the topic of subcultures and politics is not as well researched an area as it is in Western Europe. Yet we can identify distinct approaches within this field of research. In principle, the difference is based on the disciplines these approaches come from – political science, sociology, anthropology, and contemporary history.

The first studies discussing subcultures (within the context of other subjects) were published by political scientists focusing on issues of extremism and securitization. In 1998, the publication *Politický extremismus a radikalismus v České republice* (Political Extremism and Radicalism in the Czech Republic) was published in Brno and included some references to subcultures, especially skinheads and punk (Fiala et al. 1998). Other works have been influenced in particular by the approach of the German theory of extremism (Bastl 2000, Mareš 2003, Mareš, Smolík 2012, Smolík 2010, Charvát 2007, Vejvodová 2008, 2011). However, the aim of the theory of extremism is not to explore subcultures but rather to record and describe their ‘defective behaviour’. With the gradual decline in the relevance of subcultures within the concept of extremism, interest in this subject matter among political scientists is falling as well, and most of the authors mentioned above have abandoned the study of subcultures. Josef Smolík and Jan Charvát represent exceptions.

In a way, a critical approach to the abovementioned political school was formed through the second direction taken by subcultural studies in the Czech environment, which is represented in particular by the collective monograph *Revolta stylem* (Revolt through Style), created under the editorial leadership of Marta Kolářová (Kolářová ed. 2011). The collective of authors focused on four subcultures (punk, skinheads, freetekno, and hip-hop), including the specific features that shaped their political content in the Czech Republic after 1989; this approach is based on the traditions of sociological studies. Some of *Revolta stylem*'s authors went on to make further contributions to the understanding of punk and hip-hop subcultures (Pixová 2007, Pixová 2013, Oravcová 2016, Oravcová 2017).

Ondřej Císař and Martin Koubek (2012) then attempted to create their own methodological tool. Using the example of a sociological probe into the Brno hardcore scene, they came up with a conceptual grid that allowed them to divide the internal diversity of the local scene along two axes: commercialization and political articulation. The first axis moves on the product-process scale, while the second axis of political articulation captures the span of identity-politics. The combination of these two axes is typologized into four main sectors: hardcore as entertainment, style and music—an integral part of the consumer society; hardcore as an alternative lifestyle; hardcore as a basis for potential recruitment of new activists; and, finally, hardcore as a counterculture.

Other authors working on the topic include Martin Heřmanský and Hedvika Novotná from the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University in Prague. Their chapter from the collective monograph *Fight Back: Punk, Politics, and Resistance* (The Subcultures Network 2014) showcases both the question of subcultural ideology and the level of cooperation between subcultures (mainly punk and skinheads).

The third academic stream has formed around the Centre for the Study of Popular Culture (CSPK) and the Czech and Slovak Archive of Subcultures. Fundamental contributions include, in particular, the book by Ondřej Daniel *Násilím proti „novému biedermei-*

eru“ (Violently Against the New Biedermeier) from 2016 and the collective monograph entitled *Kultura svépomoci* (Self-Help Culture) of the same year, which focuses on the 1989 period in particular.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The team of authors behind this book covers all three streams of research concerning the Czech subcultural environment mentioned above. Therefore, the research team is interdisciplinary and offers a relatively varied range of views on the subject of politics and subcultures in the post-socialist space. We aim to proceed chronologically and to show consecutively how particular subcultures were, at various times, politicized or depoliticized.

The first two chapters are of a theoretical nature and introduce the reader to the basic approaches to the subject. Marta Kolářová's chapter focuses on the question of how to define the concept of subculture itself. The author focuses on the basic definition of the studied field and presents the two main approaches to exploring subcultures, namely the Birmingham School and the post-subcultural approach, while also debating the possibilities of applying these theories to the post-socialist environment.

The subsequent chapter by Grzegorz Piotrowski focuses on the question of the relationship between subcultures and social movements, or scenes. Grzegorz discusses the question of maintaining the boundaries of subculture, as well as the internal dispositions and relationships to the politicization of subculture that affect the power of political movements.

The next four chapters offer case studies focusing on individual subcultures. The first, by Giuseppe Maiello and Martina Cichá, deals with personal politicization through participation in the punk subculture while, at the same time, showing the differences between the concept of punk in the Eastern Bloc and Western Europe, especially before 1989 and partially afterwards.

Ondřej Daniel follows with a chapter dedicated to the Czech metal subculture, focusing on the period around and after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Chronologically, it moves along an axis of

time more towards the present. He focuses on the political connotations of the black metal scene in the context of violence, as well as its conceptualization and aesthetics, including links to organized racist groups.

This is followed by Jan Charvát's chapter, which examines the emergence and development of the racist branch of the skinhead subculture. Based on a content analysis of Czech White Power music, the author analyses the formation of fundamental postulates that formed the axis of skinhead identity.

Finally, the fourth case study focuses on hip-hop. Anna Oravcová's discussion of political rap and hip-hop activism compares the situation in the USA during the emergence of this subculture with the current form of hip-hop in the Czech Republic shows differences in the understanding and organization of this subculture. The critical question is the relationship between the dichotomy of authenticity versus mainstream, focusing on representatives of both these streams and their political activity.

Ondřej Slačálek and Michaela Pixová then follow up with a chapter describing the essential development of the punk, techno, and underground subcultures in the Czech environment. However, their aim is not to provide a historical description but to capture cultural memory and the way this works in all three studied fields. The authors draw attention to the vital characteristics of the 1990s, which represents the 'golden age' of the subcultures, and examine their founding myths.

The last chapter, by Valentin Nicolescu and Elena D. Neaga, looks at a somewhat different subcultural form represented by the Romanian *manele*. It focuses on the politicization of this specific subculture, particularly on the public condemnation of the subculture associated with the Balkan Roma and its defence by left-wing activists.

The final chapter of the book summarizes the fundamental postulates of the individual chapters. Due to unforeseen circumstances, including the world pandemic of Covid-19, the book comes out with some delay. The text reflects the situation towards the end of 2018, when it was finalized.



# Post-Subcultures in Post-Socialism: Transnational and Local Contexts of Czech Youth Music Subcultures<sup>1</sup>

*Marta Kolářová*

Subcultures in the post-socialist region have proliferated since the beginning of the 1990s, coinciding with a period of time when Western subcultures were being redefined by subcultural scholars and being seen as profoundly different from their classical versions in the post-war era. Instead of subcultures, new terms have been coined: post-subcultures, scenes, neo-tribes, communities with various taste or lifestyle choices, and so forth. These new youth music formations are constructed as fluid, fragmented, individualistic, apolitical, and based on consumption.

Some of the contemporary Eastern European subcultures have roots in the pre-1989 past, but their socialist predecessors were distinct from youth formations in Western culture in that they were criminalized and marginalized by the communist authorities. This also meant, however, that they did not fall into the trap of mainstream culture and commodification.

Schwartz and Winkel (2016), who study Eastern European subcultures, frame them in a global context and ask if the term 'post-socialist' is still needed for a generation of young people who grew up in the era after the collapse of the socialist regimes, more than a quarter of century ago, and who do not have any experience of totalitarian regimes. I would suggest that since the fall of communism there has not been any major change in Central and Eastern European countries that could be compared to the Second World War and which was as formative a phenome-

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1 The study was carried out by a research team (Marta Kolářová, Anna Oravcová, Michaela Pixová, Ondřej Slačálek, Petra Stejskalová) as a part of a wider research project 'Shared values and norms as sources of social cohesion and negative impacts of social differentiation in the Czech Republic' at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences and CESES, financed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.

non to the 'post-war' subcultures of the West. The dissolution of Czechoslovakia into the Czech and Slovak Republics in 1993 or accession to the European Union in 2004, for example, do not seem to be significant turning points in the subcultural sphere. It thus seems that the term post-socialism is still relevant.

In this chapter I will address the aspects of contemporary post-socialist youth music subcultures in the Czech Republic. My research question is: are the subcultures post-socialist, locally specific or globally influenced, and—similar to those in the West—post-subcultural?

The article draws on field research concentrating on four selected youth music subcultures (punk, skinheads, hip-hop, and techno/rave) in the Czech Republic that included participant observation and fifty in-depth interviews with subcultural participants conducted between 2009–10. I also use my observations, diaries, and photos from prior research that focused on alter-globalization activists related to music subcultures during the period from 1998 to 2009 (Kolářová 2009). Methodologically, the Chicago School, insider research (Hodkinson 2005), and the interpretations of meanings by subcultural members (Muggleton 2000) inspired my participant observation of subcultures. The data analysis is based on a qualitative examination of narratives regarding understandings and interpretations of the subcultural styles and experiences of young people. The aim of the paper is to contextualize the research on local youth subcultures within post-subcultural and post-socialist scholarship, and to describe to what extent contemporary Czech youth subcultures can be seen as having post-subcultural characteristics, as well as how much they are specifically post-socialist. I particularly address class issues within subcultures, political values, relation to mainstream culture, and the formation of communities, in addition to discussing Western or external influences and local transformations of cultural items and symbols.

## POSTMODERN CHALLENGE: SUBCULTURES VERSUS POST-SUBCULTURES

Subcultural research has a long tradition starting with the Chicago School, which focused on communities of bohemians, vagabonds, and hobos representing minority culture in the 1920s, and in which the notion of subculture was used for designated groups outside society or the urban underclass. In the 1970s, subcultures were studied by the Birmingham School (CCCS - Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies), which interpreted post-war subcultures of punks, skinheads, and mods as specific expressions of working class culture in opposition and symbolic resistance to hegemony and dominant culture. Subcultures were also defined by age and were understood as youth groups. Hebdige (2012 [1979]) interpreted subcultures as forms of resistance that expressed contradictions and disagreement with ruling ideology through style, understood as a symbolic disruption of social order. The meaning of style was primarily a way of communicating difference and group identity.

Since the 1990s, contemporary post-subcultural theory has critically addressed the Birmingham School's legacy. Many authors argue that the CCCS model is outdated and not suitable for the analysis of subcultures today. Furthermore, the CCCS approached subcultures theoretically, without interviewing real members of particular groups (Muggleton 2000). Taking into account the meanings that the subculturalists attach to their activities, Muggleton thus suggests the use of ethnographic methods such as interviews and participant observation. The CCCS also understood subcultures as economically determined, and situated them within the context of oppression and conflict against incorporation into bourgeois culture. Subcultural participation was thus seen as a response by the working class to its marginalization and alienation. According to Muggleton, however, this interpretation is based on a false assumption that all members of subcultures share the same class position. He therefore insists

that culture, values, and lifestyles are not to be seen only as reflections of class affiliation.

The CCCS presented a heroic concept of subcultures and saw them as subversive because they adopted a subordinated position. Marchart (2003) argues that from such a position it is not possible to automatically deduce resistance or subversion. In many cases there is nothing political about subcultural politics, because it operates at the micro level of everyday life in symbolic forms of resistance. This is in contrast to counterculture, which addresses political issues on a macro level. Politicization of subcultures is possible only when they go beyond their particularism and unite with other social actors.

The CCCS concept of subcultures is a British model based on the study of particular segments of British youth (workers, Whites, males) in a particular time period (the post-war generation). It is a specifically grounded concept which, if used elsewhere, must take regional and time differences into account (Bennett, Kahn-Harris 2004). Some scholars even consider the notion of subculture itself to be redundant in a contemporary multicultural society with a high variability of cultural styles and identities. The previous opposition of dominant culture and resisting subcultures has vanished as the dominant culture disintegrated into a plurality of lifestyles and tastes (Chaney 2004).

In the 1990s, the paradigmatic model of subcultures became the club culture or dance (rave) culture (Luckman 1998). Club culture represents a turn away from and dismissal of the 1960s and 1970s oppositional model of subcultures. Club culture also represents the dissolution of formations of resistance based on class position, and is characterized by individualism, consumerism, a Dionysian culture of endless dance, and the consumption of psychedelic drugs. Pleasure based on consumption replaced the political protest of the past. Rave does not hide its apolitical orientation, striving to escape from everyday life and to celebrate the common experience of pleasure and elation (Carrington, Wilson 2004). The significant departure of new cultural formations from strictly defined subcultures made some scholars

depart from the notion of subculture itself and suggest other concepts: youth lifestyles (Miles 2000 in Carrington, Wilson 2004), scenes (Bennett, Peterson 2004), or neo-tribes (Maffesoli 1996).

The idea of neo-tribes was important, especially when analysing dance culture. According to Maffesoli, there is a process whereby fundamental forms of community are renewed, and, at least in the 1990s, rational, contractual relations shift to emphatic forms of sociability. The feelings of togetherness in a group is based on informal relations and temporal connections that are associated with taste, lifestyle, and shared consumption. Individuals can belong to multiple tribes and switch from one group to another. Individual satisfaction and needs are positioned higher than collective and political values. Neo-tribalism is dependent on an individualized society, since when they are not tied to traditional communities, people search for their reference groups.

Muggleton (2000) suggests the notion of post-subculture and constructs its ideal model based on reflections of postmodern society. Authenticity is not important any more as the power of the media has ensured that there is nothing original in subcultural style that has not been subjected to commodification and commercialization. Subcultural actors can freely choose the style they want and move from style to style<sup>2</sup> because subcultural style is used for image, not for its hidden meanings. They do not have to be afraid of contradictions in style as there are no rules, no correct ideological beliefs, only playing with styles. While the traditional subcultural theory described subsequences of separated styles in linear time as well as strong boundaries between subcultures, the 1990s were characterized by fragmentation, revivals, hybridization, and the coexistence of many styles at the same time. Postmodern subcultural identities are multiple, fluid, and based on consumption. Post-subculturalists prefer individualism over collectivism, heterogeneity over conformity, and festivity over interest in politics.

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2 Polhemus (1997) uses the notion of a 'supermarket of style' for choice of subculture and 'style surfing' for mobility between subcultures.

This is, however, only an ideal model that Muggleton empirically tested on punks, goths, skinheads, and hippies. These groups could be characterized as postmodern because they showed fragmented, heterogeneous, and individualistic identification, and they emphasized freedom from structures, control and restrictions, as well as opposition to conventional styles. On the other hand, other postmodern characteristics were not as strong since these young people considered themselves authentic, and attitudes were more important to them than style. Muggleton's informants come from both the working class and middle class, so these subcultures should not be seen only as a specific culture of working class youth.

Nevertheless, some authors, Muggleton included, see limits to the focus of post-subcultural theory on diversity and fragmentation of styles. Weinzierl and Muggleton (2003) also turned their attention to the notion of neo-tribes, which according to them explains only particular formations of contemporary youth culture and not the political and cultural activism of young people around the turn of the millennium. The post-subcultures should not be seen only as hedonist, individualistic, and politically disengaged because of the emergence of the alter-globalization movement. These new protest groups use subcultural codes in the political field. Some tribes, such as ravers, have connected with radical leftist counter-cultures and expressive environmental and peace movements and are creating new post-subcultural formations that oppose the hegemonic culture of neoliberalism.

In addition, St John (2003), drawing on neo-tribalism, shows that groups such as Reclaim the Streets! Earth First!, and techno-anarchist sound systems do not only care about fun and feelings of affiliation to certain tribes within which individuals can consume music together. These groupings organize festivals connecting fun with protest, direct action with a focus on global political issues that spread during the global day of actions in the form of street parties and other creative events. St John points out that young people overcome the hedonism of post-subcultures by moving toward political activism. These techno-tribes are networks of small mobile communities of dissent, based on the principles of

non-hierarchy and do-it-yourself. They are interested in environmental sustainability, social justice, human and animal rights; they stand in opposition to global threats using non-violent direct action; and simultaneously create communities and engage in musical experiments. Furthermore, another classic subculture that seemed to have died out through commercialization and incorporation into the music industry—punk—has arisen from the dead and made itself visible as political anarcho-punk, a redefinition of the subculture that is active in social movements against economic globalization.

Bennett (2011) evaluates the post-subcultural turn in the last two decades and argues that it has produced new conceptual approaches but also provoked many critical responses. He sees the future in combining elements of both subcultural and post-subcultural theory and in a multimethod empirical approach using both qualitative and quantitative data that will focus on global and local cultural influences of (post-)subcultures. Also, patterns of consumption, leisure and lifestyle should be studied in relation to structural inequalities such as class, gender, and ethnicity.

#### **THE UNDERGROUND AND ALTERNATIVE CULTURE: SUBCULTURES UNDER SOCIALISM**

The (sub)cultural sphere of the former Soviet Bloc does not correspond with Western theoretical models in two ways: Firstly, the real conditions of existence for subcultures were different in totalitarian regimes. And secondly, sociological studies of subcultures were carried out much later and were based on different theoretical and ideological positions.

Researchers studying subcultures in Russia (for instance, Tarasov 2008) point to the difficulty of applying Western theoretical approaches to a different cultural context. Pilkington (2004) questions whether post-subcultural theories can be used for the study of youth subcultures outside the ‘global core’ because in the post-socialist Russia there are different conditions for the existence of subcultures; for instance, different meeting spaces, a smaller

tradition of individualism, a weaker continuity of countercultural subcultures in the 1980s, and so on. Young people in Russia create locally rooted cultural strategies drawing on global resources and live a 'glocal' life. In Russia, the Western notion of subcultures was already known back in the 1970s but was taken as an ideological, not theoretical, tool. And simultaneously, it was criticized as 'bourgeois' because it referred to generational conflict rather than a class one. Subcultural studies did not appear until the 1990s; thus, it was a chance for researchers to avoid class reductionism (interpreting youth subcultures as working class resistance), and subcultures were understood more as a choice of lifestyle. The main research focus was on the diffusion of styles from the West, which is evident from the fact that young subculturalists (called *neformaly*) under communism were criticized by the wider society for their 'blind' imitation of 'decadent' Western cultural forms.

In socialist Czechoslovakia, the research questions on subcultures were informed by Marxist sociology. Kabátek (1989) describes a process of subcultural studies development that was inspired by sources different from those in Western academia. According to Czech socialist scholars, the Birmingham School failed to 'connect the class approach with a dialectical-materialist one' (Kabátek 1989: 453) even though the school was labelled Marxist. In Czechoslovakia, subcultures had been discussed since the 1960s, but some academics refused the term itself. Interest in the study of subcultures increased during the 1980s as a reflection of the transition of youth subcultures into the socialist society. Czechoslovak society faced the 'imitation of Western youth subcultures' and considered it a problem as well (Kabátek 1989: 456).

During normalization (the period between 1968 and 1989), alternative culture was primarily non-political, but the totalitarian regime made it resistant. It was ignored and suppressed by the communists via censorship, prohibition in the media, stigmatization, surveillance, and the imprisonment of its actors (Alan 2001). It was an amateur alternative music scene where the music was accompanied by lyrics in Czech (not English) so that the audience could understand the message. Alternative music styles that got

through the Iron Curtain were mostly punk, new wave, and folk, as well as reggae, industrial, hardcore, and especially metal in the late 1980s, during perestroika, when the regime was loosened: 'The alternative world of Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s was, thanks to its isolation, actually very lucky, as it could not be shaped by the market and commodified' (Vlček 2001: 259).

A study of punk and new wave subcultures in a socialist society using the oral history method (Vaněk 2002) describes the story of subcultural movements in a local context. Punk subculture came to Czechoslovakia from the West as early as 1976, and it grew into a distinctive youth culture with hundreds of active participants and thousands of supporters in the 1980s. To begin with, punks were not in opposition, but repression by means of state power, such as the cancellation of concerts and the criminalization of band members and fans, made the subculture politically resistant. The communists attacked punk with accusations of bourgeois manipulation, ideological sabotage, and being inimicable to socialism. Sometimes punks were even blamed for propagating fascism and a cult of violence. On the other hand, from a contemporary perspective, Vaněk sees punk subculture positively, as creating a foundation for civic society, and characterizes the informal groups as having 'an authentic experience of reality' (Vaněk 2002: 9).

Hell (2013) describes how punk subculture was suppressed by the official regime: by forbidding punk concerts, censoring texts and music, and compiling lists of prohibited bands. This all happened under strong cultural isolation, which meant that no Western punk bands were allowed to play in Czechoslovakia, and Czech bands lacked suitable subcultural spaces. The Czechoslovak communist regime was stricter in cultural politics than were the authorities in Poland, Hungary, or Yugoslavia, where it was possible to listen to punk on the radio, go to a punk-rock festival, or buy punk subcultural items in a specialized shop.

Although there was a boom in youth music subcultures after the fall of communism, especially in the 1990s, academic studies of contemporary subcultures did not appear until much later. Czech studies of subcultures have focused on reviewing theoretical litera-

ture (Smolík 2010), relations between punk and skinhead subcultures (Novotná, Dvořák 2008), freegan subculture (Lojdová 2014), club culture, and subcultural entrepreneurs (Kepplová 2015), but they have not addressed the specific post-subcultural and post-socialist aspects.

### **WORKING CLASS TROUBLE: CLASS ASPECTS OF SUBCULTURES**

Punk and skinhead subcultures have been connected to class symbolism from their beginnings. Hip-hop, too, carries class significances as it originates from a culture of poor Afro-Americans living in ghettos (Rose 1994). The class connotations of youth subcultures can be, however, quite problematic in a post-socialist country where class language was a part of communist propaganda and everyday life, and class as a term was, and still is, perceived negatively by people.

Drawing on data collected, the class aspects of subcultures can be understood in various aspects: (1) class (or socioeconomic) status in the wider society; (2) class symbolism and rhetoric; and (3) internal inequalities within the groups (subcultural capital) influenced by the economic power of young people and, again, related to class position. Regarding the class status (based on education, employment, and income) of subcultural participants, the hip-hoppers and skinheads interviewed were mostly working- or lower-middle class. There were some exceptions to these findings: the subcultures contained women and some men with higher education. Thus it cannot be said that Czech skinheads (or hip-hoppers) are only working class. The punks interviewed were both high school and university students, workers, and people with vocational education. The freetekno subculture is slightly different; the interviews were conducted with active participants who were, for the most part, university educated (or students at the time). On the other hand, the rave scene is highly diverse; we observed a fairly wide class spectrum, from working class participants to the children of elites.

Class symbolism is still very important for contemporary Czech skinheads. They use class symbols and rhetoric taken from the original British skinhead tradition (such as using the terms ‘working class’ and ‘working pride’ in English to label themselves). They do not mention any meanings that were negatively associated with class terms under socialism. As far as their working class status is concerned they stress it as a privilege and as a source of social capital within their group. Other skinheads consider working class pride to be a matter of history and consider it unimportant today. They emphasize only the skinhead visual style and music as relevant and think that skinheads do not have to belong to the working class. For instance, one skinhead girl from a university educated family, studying at university herself, perceives identification with the working class as a useless degradation.

Social status, job, and available income in particular (their own or from their parents) increase the opportunity to consume subcultural artefacts and experiences. The absence of financial capital as a serious limitation on participation in significant subcultural events was mentioned mostly by young punks, students that cannot afford to pay for tickets to expensive concerts or festivals. The lack of economic capital hinders their efforts to obtain subcultural capital in the form of stylish clothes, subcultural tattoos, and experience of subcultural events (compare Thornton 1997).

This limited opportunity to consume their subculture, expressed with regret by young punks, contrasts with the skinheads’ pride in accumulating subcultural artefacts, their declared ability to earn money and spend it on subcultural items. The hip-hoppers interviewed often despised youngsters from their own subculture who adopted the hip-hop style of sporting expensive clothes: ‘Here comes a guy and he has to have the best, the most luxurious things, so that you can see that he is from the wealthiest family and can afford it. These guys want to shock others with their money, their carefree approach to money, for example: “I just got five thousand [crowns] from my mom and I can spend it this evening”’ (Pavel, hip-hop, 31 years old).

These findings fit the hypotheses of postmodern individualization based on the assumption that taste and choice in lifestyle cannot be explained through class differences (Muggleton 2000: 161). Subcultures are distinctive in their expressive style and music, but they do not communicate their class affiliation through style. All the distinction in style means that they have a particular musical taste and belong to a specific community. Subcultures can protest against the dominant culture, as the CCCS put it (Clarke et al. 2006), but not from a working class position. Similarly, youth subcultures as a whole cannot be understood as standing outside society or as an underclass, even though some outsiders may become part of subcultures. The young subculturalists belong to a wider society as they are also students and employees; where they differ is mostly in their leisure time activities. Nevertheless, class divisions, in the form of economic capital, influence the formation of subcultural capital and participation in subcultural activities (compare Shildrick, MacDonald 2006).

#### **APOLITICAL POLITICS: FREEDOM AND ANTI-COMMUNISM**

While political meanings were attached to the traditional subcultures, post-subcultural authors saw them as apolitical and consumerist. Hip-hop is rooted in anti-racism and a commitment to the struggle against social exclusion of marginalized groups (Rose 1994). Punks have been associated with anarchist rebellion from the beginning. Skinheads passed through periods of being rooted in the leftist working class, to subsequent affiliation with right-wing or even neo-Nazi movements (Brown 2004). Ravers in Britain, originally apolitical, protested against the Criminal Justice Act's restrictions on outdoor parties (McKay 1998). Such subculturally-defined politics seems to be a heavy burden for some Czech members of subcultures, while for others it is a welcomed channel through which they can express their radical views. Our interviews have various relations to politics, ranging from strictly apolitical positions to political tendencies and political activism.

A considerable portion of actors from all the subcultures we



Signing a petition against an anti drug bill at a demonstration in Prague, 1999  
(Marta Kolářová)

studied clearly declared an aversion to state politics and no political interests. Traditional skinheads in the Czech Republic label themselves strictly apolitical; they carefully protect their apolitical way of life, which they understand as an antipathy to bringing politics into their subcultural activities. Punks demonstrate their apolitical position through a reluctance to participate and disinterest in the political rituals of mainstream society; for instance, voting in elections. Freetekno/ravers also expressed disinterest in political issues and put an emphasis on fun and autonomy, living outside the social system, and making their own entertainment. Underground hip-hoppers also did not express any common subcultural beliefs or political topics, building their authenticity on the self-expression of personal, rather than collective, issues.

Among the values most frequently mentioned by Czech subcultural youth was freedom in the sense of individualism, fun, having a good time, and the fulfilment of personal inter-



Freetekno DIY festival in the streets of Prague, 2010 (Marta Kolářová)

ests, which can be seen as a hedonistic value orientation. Also, there is a tolerance of drug use and acknowledgement of the consumption of drugs beyond conventional ones (alcohol, nicotine). Freedom to youth subculturalists meant a ‘free wild party’ (Libor, freetekno raver, 32 years). For the most part, it was a passion for freedom in the sense of experiencing autonomy in their own activities, living on their own, and breaking free from societal conventions. There was no need to protest against something and show opposition, all they cared about was doing what they wanted to. Muggleton (2000: 167) found similar value orientations when he observed an emphasis on freedom from rules, structures, control, and the predictability of conventional lifestyles as a unifying factor in youth subcultural values.

Regarding personal political preferences, a considerable part of the interviewed subculturalists voted for right-wing parties in the last elections. A strong antipathy towards the Communist Party could be seen in all subcultures. Punks were not affected

by a generational divide; both older punks, who lived under the socialist regime, and younger ones expressed an aversion to communism. Inclination towards the beliefs of the leftist political parties was rather sporadic.

Running counter to the predominant apolitical orientation, political activism can be found in all of the selected subcultures.<sup>3</sup> However, only a small number of participants are politically active. Activism is strongest among punks and is framed by anarchism, anti-fascism, environmentalism, feminism, and something that could be called the ‘politics of a lifestyle’: squatting, veganism related to Food Not Bombs activities, marihuana use, and so on. For some, being punk is automatically a political act. Punk itself stands in opposition to the neo-Nazi movement, and only the anarchist punks can be understood as having an attitude of resistance to mainstream society.

Freetekno ravers also expressed anti-fascist attitudes, but these were not manifested in any collective action at that time. However, Czech freetekno/rave is rooted in the autonomous zones and anarchist activism of the Prague squat houses Ladronka and Cibulka in the 1990s. The original connection to anarchism formed this subculture to a certain extent, even though the majority of the broader techno scene is apolitical; the rebellious segment of the subculture helped to ignite the Czech techno subculture.

Traditional skinheads, even though they professed to be apolitical, often defended the political attitudes of Czech skinhead pioneers who had been openly patriotic and extremely right-wing in the 1990s. Some skinheads interviewed were active in patriotic organizations, but it is not a typical feature of the whole apolitical segment of this subculture. I would not consider the traditional skinheads—in contrast to SHARPs or RASHs (anti-racist and leftist skins)—to be a political resistance. The same is true in the case of Czech hip-hoppers; those actors around the underground

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3 Traditional skinheads—the ones we studied—are apolitical; however, if we think about other segments of the skinhead subculture in the Czech Republic, some are leftist (red and anarchist skinheads) and the majority were right-wing or neo-Nazi (in the 1990s).

club Pantheon were not politically engaged except for a handful of hip-hoppers who addressed social issues (such as racism, drug policy, police repression, and so on) in their texts.

Politics, framed mostly by anti-fascism, connected the rebellious segments of these particular subcultures (some hip-hoppers, punks, autonomous ravers, and anti-racist skinheads) in the late 1990s and 2000s. This 'amalgam' counterculture, made up of parts of youth music subcultures, attended or even organized events with political messages, such as street parties around the turn of the millennium, anti-fascist May Day festivals in late 2000s, The *ProtesFest* held in Brno in the 2000s, and freetekno DIY carnivals. The social movements of the radical left (especially anarchists and left environmentalists) mobilized youth on issues of lifestyle and autonomous spaces for entertainment linked to broader issues such as globalization and environmental problems. In the late 1990s, large protests by young people—street parties—were organized as part of the global alter-globalization movement (Kolářová 2009). This new form of protest reached the Czech Republic, mostly from Great Britain (where it originated as road protests in the 1990s), soon after its appearance in the West and was quite popular and successful in Czech cities (mostly, but not only, in Prague). The Czech groups, similar to the new protest post-subcultural formations in the West, use subcultural codes in the political field and combine subcultural communication with counterculture ideology in a protest carnival (compare Muggleton, Weinzierl 2003: 14–15).

In sum, it is not possible to equate subculture with the political or resistance activities of young people, because these four subcultures include too many participants who only consume subculture as entertainment. The most prevalent attitude of Czech subculturalists is an aversion to politics or, alternatively, an interest in the politics of youth lifestyle, such as drug policies or issues of autonomous spaces for parties. Small segments of subcultures are politically active; however, in general, and on the basis of the collected data, I can refute the idea that Czech subculturalists are leftist and markedly alternative in their values. The situation has definitely

been shaped by the Czech post-socialist transformation, with its predominantly right-wing and neoliberal political culture that has been influencing the attitudes of young people since the 1990s.

#### **SUBCULTURAL INDIVIDUALISM AGAINST MAINSTREAM INDIVIDUALISM**

Opposition to mainstream culture has been a significant aspect of subcultures, and based on the informants' responses, we can think about the relationship between subcultures and mass commercial culture in two ways. The first is the perspective of the internal structure of subcultures: subcultural participants who produce music and organize subcultural events for profit as their occupation are labelled commercial. The second perspective is understanding mainstream as a sphere outside of subcultures. This level can be seen as part of the value orientation, a subcultural effort not to conform to the majority society.

With the hip-hop and techno subcultures, the influence of mainstream culture on the subculture is related to a large extent to commercialization and massification. Hip-hop is a typical commercially successful scene, where the mainstream part is seen as a sphere higher than the underground, a way of achieving recognition. Those who intentionally stay in the underground are quick to denounce commercial advancement. Being a commercial hip-hopper and celebrity does not mean being an authentic artist. On the other hand, some mentioned that if they managed to reach the mainstream, they would not mind being a successful hip-hopper. They distinguish separate steps of commercialization: 'I am all for selling my rap, but not for selling out' (Jiří, hip-hop, 26 years). The commercialized sphere of the hip-hop subculture shows elements of conspicuous consumption, such as going to luxurious clubs, consuming expensive drinks, and sporting branded goods. The underground hip-hoppers scorn this culture and call such people 'metrosexuals' and the 'hip-hop discotheque'.

Commercial youth are also despised by freetekno ravers; they construct themselves as authentic and in opposition to main-

stream, which, according to them, is represented by club culture and disco. Freetekno ravers also oppose mainstream as the culture of the majority and the social system in general. The foundation of freetekno is based on resistance to the consumerist lifestyle and desire to live according to do-it-yourself principles. Those on the core scene of freetekno participants express their distance from those who organize commercial parties under the label 'techno' and sell out the subculture. Unlike hip-hoppers, the freetekno ravers do not wish to enter a commercial entrepreneurial career.

Punks also made the distinction between popular medialized punk celebrities who sell out huge concert halls, and local punk bands playing in pubs. Contemporary punks must deal with the fact that punk was commercialized before some of them were even born. Punk, however, remains a way of showing the majority society that punks are still resisting commercialization. They stand—in their own words—in opposition to the 'herd', the 'grey masses', and consumerism; they refuse to adjust to social norms which they demonstrate through their style and appearance. For young punks especially, punk means to 'protest against society, not to be sheep, stand out in a crowd and do what I want to do. . . . I am simply different from others' (Krysa, punk girl, 19 years).

It is skinheads who consider their own subculture to be the least contaminated by mainstream and as strongly authentic when it comes to their music and style. In the interviews, it is possible to find arguments regarding their strong individualism and opposition to mainstream culture. Skinheads mentioned that violence as a subcultural practice is the reason they can never be adopted by the mainstream and their music can never enter the mass media:

'[The skinhead subculture] will never be commercialized, since society sees us as neo-Nazis. It will never become mainstream, it will never be on the radio' (Karel, skinhead, male, 32 years). The justification of authenticity in their subculture was based on the argument of tradition, in the sense that skinheads have been the same for many decades while mainstream fashion and style has kept changing. One might, however, wish to question this statement by pointing out that skinhead style was varied over time too

(for Czech society see Smolík 2010; Novotná, Dvořák 2008). In conclusion, subcultural youth emphasize their difference, individuality, autonomy, originality, and authenticity in contrast to the grey masses, mainstream and majority culture.

Counterculture theorists Heath and Potter (2012) describe the bohemian values that have been expressed since the 1960s: individualism, free thinking, creativity, originality, self-expression, and revolt. The hero is someone who despises conformity, the rebel who frees himself from mass culture and mainstream society, showing that he is different from others. However, every alternative or cool style inevitably becomes mainstream, as counterculture has always had a strong entrepreneurial spirit. The rebel image has been a significant force driving consumption and consumerism for many decades. Capitalism does not require conformity, on the other hand, it is supported by revolts.

Furthermore, it is quite typical even for the mainstream young generation of today to claim individualism and aversion to belonging to the 'herd'. This fits perfectly into the main imperative of contemporary mainstream society that is individualism. Individualism, especially in a post-socialist society, is the ruling cultural norm, and individual autonomy is not only a matter of choice but an obligation. Contemporary subcultural youth wants to be non-conformist, but its values conform to the majority society. As Moore puts it: 'The rhythms of youth and the spirit of capitalism are today one and the same: the constant pursuit of novelty; the affirmations of individualism and difference; the rejection of tradition and history; the lure of hedonism and appeal to instant gratification' (2005: 250). Subcultural participants internalize opposition to the majority as part of the traditional subcultural values without reflecting on what it would mean to take a real stand of resistance against contemporary individualistic society and market capitalism. Subcultural youngsters express their individuality and show, through their appearance, that they are not part of the common herd; on the other hand, they do not mind wearing a particular subcultural style 'uniform'.

Muggleton (2000: 158, 163) solves this contradiction in the case of his informants, who defined themselves as an alternative to the mainstream, by understanding subcultures as a collectively shared means of expressing individualism.

#### **A SUBCULTURAL FAMILY OR A NEO-TRIBE?**

Shared style and visual appearance ensure certain degree of unification, which enables the expansion of new people with shared interests and expanding the subcultural community. Through clothing and other features (such as shoes, hairstyle, and tattoos) that communicate subcultural values, young people recognize each other and can start to communicate: ‘When a punk meets another punk that he doesn’t know, they say hi . . . they can have a beer together, or if you don’t have a cigarette, the other punk will always give you one. Nice people that all know each other . . .’ (Krysa, female, punk, 19 years). Subcultural style generates social capital in translocal networks, be it on a national level or a transnational one.

It could be said that belonging to a community is a significant aspect of subcultures that distinguishes them from wider society. The incentive to become a subcultural participant does not originate only in the need to be and to look different from others, but also from a desire to belong to a group of people with similar interests. The informants mentioned a need to search for community and find a ‘home’; they do not want to be isolated individuals in a cold individualized society (compare Maffesoli 1996). For some, striving to not be ‘outside’, and hence seeking to take part in a subculture, almost meant the end of exclusion from ‘normal’ society. This is expressed by a punk girl, Matylda: ‘In primary school and high school, I was the “strange” girl that no one wanted to talk to. Only among the punks do I feel that I am at home. I like the dirt, the booze. The people I met do most of their stuff together, they count on each other. . . . When I was at school I was bullied by my classmates.’ Subcultural affiliation can be a solution for individuals who perceive their status in majority society as unsatisfying,

and who want to find other people who share their values, appreciate their lifestyle, and support their attitudes (compare Cohen 1997: 52).

For the central core of subcultural participants, the community serves almost as a surrogate family and the ties between its members are quite strong. Some informants stress the significant experiences that strengthened their relationships and cemented internal group solidarity (such as travelling with freetekno sound systems over a longer period of time). To belong to such a subcultural family is considered an advantage in comparison to wider society. Moreover, this passion to fit into a 'tribe' and feel a sense of belonging, as described by postmodern researchers, is not only significant in the techno subculture, which incorporates it into its main principles, but in others as well.

During the interviews, the participants used the term 'tribes', by which they meant a small group or community based on face-to-face interaction. The tribes (or gangs, crews) arise within the subcultural field, and they may be small subcultural groups (a particular hip-hop club or techno sound system, for instance) or the subsets of subcultures defined as a cultural field specified by a musical taste and various levels of belonging.

The problem with using the term 'tribe' in subcultural scholarship is that, according to Hesmondhalgh (2005), the word itself connotates fixity, rigidity, and stability. Based on the gathered data, the term might be better used only for the subcultural core that is active and creates community based on strong ties of friendship, while Maffesoli's concept of 'neo-tribes' (1996) would better fit the loose groups of followers and broader circles around the core in each subculture—those who consume rather than create music and style, who may be affiliated with the groups only temporarily when they visit some subcultural event, and who may freely move between various groups.

Some subcultures (especially skinheads) were able to maintain control over their community, but some were threatened by massification, commercialization, and mainstream influence. The freetekno scene is an exemplary case of how the togetherness was lost

by the mass growth of sympathizers. The core of the scene was not able to incorporate the tens of thousands of new participants joining the scene around the turn of the millennium, and it was not possible to stop the wave that swept away the communitarian character of the freetekno scene in the 1990s: 'I felt a strong awareness of community at the beginning, so this belonging was replaced by massification and anonymity. For me, it got qualitatively worse' (Shaman, male, freetekno, 29 years). Some core freetekno ravers set out to search for a community by travelling east of the Czech Republic (Bulgariatek), while others chose to emphasise the original values and use normative requirements that were placed on the rest of the subculture, based on their authority as techno pioneers.

It is possible to interpret the situation in freetekno subculture using Bourdieu's sense of distinction. The original ravers tried to differ from the others by strengthening their exclusive membership in the subcultural core ('old techno systems') and distancing themselves from inferior non-member groups (youngsters, commercial, those without subcultural capital). However, when the exclusive taste (of music and lifestyle) became popular, it was already degraded and no longer special and distinct (Heath, Potter 2012). Those ravers who wanted to regain their distinction thus had to escape the massified scene and participate in the teknivals of other countries to the east, for instance.

#### **GLOCAL SUBCULTURES: TRANSCULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND LOCAL SPECIFICITIES**

Czech youth music subcultures must be understood as integrated within global networks, since these formations did not originate in Czechoslovakia but have drawn inspiration from the West since their beginnings. After the fall of communism in 1989, there was a subculture boom and a variety of subcultural choices became available, which can be compared to the notion of a 'supermarket of style' (Polhemus 1997). Yet it must be contextualized within the expansion of consumerism that began in the early 1990s, similar to the post-war consumption choices in Great Brit-



Swedish band Protestera playing at the Squattek festival  
at the Šafránka squat in Prague (Marta Kolářová)

ain that opened the possibilities of consuming subcultural styles (Clarke et al. 2006: 43).

In Czechoslovakia (and subsequently in the Czech Republic), the subculture boom was undoubtedly influenced by Western markets and media, including alternative ones. With the exception of punk (and skinheads) and their (short) local socialist-era tradition, the subcultures (and post-subcultures such as rave or club culture) had no roots here, yet suddenly there was an influx of styles flooding the alternative scene. New subcultural elements arrived en masse and only later started to slowly differentiate, even though the alternative scene kept a significant unity of various subcultures. According to Syrový (1999), the subcultures of the 1990s mixed together in the Czech Republic, while in the West they had been developing on their own for a fairly long period of time.

The absorption of various subcultural styles was also influenced by wider post-socialist transformations, such as a general change in the lifestyle of adolescent people related to the postponement of mar-

riage and starting a family, which caused the extension of youth as a life stage and a greater orientation towards leisure time activities and friendship ties. These processes of lifecycle shift had been going on in the West since the 1980s. The emergence of a new specific period of life between adolescence and adulthood and the prolongment of youth until the age of thirty, meant that 'the notion of youth subcultures [had], itself, become increasingly problematic as the composition of such formations becomes increasingly cross-generational' (Osgerby 2014: 31). In post-socialist society, the change was gradual but was fairly sharp. Under communism it was common for young people to get married and have children by the age of 20 (for some even earlier), which meant the beginning of 'serious' adult work and family life; however, after 1989 such rites of passage into adulthood started to take place as late as thirty. With regards to leisure time and cultural choices, the generational gap between post-socialist youngsters and their parents, who had spent their youth under communism, was widened by social transformation.

Schwartz and Winkel, who study the influence of globalization on youth culture, suggest that in the Eastern European region the transition brought 'new opportunities in individual freedom, mobility, education and welfare' to young people (2016: 5). Young people went through a double transformation of their own lives from children to adults and from socialist societies into capitalist democracies. While young people under communism had a more homogeneous experience, after 1989 their lifestyles became more heterogeneous and pluralist.

Czech youth subcultures represent a mix of local and global cultures. All four subcultures selected are shaped by the transcultural transmission and local absorption of global and, in reality, rather Western influences. But the local communities rephrase the subcultural meanings. For instance, hip-hop in Czech Republic is quite different from the American model in terms of the social conditions of rappers. Local Czech hip-hoppers are not gangsters or unemployed Afro-Americans (or other ethnic minorities) who have experienced imprisonment because of guns or drug possession, and they do not face life below the poverty line. Czech hip-

hop does not express collective resistance to unfair conditions but individual emotions and attitudes. Hip-hop as a culture of ethnic underclasses has not transferred to the 'black' (Roma) ghettos or migrant communities of the Czech Republic, as happened in Germany, for instance, (see Brown 2005), or to groups of unemployed youth in housing estates like in Poland (see Pasternak-Mazur 2009); however, we can find instances where hip-hop is mixed with traditional Roma music here. While it is possible to find anti-racist values in Czech hip-hop, the relevance of hip-hop as a culture of ethnic minority resistance was 'lost in translation'. Furthermore, in the Czech Republic, hip-hop outside its American cradle is not 'Black' but has become integrated into the local culture, and because the rap is mostly in the local language, hip-hop is a glocal phenomenon (compare Gelder 2007).

The skinhead subculture in Europe underwent cultural transmission to a different political context on a scale from anti-racism to a neo-Nazi movement (see Brown 2004). In this context, a specific variation of the Czech subculture has been shaped in the period of post-socialist transformation. The skinhead subculture was influenced by neighbouring Germany, where a large part of this subculture had changed politically to the extreme right-wing, as well as a local post-1989 departure from leftist politics, a strengthening of nationalistic tendencies, and xenophobia (see also Pilkington 2010 on Russian skinheads).

As a result of its being rooted in an alternative culture in opposition to a socialist regime, punk avoided the early commercialization that came in the 1990s with the opening of Eastern European markets. The local version of punk subculture today is formed by global flows of bands and zines more than by its own distinctive past. The role of a subculture repressed by a state regime was to some extent taken on by freetekno. Regarding the techno scene in Europe, it is possible to trace shifts in the meanings of dance culture. It became politicized as a reaction to repression in Britain where parties were outlawed in 1994, leading to an expansion and diffusion of rave into Eastern Europe (Rietveld 1998), especially the post-socialist countries, where it had not been regulated in the

beginning. The young British dance generation grew up in the climate of Thatcher's individualism and associated the language of class struggle with the outdated politics of the past (McKay 1998). This political, or better yet, apolitical orientation fits well into the Czech post-socialist period filled with the ideology of freedom and an aversion to collectivism. The Czech techno pioneers had direct personal contacts with the Western underground 'apostles' and the biggest freetekno event in the Czech Republic—Czechtek—became a significant subcultural event, even internationally.

In the case of all the four subcultures, the subcultural styles have developed using local resources and handmade or remade clothing from ex-army clothes, for instance, on a do-it-yourself principles. Even though the cultural forms were borrowed, a certain degree of bricolage was used in the Czech subcultural environment (compare Hebdige (2012 [1979])). Today, however, this is viewed as making a virtue out of necessity in the early years. The styles were later commercialized, and the space that had been open to invention was replaced by the consumption of prefabricated goods. Not only the clothing, but also communication and cultural capital in the form of knowledge were affected by global flows of information led by the internet. Some of the old subculturalists see this trend as a loss of authenticity, especially in relation to the formation of a community which had previously been based on face-to-face contacts and authentic living, not only contemporary solitary sitting at the computer and connecting with others via the Internet.

#### **IN CONCLUSION: POST-SUBCULTURAL AND POST-SOCIALIST**

The question of how much the subcultures are post-subcultural is difficult to answer, as the post-subcultural approach is not a unified and coherent theoretical concept but a highly diverse one, which also incorporates critique of the ideal model of postmodern subcultures. Authors who critically review classical and contemporary approaches to subcultures suggest that it is useful to combine both the subcultural and post-subcultural approaches. What I have tried to show is that in Czech subcultures we can find both the post-subcultural and more

traditional, post-socialist aspects.

The postmodern features of Czech youth subcultures are the absence of class determination, a strong individualism, and an interest in free choice, self-expression, and consumption; a connection of local scenes to global subcultural networks combined with the apolitical orientation of large segments of each music subculture. Disinterest in politics and a passion for autonomy is typical, not only of the post-subcultural techno scene but also of other (originally traditional) subcultures. Similarly, the significant level of commodification and the loss of original authenticity could be understood as post-subcultural. Aspects relating to the transformation of society, however, could be interpreted more as post-socialist, since Czech youth encountered these subcultures (except punk) much later than youth in the West, and the subcultural formations had already gone through a modification and transition to another locality.

Thinking about other post-subcultural characteristics, the blending and mixing of various subcultures exists, and it is possible for a subcultural identity to change over time. However, the Czech subcultures (especially skinheads) show a certain degree of closure and stress purity of style. Subcultural affiliation is not only a game; boundaries of subcultural styles are significant, and relate to values, type of entertainment, choice of friends, or drug use. Besides common value systems, the Czech subcultures contain other elements of traditional subcultures based on shared music taste and the formation of communities. In this sense, it is important to distinguish the core groups of active participants from the broader circles of subcultural consumers oscillating around the core. It is the latter that would better fit the fragmented character of post-subcultures.

Also, most participants articulated disinterest in protest repertoires and, moreover, opposed any kind of left-wing politics, especially communist. Instead, they voted for right-wing (conservative) political parties. On the other hand, they cannot be understood purely as postmodern, as the participants see themselves as authentic and in opposition to mainstream culture.

All of the selected subcultures also include politically oriented seg-

ments—countercultures that are linked to anti-fascist and alter-globalization social movements. From the perspective of a dichotomy of resistance versus fun, I do not see a difference between younger, post-subcultural techno and other, more traditional subcultures. Techno is not the only subculture that is both consumerist and resistant; this seems to be part of all subcultures. All subcultures can be linked to political meanings. Based on the collected data, I find it possible to agree both with those post-subcultural researchers who put emphasis on apolitical orientation and consumption, and with their critics, because the countercultural parts of youth subcultures mix politics and fun, protest and festival. The Czech resistance amalgam of subcultures is globally linked to networks of similarly oriented activists.

Postmodern approaches also reject the notion of subculture itself because of the heterogeneity of lifestyles in former dominant cultures. This may be applied to the majority society, but from the perspective of the youth music subcultures, the mainstream is perceived as an opposite culture from which the subculturalists strongly distance themselves. Subcultural youth defines itself—not only through visual style—as authentic, be it ‘underground’ (hip-hop), ‘free’ (techno), or ‘traditional’ (skinheads), especially in opposition to ‘commercial’ youth in general - but, furthermore, against commercialized parts of their own subculture. Contemporary Czech subcultures emphasize self-expression, individual autonomy, and cultural diversity that are, according to Muggleton (2000), in harmony with the bohemian values that had characterized Western subcultures at least since the 1960s. That means that these attitudes are not specificities of postmodern subcultures, but are only intensified in the postmodern or post-socialist era.

Czech subcultures seem to form a specific mix of local and global elements. They are influenced by transcultural transmission and the absorption of global (in reality largely Western) cultural elements. They have also been shaped locally by a post-socialist transformation that stressed individualism, market capitalism, and consumption.

# **Tough Love: The Interplay between Independent Music Scenes and Radical Libertarian Left-Wing Movements**

*Grzegorz Piotrowski*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The development of contemporary social movements is often explained by their strong links to subcultures and counterculture. This is the case, in particular, of leftist movements emerging since the mid-1960s. The relationship with subcultures and counterculture enhances the mobilization capacities of these movements but is also an important part of the process of building collective identity in these movements. Starting with the hippie movement, through movements associated with the New Left, the pacifist movement, animal rights, squatting movements, and many others, the processes of connecting the collective identity of social movements and subcultural milieu come together clearly. This development also reflects the assumption—inspired by the writings of Antonio Gramsci—that culture has become a battleground for social movements attempting to take over or undermine cultural hegemony.

The relationship between social movements, counterculture, and subcultures is particularly evident in the case of anarchist groups. On the one hand, there is a simple correlation: The rebirth of the anarchist movement after the defeat of the Spanish Civil War coincided with the development of the counterculture movement. One of the first neo-anarchist groups was the Dutch Provo, active between 1965–67. During the ‘Summer of Love’ in 1967, the occupation of the Haight-Ashbury districts of San Francisco by the hippies took place, preceded by numerous concerts and performances by poets belonging to the beat generation. The common denominator in the events that led to the ‘Summer of Love’ and the Woodstock Festival was the radical rejection of any form of hierarchy and domination, whether stemming from mainstream culture

or embodied in compulsory military service and participation in the war in Vietnam. These demands were most consistent with the ideology of the resurging anarchist movement and its opposition to any form of power. This chapter relies on numerous observations and participation in discussions over the last decade that were conducted during the fieldwork of my PhD thesis, *Alterglobalism in Post-socialism: A Study of Central and Eastern European Activists* (Piotrowski 2017), as well as several research projects. In addition, my prior engagement as an activist and close connections to the scene, which were maintained after ceased to be politically involved, were helpful when reviewing the literature on social movements, scenes, and their connections to political activism.

Prior to the analysis, an operationalization of key concepts such as subculture, counterculture, a social movement, and others used in this chapter should be presented, and this section opens the chapter. I will refer to the development of the anarchist movement with a particular focus on its revival in the mid-1960s and the impact of this development on the shape of the newly emerging movement. I then go on to discuss the concept of a scene, its relationship to the study of social movements, and components that can be used to analyse the relationship between social movements and music-related subcultural scenes. The primary purpose of this chapter is to show that it is not only the social scene that is influenced by the development and shaping of contemporary social movements, but that this impact can also be seen in the opposite direction of these relationships. Both in the configuration, as well as in the development of musical scenes, far-reaching influences from anarchism can be understood in their configuration and dynamics, not only related to the political and ethical program of anarchism but also the organizational practices that result from it. The analysis will be linked to the hardcore and punk music scenes as these two genres show an extensive relationship to anarchism, although similar links can also be traced, for instance, to the electronic music scene, and the rave scene in particular. But in scenes related to the music of hardcore punk, there are influences associated with the horizontal forms of organization and political commitment. It al-

sonegates the understanding of music (and everything connected with it) as a product, instead treating it more as a process involving its participants.

## **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

In a nutshell, social movements are defined as ‘loosely coupled distributed networks that are minimally dependent on the central coordination, leaders, or ideological commitment’ (Bennett 2015: 205). They are often also presented as a ‘deviant form’ of mainstream politics, as an exception in institutionalized politics.

Other definitions suggest that ‘social movements can be thought of as collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part’ (Kriesi, Snow, Soule 2007: 11). On the other hand, other researchers using a more cognitive approach say: ‘[Social movements are] those sequences of contentious politics that are based on underlying social networks and resonant collective action frames, and which develop the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents’ (Tarrow 2006).

Most studies of social movements are focused on protest events, during which the movements become visible to a wider audience. Between the peaks of activity, in the so-called ‘submerged phase’ (Melucci 1989), the actions of the movement are considerably less spectacular, less oriented towards attracting the interest of public opinion to their activities, and are more focused on actions oriented ‘to the inside’ (for instance, strengthening the feeling of belonging to the group). Establishing and networking is much less intense in the ‘submerged phase’. Protests are often turning points for activists in terms of recruitment, mobilization, and choice of tactics, which is why the study of modern social movements not only focuses on the obvious activities, such as demonstrations and protests, but also on people, groups, and organizations involved in

shaping these activities. However, together with the turn of social movements towards cultural activities, guided by the logic of the writings of Antonio Gramsci, researchers have increasingly begun to analyse the cultural aspect of social activism, expanding its focus to other activities, such as participation in subcultures. Olivier Marchart writes: ‘If we want to analyse these subcultures we will therefore have to take them seriously as political formations or ... as “new protest formations”’ (Marchart 2004: 415). This allows us to locate social movements in ‘the larger context within which these protest formations articulate themselves politically’ (Marchart 2004: 415). The groups that are the subject of analysis in this article, that is those who take part in the formation of independent music scenes, highlight the importance of prefigurative politics. Close connections between social movements and subcultures or counterculture suggests that the identity (or identities) of this movement is constructed in a different way than within the classical theory of social movements. As Martin concludes, ‘For Melucci ... contemporary movements mount symbolic challenges to dominant homogenizing cultural codes by communicating to the rest of society the message of difference. They do that by living out alternative lifestyles. In this sense, the “medium is the message.” In order to communicate a clear and coherent message, movements must generate a collective identity’ (Martin 2013). But in order to analyse the political dimensions of subcultures, one must first look at the spaces in which they operate, as they often determine the shape of the latter.

## ANARCHISM

For many years of its development, anarchism was interpreted in many ways: from the perspective of ideology, political program, criticism of social relations and, finally, as a specific type of organization.

From the individualist anarchism of Stirner to the collective, communal anarchism of Bakunin and Kropotkin, anarchism is a diverse string of real positions as well as political strategies. How-

ever, these are linked together in a fundamental rejection and critique of political power in all its forms. The belief that all power is oppressive, abusive, and dehumanizing can be considered a key political and ethical position of anarchism. For classical anarchism, the State embodies all forms of oppression, exploitation, enslavement, and degradation of man. Theorists of post-anarchism, such as Saul Newman, claim that power is an extensive concept, and domination is often confused with power; as Michael Glavin writes: ‘Newman . . . posits that anarchists oppose power as such, not state power, the power of the church, and the economic exploitation of capitalism, but rather, simply “power”’ (Glavin 2004). The power of the State is the most visible emanation of domination with which anarchists struggle. However, since Michael Foucault, the range of the conceptual terms ‘power’ and ‘domination’ is much broader and includes the elements referred to as ‘biopower’ (Newman 2001).

However, the State is the most commonly recognized subject of anarchist critique of authority (Laskowski 2012); for anarchists, it is the fundamental embodiment of oppression in society and must be overthrown as the first act of the revolution: ‘Historically, anarchists see the state as the origin of social problems, a form of centralized, hierarchical social organization which monopolizes violence, to exploit workers for profit, bureaucracy and the ruling elite’ (Romanos 2013). States create authoritarian dynamics re-



A standoff between the antifascists and the police, few hours before the demonstration and the blockade on November 11, 2011

(Grzegorz Piotrowski)

ardless of who is ruling (whether governments are socialist, liberal, or whatever). Anarchists also contest other institutional forms of power and domination, such as organized religion and education systems (Romanos 2013).

Following the defeat in the Spanish Civil War, probably the last chord of classical anarchism, anarchist ideas were revived, along with the growing importance of social movements, starting in the 1960s. As Eric Kerl writes: ‘Only with [the] social upheavals of the 1960s did anarchism begin to reemerge with any significance. Because of the revolutionary, anti-imperialist movements then taking place in colonial countries like Cuba and Vietnam, the dominant ideas of the new radicals reflected the atmosphere of the time. A patchwork of national liberation politics, Maoism, and Leninism played a considerable role in the New Left. However, in an era when official “Marxism” meant the suppressions of the Hungarian and Prague uprisings, many young radicals sought a “third way” that appropriated ideas from the anarchist tradition’ (Kerl 2010). That third way meant searching for other forms of opposition to capitalism, although not in classic Marxism-Leninism or its derivatives. Further development of the anti-nuclear and pacifist movements coincided with the development of movements based on identity politics, such as the German and Italian autonomists movements, squatters, and the like. However, ‘[t]he failure of anarchism to convincingly offer a coherent strategy for fighting oppression meant that many turned to variants of identity politics. Rather than a unified movement, this resulted in an increasingly disjointed residue of identity-based anarchisms; green anarchism, anarcho-feminism, anarchist people of colour, queer anarchism, etc.’ (Kerl 2010) Successive waves of social movements began to ‘pick and choose’ the fragments of anarchist ideology or organization that suited them the best. This, for instance, was evident even in the case of the alter-globalist movement. In the text *Fragments of Anarchist Anthropology*, David Graeber (2004) notes that some anarchist ideals are today crucial for the movement, in particular regarding the forms of organization and the emphasis on practice. Therefore, issues such as small groups, federalism, direct action, direct democracy, autonomy,

and equality become fundamental to contemporary progressive social movements.

In a similar vein, Barbara Epstein notes that ‘anarchism means a decentralized organizational structure, based on affinity groups that work together on an ad hoc basis, and decision-making by consensus. It also means egalitarianism; opposition to all hierarchies; suspicion of authority, especially that of the state; and commitment to living according to one’s values’ (Epstein 2001). One such strategy of resistance, as well as the increasingly popular variety of pop-anarchism, is interpreting anarchism as a lifestyle. In other words, it is living one’s life in accordance with one’s own convictions that keeps building its identity. This tension between political activism—action directed to the outside—and ‘lifestyle activism’ has become one of the central tensions in the philosophy of modern anarchists, beginning with the release of the groundbreaking work of Murray Bookchin in 1977.

Many sociological descriptions of the role of lifestyle in social movements positions activists’ return to lifestyle as a personalistic escape from previous forms of political activity aimed directly at the State. This is directly linked with the abandonment of the understanding that the State is central to political criticism, especially by (post-)anarchists. As parts of the first wave of feminist activists claimed, ‘everything is political’. First-person politics, which claimed every activity and choice had a political meaning, has evolved into lifestyle anarchism and is often the first step to self-revolution. As noted by Laura Portwood-Stacer: ‘Today’s anarchist lifestyles must be understood as partially continuous with the efforts of earlier radical and utopian movements that attempted to put principles of anti-authoritarianism into practice at the most minute levels of everyday life’ (2013: 15).

## SCENES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The relationship between the scene and social movements seems to be most important in the case of groups often labelled radical. Historically, they are associated with the extreme left as-

well as punk rock and hardcore music. In Central and Eastern Europe, this connection resulted in a kind of symbiosis between music scenes and the hardcore/punk movement. However, the connection cannot only be limited to radical left-wing libertarian movements; similar ties to parts of the scene can be observed with extreme right-wing groups within the so-called 'national rock scene', as in the case of skinheads or groups like the autonomous nationalists with their connection to the right-wing hip-hop scene (see Pankowski 1998). In the case of leftist movements from Central and Eastern Europe, the relationship of social movements with the music scene began in the mid-eighties with the development of the 'third circulation': anti-communist groups and movements which were also critical of the dissident sector (cf. Piotrowski 2017).

One of the key issues for subcultures is to preserve the purity and orthodoxy of groups and their members. Subcultures are more focused on internal dynamics, thus many of their activities are focused on building the strength and unity of the group. There is an (idealized) image of the group and its participants, perceived by them as a kind of 'ideal type' (as described by Thornton 1995); if one does not fit in, then one cannot be a member of such a group. In other words, if one wants to become a punk, but still feels more comfortable in a suit and tie, one will not be recognized as punk by other punks and will not be allowed to participate in their group, despite listening to the same music or sharing the same values. Any sign of deviation from the imagined model of a subculture member is considered treason. Practices of maintaining purity and orthodoxy strengthen the members' sense of belonging, which might be surprising considering how many of them emphasize individualism.

Practices rooted in the everyday life of activists stem from their ideology and can be identified at various levels: diet (vegetarian or vegan—the latter denotes a diet which excludes not only meat but also any animal-derived products: eggs, milk and dairy products, and honey), fashion choices, avoiding political participation (electoral voting in particular), ethical consumption, a preference for the use of public transport or cycling, and so on. One of the



A group of militant Antifa during the November 11, 2011 protest  
(Grzegorz Piotrowski)

concepts that have proven particularly useful in the analysis of contemporary, culturally oriented social movements is the concept of the scene. Although similar ideas were present in the study of social movements in recent decades, this concept, and the word itself, is often also used by activists themselves. The term, derived from the world of music (in particular punk rock and hardcore), is often used to show a common platform for the audience and the involved performers. The scene is the ‘soft underbelly of activism’ (Leach 2008), a space where the movements less involved participants meet with other participants and activists. It has a strong spatial relationship with places such as squats, social centres and alternative bars; however, it is much more than just an alternative space. The scene also includes people whose lives, in one way or another, are affected by the ideology of social movements, whether through their choice of clothing, diet, or leisure activities. The scene has one additional very important aspect: It is a space in which social movements can mobilize people and, to some extent,

resources. Scene participants go on demonstrations, participate in boycotts, and so on, but they also support it financially, taking part in benefit gigs (Siemaszko 2012), whilst not being otherwise active..

### SPACES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND GEOGRAPHIES OF RESISTANCE

Many researchers studying alternative social movements note that 'space', beyond the strictly political activities of the movement, leans to a more culturally-contextualized characteristic. This cultural environment supporting social movements and counter-culture can be described by many names: submerged networks, oppositional subculture, community-based social movement, cultural laboratories, safe spaces, and so on. One of the more common terms is a scene, suggested by Darcy Leach and Sebastian Haunss (2008: 255–276). It describes a place where people meet, listen to music, and meet other people who are not a politicized part of the movement; for example, artists sympathetic to social movements (Piotrowski 2017: 69). The distinction in terms of belonging to a scene or a movement is problematic to define. As Leach and Haunss write: 'The transition between core members and those less integrally involved is fluid, as is the transition between members and non-members. Neither the boundaries of a scene nor its membership criteria can be determined from the outside' (Leach, Haunss 2008: 259). However, belonging to the scene is often externalized in a specific dress or behaviour. At the same time, the boundaries that separate the scene are 'porous and permeable, requiring constant policing through the ongoing process of classifying and reclassifying' (Muggleton, Weinzierl 2003: 10). As in many other aspects of social movements, 'purity' and 'orthodoxy' seem to be the most important factors. Leach and Haunss say that it is difficult to distinguish between members of the scene and activists. The term 'scene', used by other researchers, describes a complex and diverse 'subcultural space', a place for 'relations between various populations and social groups, as these coalesce around specific coalitions of musical style' (Bennett, Kahn-Harris 2004: 13).

The scene seems to be a universal differentiator from other areas of social activities, combining ‘cultural anarchism’ (Urbański 2009), a term that refers to the popularity of anarchist ideas among the youth of the 1970s, with the increasing popularity of punk music. Many teens from the said period were also politically involved, although their anarchism was focused more on organizational forms (equality, horizontality) rather than straightforwardly expressed criticism of the State.

Another source for interaction between the broader social environment and culturally politicized social movements is the blurring of the boundaries between spheres of the political and the private. Social movements of the 1970s politicized issues such as sexual orientation, sexuality, and ethnicity and began to form around the issues of collective identity. On the one hand, for the whole cluster of movements, identity was the basis for many new social movements, and the LGBT movement in particular; on the other hand, in the seventies, increasing popularity convinced movements to promote ‘first-person politics’. In this approach, all aspects of life hitherto considered private or even intimate take on political significance and become a political manifesto (sexual identity or gender, diet, consumption patterns, and so on).

For small-scale movements (which the anarchist movement often is), personal relationships seem to have quite an impact on the political sphere; personal animosities, quarrels, and broken relationships can sometimes divide groups. Two dense networks, or rather dimensions—political and personal—interacting with each other can create more intense emotions and links within the movement, while conversely also making the network become more hermetic and difficult to join for newcomers.

The definition of a scene may be combined with the concept of ‘submerged networks’, developed by Alberto Melucci (1989). These networks are visible to non-actors only during the peak of activities, and, most of the time, they are hidden from the eyes of outsiders. That is why this sphere is the background of the movement; it helps to sustain the movements between the peaks of activity and creates potential mobilization when it is needed.



A group of antifa activists during the November 11, 2011 protest. The slogan says: IT'S US: leftist whores, Judeo-Communists, homoterrorists. We revel in your stupidity – we will stop you with our laughter  
(Grzegorz Piotrowski)

However, the same activists often mention that it can cause problems for novices (Piotrowski 2017: 33). They must have the specific cultural capital or competence to ‘read’ scenes, to know how one should properly locate and identify places and events as belonging to the scene and identify their association within a particular social movement. Conversely, the ‘submerged’ phase of the network makes the groups form a closed community, even a ghetto—a problem that many groups must deal with.

Putting emphasis on the importance of space and spatiality, Francesca Polletta (1999: 9–10) distinguishes three main areas according to their relationship to the social movements. These are:

1. *Transmovement spaces*, which may be organizations or networks of activists that play a role in the scene, providing training for the movement, or offering their resources.
2. *Indigenous spaces* are spaces and places that already exist but are

not initially involved in political activities; for example, bars where activists, local groups and organizations hang out, and where they make room for lectures and meetings with wider audiences in addition to people invited by the movement.

3. *Prefigurative spaces* are deliberately created by the movement to express opposition to the surrounding world. This category includes, for example, squats or illegally occupied empty buildings used by activists as a centre for their activities, as well as an alternative form of housing (Piotrowski and Polanska 2016: 53–69).

### POLITICIZED MUSIC SCENES

As noted earlier, music scenes associated with subcultures are not politically neutral, particularly from the perspective of a specific definition of politics as a prefigurative practice. When writing about the Czech hardcore scene, Martin Koubek discusses two axes of tension that occur in the hardcore DIY (do-it-yourself) scene, running between the product (for example, music or a concert) and the process of forming individual identity. They are divided into four different areas: (1) style of music, entertainment—essentially external characteristics; (2) subculture-oriented alternative lifestyle; (3) politically oriented groups, which are the basis for the recruitment of activists; or (4) counterculture (Koubek 2010). The tension between individual identity and politics can be reduced to an opposition between identity and ideology, both of which are rarely clearly separated, making it difficult to discuss how they mutually affect each other.

The hardcore scene can serve as an example and a starting point for reflections on social movements. Hardcore is a style of music derived from punk rock music that developed in the 1980s and has historically been associated with political activism. This relatively closed scene is probably mostly strongly connected with the animal rights movement and anarchism. Inside the hardcore scene, a large number of discussions about its political commitment take place. There is a small number of politically engaged musician

who usually emphasize their political commitment, determining their genres by using adjectives such as ‘progressive’, ‘vegan’ or ‘straight edge’ (avoiding the consumption of mind-altering substances such as alcohol, drugs, and any others that impair performance, such as tobacco). Most of the people participating in the scene remain politically inactive, abstaining from participating in demonstrations and other such activities.

When discussing activism and commitment, activists often talk about the context in which their actions are carried out, and it is often called a ‘scene’. In this chapter, I would like to verify the analytical usefulness of the concept, especially in the context of the ‘space between’ audience and activists. The scene is often described using spatial metaphors that will allow me to use the term ‘geography of resistance’, introduced by Michael Keith and Steven Pile (2013), creating activist-friendly spaces for exercising their prefigurative political practices.

#### **THE MEANING OF SCENES FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

When analysing the relationship between scene and social activism, a problem occurs when one tries to determine the precise boundaries between these two spheres; the more the movement is associated with a subculture or counterculture, the harder it is to designate these limits. An even greater problem occurs with groups in which participation takes place on the basis of activity and where there is no formal membership (according to the principle that a member is someone who is active).

These spaces may have implications not only for the formation of the movement or the structure of its business but may also serve as transmission belts for the movement’s ideology. The fact that the squat or alternative cultural centre is located in the middle of the city sends a clear message to passers-by and potential participants: there is a strong group or movement that is able to seize and defend that place (Gagyí 2016: 80–88). In urban areas, they can also serve as a way of demarcating the geographic boundaries of the scene; the graffiti on walls, stickers, and posters not only-

communicate messages to potential readers, but also mark their presence. It is a message both to outside observers, as well as other groups. Therefore, as Leach and Haunss (2008: 263) write, to know what is happening in the city ‘one does not read newspapers, one reads the streets’; one pays attention to posters, stickers, and graffiti. In addition, bars and clubs friendly to the movement offer this kind of service by allowing the display of posters and leaflets.

The concept of the scene therefore has at least a twofold significance for social movements and the methods of their study. The first is a way of describing the space the social movements operate in. Here, the scene is a network of bars, clubs, squats, and similar locations that differ among each other in the degree of association to the activities of the movement. These consist of all sorts of places, starting with those that fall under the common denominator of a temporary autonomous zone, an idea coined by anarchist poet Hakim Bey where activists have the chance to implement their utopias and ideas, and ending with sympathetic bars allowing the display of the groups’ leaflets. These places compose the ‘geographies of resistance’, allowing activists to meet each other as well as a broader audience. It is also in these places that activists can meet potentially interested people who engage in the activities of the movement. One of the extreme variants of this phenomenon is the ‘Nazi-frei zone’ tactic initiated by the German Antifa and taken on by groups of anti-fascists across the world. It involves the demarcation of ‘places free from fascists’, where the lack of visible activities of neo-Nazi organizations on the streets is imposed by force.

Another way to analyse the relationship between scene and social movement is to look at the function they play in this relationship. Scenes are primarily facilities for the movement and for the activists; they are a place of interaction with the audience. Much of the behaviour described as ‘lifestyle activism’ (dress patterns, hairstyles, diet, and so on) has its origins in the scenes, and, as a result, a characteristic image of a movement and its participants is often created. Scenes are also often the material facilities of social movements, which are supported by concerts and benefits, or the sale

of gadgets and other paraphernalia connected to the movement (CDs, magazines). The most in line with the principle of DIY is often a group of closely related scenes, putting a large emphasis on 'independence', manifested in an aversion to apply for grants or be dependent upon external assistance promoting self-sufficiency in return. Scenes are also places where social movements can survive unfavourable times, between the peaks of their activity and popularity of the larger mobilizations. The ideas of social movements can survive within lyrics (in this way, the ideals of anarchism were introduced into the more mainstream activism of 1970s Western Europe and 1980s Central and Eastern Europe) or during meetings between members of the scene, as was the case within movements like Reclaim the Streets or the techno and rave scene.

The more subcultural the movements, the greater the importance of the scene for social movements. While researchers usually focus their attention on left-wing groups, and especially their relationships to the punk rock, hardcore, and rave music scenes, in the case of other movements with a strong subcultural tendency, the significance of the scene can be seen as well. Often, it is not expressed explicitly by its participants as the connection to subcultures make the movements 'less political' (see Piotrowski 2017).

In addition, the importance of the scene for social activism is all the greater the more cultural in character are the claims of particular groups. This is connected to the turn into the field of culture as the main area of struggle for contemporary social movements that follow a Gramscian understanding of struggle over hegemony. As noted by Greg Martin (2013): 'These perspectives focusing on the relationship of social movements to the state and polity thus tend to ignore the hidden cultural dimension of social movements, which is significant because, among other things, it is the culture of movements - submerged in pre-existing networks of everyday life - that makes mobilization possible. In this way, the network of groups that constitutes a social movement serves as a platform for mobilization, since the movement network shares a culture and collective identity.' The scene is an extension of this understanding of social movements, because the people involved in the scene are

a part of it, despite being less engaged in political activities than social activists.

## CONCLUSIONS

The popularity of the concept of the scene, expressed by its size, but also by the diffusion of scene elements into mainstream culture, is greater than that of its politicized wing. Some items of clothing, such as punk rock-inspired fashion, the popularity of 'fixed gear' bikes (without gears, a freewheel, and sometimes without brakes), and the popularity of so-called 'ruin bars' are associated directly with the scene. Elements, such as, for example, vegan diets, are a kind of cultural capital; the actors and brokers of social movements can capitalize by politicizing it. Sometimes, however, they face problems in maintaining the political significance of this capital. This proves two things: the lack of predictability in the trajectory of politicization and the weakness of social movements and radical movements in particular, within Central and Eastern Europe.

By analysing the development of the scene and its connections to radical social movements in Central and Eastern Europe in comparison to Western Europe, one can observe that it reflects the scale of the movement—a small number of alternative bars, info-shops,<sup>4</sup> squats and social centres. The final question is whether this is the reason for the smaller scale of the movement in CEE (considered to be one of the characteristics of social movements), or whether it is the result of this situation. The activists themselves are quite ambivalent about the concept and meaning of the scene as well as its significance for political activism. For some activists, flirting with a mass audience, which some scenes do, could lead to them becoming part of the disputed system they try to fight.

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4 The info-shop is a concept taken from activist jargon. It is a place where one can buy activist literature and get to know about planned events.



## An Italian HC Frontman Melded into Czechoslovakia

*Giuseppe Maiello and Martina Cichá*

Carlo Levi, Simon Wiesenthal, Arnošt Lustig, Varlam Shalamov, and many others seem to suggest to us that certain experiences are impossible to transmit. Marshall McLuhan and many others then taught us that our world remains ours for our whole lives. There is therefore no doubt that such a specific narrative, despite all our efforts, can ever be fully transferred in all its meaning. However, it can represent not only another of the many case studies of modern qualitative research, but also an important element in the reconstruction of the transfer of experience between Western subcultures and those which are now defined as 'post-socialist'.

Hardcore punk (HC) is a well known radical form of punk rock, characterized by the speed of its execution and political texts, ranging from pacifist anarchism, insurgency, and even reaching (in the Italian case) autonomist Marxism as well. The deep roots of HC are from the Southern California punk scene,<sup>5</sup> but like the speed of its rhythms, HC soon reached England in the early eighties before spreading to the rest of Europe.

Italian hardcore has its 'founding myth': on 1 June 1980 (Nozza 2011), the British punk band The Clash was booed in the city of Bologna, where it had come to play by invitation of the Italian Communist Party. The Clash are defined without mincing words as 'whores', not only for having accepted the invitation of the city administration, firmly in the hands of the Communist Party, but, indeed, also for having signed a contract with the US multinational label CBS (see interview with Helena Velena in Ras-

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5 In the first complete book dealing directly with Californian HC, the authors define San Francisco and Los Angeles punks as 'anti-institutional' in their essence (Belsito and Davis 1983: 7). According to Steven Blush (2001: 18), the term HC refers to 'an extreme: the most absolute Punk'. Both definitions are also well accepted by us.

telli 2005). The spokesman of the Bolognese punks, Giampaolo Giorgetti, well known at that time as Jumpy Velena and today as the transwoman Helena Velena, referred to the second record of Crass, the English anarcho-pacifist punk band that had harshly attacked The Clash because of their lack of political coherence.<sup>6</sup>

At that time, I was just moving away from the freak (hippy) aesthetics. It happens in an instant—you read a culture or a music magazine and understand that people who once represented a political and cultural vanguard have now sold out to the system. So, you decide to follow new wave as quickly as possible. The occasion was one of the first new wave concerts in my town. I decided to cut my long hair. When I arrived at the concert, all my friends thought I had gone crazy. Someone asked me, ‘did you become a fascist?’ just because I had cut my long hair. (Interview with Pippo, Olomouc, 27 April 2016)

Pippo,<sup>7</sup> the future Underage lead singer, had already been politically active for seven years at that time, with a militancy called, from the emic perspective, the revolutionary left—or extreme left politics, as it is generally called (Cosseron 2007: 20).

The end of the seventies used to be called ‘Ebb Tide’ in Italy. The revolutionary wave was dying, and the music offered little consolation. (Interview with Pippo, Olomouc, 27 April 2016)

It is clear that in such a situation, new wave music was still insufficient to express the new desires of the spontaneous subjectivities which emerged from the clashes between demonstrators and

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6 The text of the Crass song entitled ‘White Punks On Hope’ starts with the following words: ‘They said that we were trash, well the name is Crass, not Clash / They can stuff their punk credentials ‘cause it’s them that take the cash’ (Crass 1979).

7 ‘Pippo’ was, at that time, the nickname of one of the authors of the present chapter. Because the interviews were led by the second author, we do not consider our contribution as a typical example of autoethnography.



Aesthetic of Punk (Giuseppe Maiello)

police in the years 1976–79,<sup>8</sup> even under circumstances when new wave, in the beginning, had staked out a distinctly alternative position to other musical genres, acquiring much of the first wave of seventies' punk rock (Gendron 2002: 269–270).

In order to plunge himself into HC, Pippo only needed the right opportunity. This supervened on 8 October 1981, when Jello Biafra's Dead Kennedys from California came to Rome for a public performance.

In the middle of the gig, during a break, I met a guy from my city who was putting together a hardcore band. We swapped phone numbers with the hope that one day we would meet each other. (Interview with Pippo, Olomouc, 27 April 2016)

The band was actually formed within a few weeks and was named Underage, 'the first Neapolitan punk band and one of the first in Italy' (Torre 2013: 15). However, Pippo only joined it in August 1982, contributing even more to the radicalization, in a political sense, of the texts and activities of the band (see Morgera 2018).

Thanks to Underage, I could once again be fully involved in politics but on a completely new level. I was able to find very radicalized political subjects who could, unlike the comrades of previous years, manifest their revolt not only in political acts but also in individual acts. The personal had finally become political, and I was in it up to my neck! (Interview with Pippo, Olomouc, 28 April 2016)

The Italian punk movement of the early 1980s was highly politicized and much influenced in its manner of creation by autonomism, which was, at that time, in the process of a net decrease.<sup>9</sup> Be-

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8 More recently, Toni Negri, opening a remote discussion with Ernesto Laclau, posed the question as to whether social subjectivities are able to organize themselves spontaneously or whether they should be organized (Negri 2015).

9 The roots of autonomism are from early sixties Italy. The golden age of worker's autonomy, as autonomism was called at that time, was in the second half of the seventies when students, workers, and other precarious social subjects were

sides fanzines, where musical and political discussions mingled, punks began to occupy uninhabited buildings and build autonomous social centres based on the Berlin model, especially in the cities of northern Italy. The most famous of these was *Virus*, established in February 1982 at Via Correggio 18 in Milan, which, after several forced evictions and displacements, permanently ceased its activities in 1987.

The occupants of *Virus*, in collaboration with a group of young filmmakers from an experimental audiovisual school, managed to make a 16mm documentary film that was disseminated widely—before the Internet era—thanks to VHS cassette copies. This was one of the main visual and audio documents that helped to spread the idea of punk participation in the squatting movement (*Virus* 1982), an idea that is well-established across Europe today, including central ‘post-socialist’ Europe.

Starting with the so-called *Spring Offensive*, which was a festival of Italian HC held in April 1982 in *Virus*, the whole of northern Italy became a continuous swarm of concerts and squatting attempts, accompanied by repressive action by the police. On 1 August 1982, in the Dolomite village of Lenticai after a night of hardcore music, the leading figures of Italian punk held a meeting at which it was decided to create a fanzine that would cover the entire Italian peninsula. The fanzine, called *Punkaminazione*, represented ‘the first and unique example of the punk network pre-internet’ in Italy (Nozza 2011) after its first issue release in September 1982.

In the same year, another HC fanzine was founded in San Francisco, called *Maximumrocknroll* (abbreviated as MRR), which spread throughout the Western world as it was written in English. The fanzine paid particular attention to the Italian scene, which was considered a source of inspiration not only for European but also American musical and political groups.<sup>10</sup>

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able to stand up to the repressive apparatus of the State. For a history of European autonomism in the English language, see Katsiaficas (2006).

<sup>10</sup> Underage were, for example, included in the *MRR* ‘play list’ with other groups such as Agnostic Front, Crucifix, The Exploited, Icons of Filth, One Way System, Reality Control, and Mayhem. The reviewer defined Underage

Alongside these initiatives, however, Italian punks began to also participate in marches and street demonstrations, in some cases becoming the main protagonists; as was the case in the attempted occupation of the Comiso military base in Sicily in July of 1983.<sup>11</sup>

At Comiso, I met the Crass, who had come to help out against the Americans. I saw my old friends from Virus there and saved Alfredo Bonanno's skin when he fled the police charge, dragging him inside a camper van belonging to the French TV crew. The crew made a report on our entire event, but the journalist who was driving, Patrick Zerbib, was severely beaten by the police during the charge. Something was saved, including a video interview with me.<sup>12</sup> I never saw Patrick or his sister Corinne again. They came out with various bruises. The evening before the police charge, some masked guys also came to our house and shot at us with a 7.65 calibre gun. The matter, however, was very strange because there was a lot of fear but no injuries, so many then suspected that the same Bonanno organized the staging of it. Maybe just to create a media case and/or to galvanize us. But I never believed in these types of hidden tactics. I have seen Czech politicians using the same hidden tactics, although not in the extreme way of the Sicilians—shooting at you . . . (Interview with Pippo, Olomouc, 5 March 2016)

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using these words: 'The most applicable adjectives here are rhythmic, savage and raw. This is mainly a fast-paced thrash which is driven by steady drumming and topped off with a totally fuzzed-out guitar and insistent, intense singing. The Underage are an anarchist band and, judging from this, have an abundance of commitment. Excellent' (Yohannon 1983).

11 This attempt was organized in a very clumsy way by the well known theorist of contemporary insurrectionary anarchism, Alfredo M. Bonanno. A written testimony of the Comiso events and of the police brutality against the demonstrators was reported by the German journalist Michael Sontheimer (1984). Other testimonies of Comiso have been collected in *Costretti a sanguinare*, an autobiographical novel created in 1997 by Marco Philopat, a founder of Virus in Milan (Philopat 1997).

12 This is the documentary film *Punks-Spaguettis*, released in French in 1989 (Zerbib and Zerbib 1989).



The cover of Underage Cassette (Giuseppe Maiello)

The summer of 1983 is also the first time that Pippo visited Czechoslovakia, just after the demonstrations at Comiso. His way of dealing with things was still imbued with anarchism but also with strong and fresh memories of autonomist Marxism.<sup>13</sup> The autonomists denoted states that, at that time, were called ‘socialist’ with various terminologies seeking to emphasize the fact that these states did not have anything to do with socialism, and much less so with communism. One of the terms used to define the economic and political system of these countries was ‘state capitalism’. It was thus assumed to be a kind of leftist criticism that had been elaborated in detail by Amadeo Bordiga (see, for example, Bordiga 1966). The criticism from the left of regimes which called themselves ‘socialist’ had always been very limited because of the predominant role of the communist parties derived from the Third International within the European left. Instead, in Czechoslovakia, the most visible was a kind of lesser intellectual criticism, supported by the United States and European anti-communism parties. This type of political position continued to thrive even after 1989, crystallizing into what is defined today in various sectors on the Czech left as ‘primitive anti-communism’..<sup>14</sup>

In August 1983, I spent three weeks in Brno and two weekends in Prague. In Brno, I could not find even one single punk. The only ones who considered themselves alternative radicals were the guys with long hair. I had extensive discussions with those few who spoke English. I also tried to use my insufficient Russian and my very limited knowledge of the Czech language. I could agree on some criticism of their regimes. But, for me, it was annoying, the apology they were

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13 A few days before the demonstration at Comiso, a red vinyl record by Underage came out in Bologna. The spirit of autonomism of that time is strongly present in the song ‘Tre settembre’. The song recalled the Mafia murder of the Carabinieri General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa. In March of 1980, he commanded an anti-Red Brigades operation, in which four militants of these extremist organizations were killed. A slogan borrowed from the autonomous demonstrations of that time in Italy is quoted in the text of ‘Tre settembre’: ‘*Piombo hai seminato e piombo hai ricevuto* [You sow bullets, you gather bullets]’ (Underage 1983).

14 Among those who also use this expression is the former leader of the Czech Green Party Matěj Stropnický (see Hoření 2014).

making for the Western system. They spoke well even of the USA which, for a person of my generation, or at least of the social group I had grown up in, was totally inconceivable. Similarly, for them it was inconceivable when I explained that police in Italy attacked and beat us just for the fact that we were dressed in a strange way. In Prague, I began looking for the punks. I found them within a few hours in a district called 'Kampa', where someone told me they used to gather. The Prague punks still had the Sex Pistols style: studs on faux leather jackets and pins in the mouth. None of them spoke any language other than Czech, but they welcomed me amongst them without any problems. It seemed to me that, somehow, they were connected with the underworld of Wenceslas Square, because a girl got a bunch of money from a porter at the Yalta Hotel and then paid for our drinks for two days in a row. I think that their political views were not very distinguished from those of the Brno hippies, but at least the punks from Prague seemed to understand that Western punks were also in radical opposition to their regimes. (Interview with Pippo, Olomouc, 28 April 2016)

The heyday of Italian HC faded out after the first half of the eighties. The autonomist Marxism, originally from Italy, had spread in the meantime but took different, more libertarian forms, especially in West Germany. The Berlin district of Kreuzberg, which at the time was located on the eastern outskirts of the western part of the city, was a swarm of self-managed centres and occupied houses (squats). The Italian punks interacted with the German punk scene through concerts and the exchange of experiences, culminating in their participation at the II. Chaos tag (Chaos Day) in Hannover on 2 August 1984..

Many Italian punks of that generation moved abroad, particularly to England, Germany, or the United States. Our interviewee chose Czechoslovakia, where the news coming from the Western world was carefully filtered at that time and, often, distorted in an extreme manner.

I was looking for a place geographically close to that in which my

family still lived but culturally distinct. Thanks to full immersion in the Prague student world, my Czech improved visibly, in that I could understand television programmes. But I was absolutely shocked by the conduct of Czechoslovak television, when in a report about neo-Nazism in Western Europe they showed images of punks and German autonomists as if they were neo-Nazis. Crazy! I never understood if it was ignorance or something designed to discredit the critical left. (Interview with Pippo, Olomouc, 27 April 2016)

Meanwhile, despite this, a true British-style punk band had arisen in Prague: Plexis P.M.<sup>15</sup>

It was 1985. On one of my first nights, I was wandering through Prague when I came across a group of punks. They looked at me and wondered if I was a punk or not because, by that time, many of my extreme aesthetic attributes were disappearing. I understood from their crests what kind of groups they were inspired by. . . . I screamed out: 'The Exploited'. And then they answered in unison: 'Barmy Army!' Among them was Peter Hošek and other members of Plexis. Then, in Stará Lysá nad Labem, they invited me on the stage and I sang a song by an Italian band with them as well.<sup>16</sup> But then I stopped following both their destinies and the destiny of punk in general. Finally, one day I went to the coffee house Slavie, where the punks sat, and I gave them some EPs (extended play records) by Italian HC groups. I remember that the punks jumped on those vinyl records as if they were starving cats. (Interview with Pippo, Olomouc, 28 April 2016)

At that time, there were other punk bands performing in Prague such as Visací zámek, Tři sestry, and HNF of the Moravian town of Jihlava.

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15 According to the founder of Plexis P.M., the name came from some letters included in the names of the British bands Sex Pistols and The Exploited. The abbreviation P.M. meant Punk Music (Svítivý 1999; comp. Fuchs 2002: 46)

16 The episode is narrated by Filip Fuchs (52), who defines the event as 'one of the most famous concerts in the history of Czech punk' (50). It was a concert featuring rock bands held in the Czech village of Stará Lysá nad Labem on 6 September 1985.

I didn't use to go to punk performances, and I had no punk friends. It seemed to me that the music was too mixed with a strange kind of melody I called 'anti-socialist sad rock'. But the main problem for me was the poor political commitment of Czech punks, which was limited to the generic anti-communism style of Prague, but nothing more. . . . (Interview with Pippo, Prague, 4 March 2018)

It was necessary to wait until the nineties to observe a radicalization in the libertarian sense within the Czechs' antagonistic social groups.

Before the revolution [in 1989] punks had made friends with Nazis, in the Nazi skinhead sense. There were few Nazis in Czechoslovakia, so they used to sit together with the punks in the pubs. (Interview with Radka, Prague, 11 March 2018)

I remember that in the beginning the Communists saw punk as a positive phenomenon, at least while it was confined just to England. Then, as soon as the first punks appeared here, they reacted very harshly, although with some delay because they were still slow, their ideologists, in their decisions. I'm referring to an article published in the Bolshevik weekly, *Tribuna*, sometime in 1983. (Interview with Věva, Prague, 11 March 2018)

The system's cultural turn to the right of the system, culminating in the cited article published on 23 March 1983 and signed Jan Krýzl<sup>17</sup> (1983), had already been criticized at the time by music critic Josef Vlček. Vlček, unlike the editors of *Tribuna*, emphasized that punk and new wave were 'leftist' cultural forms. The weekly *Tribuna*, however, did not publish the critical letters by Vlček, which were thus published in the form of samizdat (Vlček 1983).

Only after 1988 did the communist ideologues try to reclaim punk, and it was they who organized the concerts of punk and new wave

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<sup>17</sup> It was evidently a fictitious name; the true author of the article has never been discovered (see Hartmann and Janouškovec 1993).



Punks and skins together in Prague shortly after the "Velvet revolution"  
(Jan Charvát)

groups. It was evidently an instrumental thing to recover a part of the youth. (Interview with Věva, Prague, 11 March 2018).

Shortly before 1989, leftist opposition to the authoritarian regime of Czechoslovakia began to be more and more visible. This opposition crystallized into a subject called Levá alternativa [Left Alternative] that included Trotskyist-inspired personalities: former members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, left-liberals, and anarchists. This complex path led a part of this opposition to the discovery, in both the Czech and Slovak Republics, of late seventies Italian autonomism (as a source of political inspiration). But Czech autonomism started not as the result of a debate within Marxists groups, but rather of a debate among anarchist groups born in the year 1989, the year in which the authoritarian Czechoslovakian regime collapsed<sup>18</sup>One of the first anarchist journals was called *Autonomie*, founded in 1991, although it seemed more to have been inspired by the German *autonomen*. Another milestone that would lead to the establishment of an autonomous group was the year 1995, when the (Czechoslovak Anarchist Federation) was founded. A little later, in 1996, a group called the Organizace revolučních anarchistů - Solidarita (Organization of Revolutionary Anarchists - Solidarita) (ORA-S) broke away from it. From the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ORA-S was considered within the anarchist movement to be increasingly more of a communist organization because of its high interest in workers' and industrial unionism. ORA-S later declared itself to be a group inspired by Georges Fontenis' *Manifesto of Libertarian Communism* (1953).<sup>19</sup>In

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18 For a brief history of anarchism in the Czech Republic, see, for example, Václav Tomek and Ondřej Slačálek (2006), Jan Charvát (2007), or Martin Bastl (2000).

19 In literature, the word 'libertarian communism' is sometimes translated in the Czech language with *libertinský komunismus* as it was used in the sixties by the Czech philosopher Robert Kalivoda (1968). We could not understand how this error came to be made in the Czech language because the adjective *libertinský* means libertine. It is as if the Czech anarcho-communists called themselves 'libertine communists'. Sometimes, but less often, the term *libertariánský komunismus* is used, which is the correct translation of the term libertarian communism.

2004, the ORA-S split into two parts. The one that still continues to consider itself part of the anarchist movement took the name Anarchokomunistická alternativa (Anarcho-communist Alternative) (AKA). Those who remained in ORA-S soon after changed its name to Koletivně proti kapitálu (Collectively Against Capital) (KPK). Over the years, KPK has profiled itself more and more as an autonomist collective with a strong intellectual tradition that flows into the study of the historical texts of Italian autonomist Marxism.

From the consulted texts,<sup>20</sup> it seems that, at the beginning of the first decade of the twenty-first century there was still considerable confusion in the Czech Republic about the meaning of autonomism. Above all, there was a lack of a theoretical basis and a lack of knowledge of the political and intellectual situation in Italy from 1960s to 1980s. In any case, just before the end of the twentieth century a strong, highly politicized punk scene began to form in the Czech Republic too, seemingly retracing, without effectively differentiating itself, the early 1980s Western HC scene. To discover traces of the transfer of HC from the beginning of the eighties and the current Czech anarcho-punk is almost impossible. In fact, the question involves several generations of musicians and political activists whose ages range between 15 and 56 years.

I understand that in the West there was anarchist punk, because there was the capitalist system. We had to wait for capitalism to take shape in order to understand punk as an expression of the anarchist political movement. The only band of the eighties that still has my respect is Plexis. Commercial bands, such as Visací zámek, no longer have my respect and I do not follow them any more. (Interview with Věva, Prague, 11 March 2018)

However, one of the many threads is represented by Underage, as can be seen from this last witness:

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20 Cf. mainly Petr Wohlmuth (Wohlmuth 1997) and Martin Bastl (2000).

In April 2009, I saw a young punk in the street looking like a copy of myself 25 years ago. He had the Underage logo sewn on his vest. I asked him how old he was, and he told me he was born in 1986. I pointed out that Underage had split up three years before his birth. He replied that it did not matter. I asked him if he knew the fate of the singer, and he told me that maybe he had died or emigrated to the East. I smiled and told him that I was alive. To him I looked like a ghost. Then I began to be intrigued myself; I started to go to concerts and realized that it really was just like before. What was imprinted in my youth had moved silently everywhere, even to Central Europe, where I ran away in order to forget. I discovered that CD copies of Underage were sold that we had never printed, since digital technology did not exist then. In addition to the concerts, there was always a flag that read—but why in German?—‘*Antifaschistische Aktion*’. Young punks today still invite me to the concerts of anarcho-punk bands. The last one was yesterday—there was also an Israeli group—but the Czechs were faster. And that’s good! (Interview with Pippo, Olomouc, 3 May 2016)

Our main respondent is still politically active and, at least in one case, was also able to join his political activities with Czech anarcho-punk:

I was the coordinator of cultural activities in my city district. I initiated in 2007 a project entitled ‘Together Against Racism’. Part of this project was also a performance by three HC bands from Czech Republic: Le Lapse, Red Insect, and Cunnilingus, from the Western Bohemian town of Rakovník. It was funny to find myself, an old former hardcore singer in a tie, in the position of being able to give material support to some young Czech punk. (Interview with Pippo, Prague, 4 March 2018)

## CONCLUSIONS

This, like so many individual interviews, offers us a wide range

of individual stories helpful both in the reconstruction of the spread of punk in the Czech Republic and in the reconstruction of Central-European autonomism.

The transfer of ideas survives the lives and attitudes of individuals.<sup>21</sup> The transmission of the lyrics of HC political punk songs is reminiscent of the transmission of medieval manuscripts.<sup>22</sup> Although it is possible to admit to a common matrix in youth revolts, the ways in which these are expressed follow diffusion centres located, for now, in the Western world. As things stand, the Internet has merely created a strong time acceleration end, at least in this case, no kind of paradigm shift in the transmission process itself.

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21 In Italy, it is a well known phrase attributed to the anti-Mafia judge Giovanni Falcone, who was killed in Sicily in 1992. Falcone's statement 'Men pass, ideas remain. Their moral tensions remain and continue to walk on the legs of other men', although expressed in another context, is well suited to our history.

22 An erudite example is Paul Mass' metaphor for philological research (Maas 1958: 20):

A river comes from an inaccessible source under the peak of a high mountain. It divides underground, its branches divide further, and some of these branches then come to the surface on the mountain side as springs; the water of these springs at once drains away and may come to the surface at several places further down the mountain side, finally flowing onward in visible forms overground. The water from its source onwards is of ever-changing but fine and pure colours. In its subterranean course it flows past several places at which colourants matters from time to time dissolve into the water; the same thing happens every time the stream divides and every time it comes to the surface in the spring. Every influx changes the colour of a certain part of the stream, and this part keeps its colour permanently; only very slight colour changes are eliminated by natural processes.

## **Nazism as a Mode of Transgression: Politicization of Post-socialist Czech and Slovak Black Metal**

*Ondřej Daniel<sup>23</sup>*

Black metal (BM) is one of the extreme metal genres that emerged out of heavy metal music in the early 1980s (Kahn-Harris 2006). It adopted and elaborated on elements of the punk ethos such as provocation, shock, and anti-humanism, and it also owes punk its vocal techniques and militant look with cartridges belts, torn jeans, and T-shirts. Together with generally less instrumental or vocal equilibrium, it created an incomparably rougher sound than the ‘new wave of British heavy metal’ (NWOBHM), which included bands such as Iron Maiden and Saxon. Moreover, it also incorporated some elements of glam rock and the hard rock aesthetic with references to the visual performances of Alice Cooper, Kiss, Black Sabbath, and other similar acts. Important influences on BM include horror movies and comic culture, echoing the Satanism of the post-1968 counterculture, sometimes labelled ‘acid Satanism’ (Baumann 2001). Musical bands such as Venom, Bathory, Hellhammer, and Celtic Frost are seen as founders of the genre, their performances not only exhibiting distinctive musical production but also important material for visual studies. (Mirzoeff 1999).

BM has, since its beginnings, had major orientation towards image and overall visual style. At the core of this study, therefore, is an analysis of the meanings communicated through several BM fanzines and bands after the fall of state socialism in former Czechoslovakia. Due to the transnational nature of these scenes, a result of the circulation of English written fanzines, musical lyrics, cassette tapes, followed later by CD booklets, posters, music videos, and other visual materials in the English language, and most recently by internet sites and online social media, the aim of territorializing

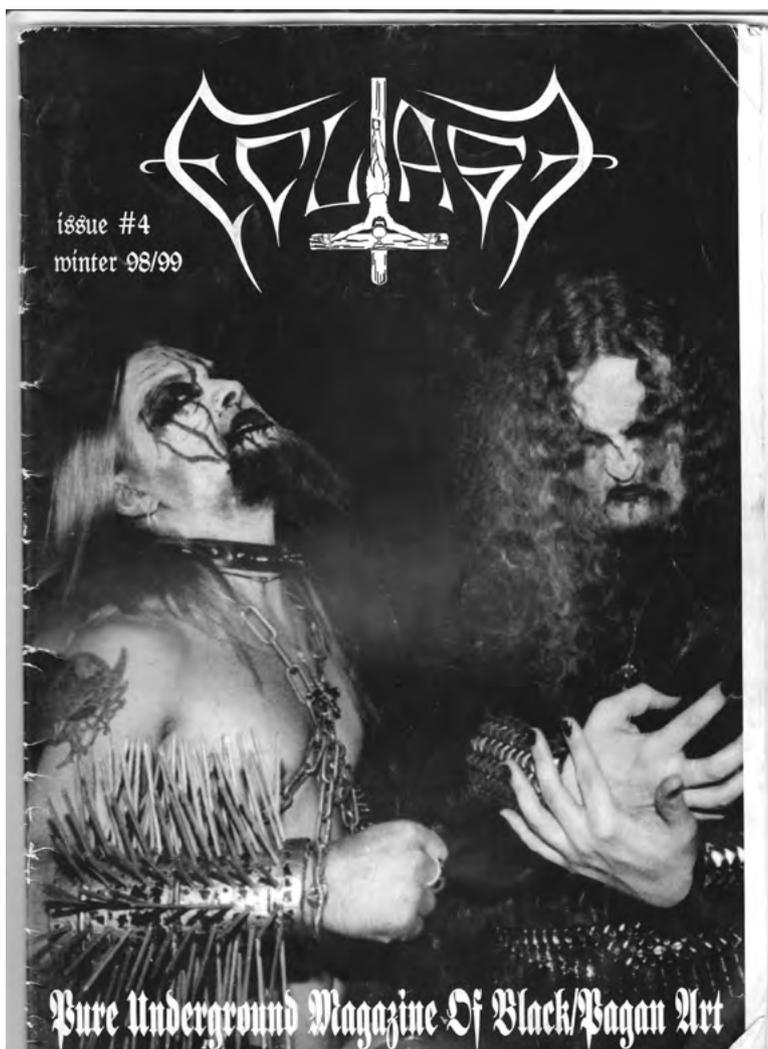
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23 This study is result of the research funded by the Czech Science Foundation as the project 6A ČR 17-09539S “Building up the Scene: Czech and Slovak Fanzine Culture from the State Socialism to Post-Socialism”.

their visual impact may, however, remain secondary. The main research question is an attempt to understand the different ways in which BM became inherently politicized during the post-socialist period.

This study is a side product of a larger research project analysing mainstream reactions to subcultures in the context of Czech post-socialism (Daniel 2016a, Daniel 2016b). Its methodology is based on microhistorical research using a plurality of accessible sources. In relation to BM visuals, I have concentrated on the Tumblr profile *BlackPrinting*, which focuses on visuals of the mainly Nordic second wave of BM in particular. This seemed to be the path to follow since many of the post-socialist BM scenes drew upon the aesthetics of early 1990s Norwegian bands specifically. This focus was confirmed by the master's thesis produced by Ryšávka and Palák, who presented research concerning Czech metal webzines and musical videos respectively (Ryšávka 2007, Palák 2007). Based on their information, I searched for materials on the Czech and Slovak file sharing database Uloz.to as well as on Google Images, YouTube, Facebook, Bandcamp, and its Czech and Slovak equivalent, Bandzone. An important empirical tool was the website Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives. I also found mention of Czech, Slovak, and other Eastern and Central Eastern European BM scenes thanks to the archiving of 1990s fanzines on the website entitled Send Back My Stamps.

Besides online research, I conducted six long distance interviews with members of different Czech and Slovak BM scenes: two of them were members of the first generation of Czech BM bands originating in the late 1980s; two are from the second generation, active since the mid-1990s, one based in Czech Republic and one in Slovakia; and two are from the youngest generation of Czech BM fans and musicians, active since the mid-2010s. At the core of this research is a generational cohort that was active in East Central European BM scenes from the first half of the 1990s until the second half of the 2000s. Last but not least, I consulted the staff of the Czech and Slovak Archive of Subcultures, and thanks to them, I was able to access the material from Slovakia in particular.



Black metal aesthetic (Český a slovenský archiv subkultur)

The theoretical framework of this study is provided by an analysis of aesthetic protest, as analysed by Alexei Yurchak in Chapter 7 of his notorious work, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Yurchak 2006: 238–281). When reading about late-socialist micro-communities of taste, such as necroaesthetics or *stiob*, one might also think about their similarities to BM scenes, in particular to the visually exaggerated stylizations of BM musical bands with corpse paint on their faces, battle axes or swords, bracelets made of nails, and other similar objects. Such staged photographs, mediated through fanzines, were often crucial in gaining what Sarah Thornton, based on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, described as subcultural capital (Gelder, Thornton 1997: 200–209). Keeping in mind that BM did not originate in Eastern Central Europe, the context of late state socialism, analysed by Yurchak, and the overidentification of its actors with its ideology, does not completely match the BM that can be understood as a result of a cultural transfer from the global cultural core to the semi-peripheral ‘second world’<sup>24</sup> (Wallerstein 2000).

But not all micro-communities of taste were uniquely limited to late state socialist Eastern Central Europe, with its abundance of free time and near-zero pressure on productivity (for American *stiob*, see Boyer & Yurchak 2010). One could also give further examples of geeks or otaku managing similarly to survive perfectly in the citadels of the capital. The visuals and proclamations produced in BM scenes can thus be analysed in keeping with the theories of Yurchak and Thornton through negative overidentification. The more evil and sinister the band’s appearance and way of speaking, the more subcultural capital it gains. The image and the word were clear means of communication inside the reference group. A different but complementary view was presented in the testimony of one of the youngest BM fans, stating that a lot of the entertainment production of band members posing in aggressive postures was created not because of their lust for violence but ‘just for fun’.

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24 This might be questioned in particular in relation to the mainly Nordic second wave of BM since the position of Scandinavia in the global cultural core is not evident. Also, BM spread beyond Central East Europe to regions such as Latin America and the Middle East, becoming a global phenomenon.

In any case, the spectacle created, following Guy Debord, can be understood as ‘capital accumulated to the point that it becomes images’ (Debord 2001: 11).

### SHADOWS OVER TRANSYLVANIA..., SORRY CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In late 1980s Czechoslovakia, metal music experienced a wide expansion of its popularity and became a truly social phenomenon (Rain 2008). The state socialist regime-backed intellectuals deemed it decadent. Their repulsion can be understood as the result of their distrust in the young undereducated working class males who reminded them of a literal reading of Marxist doctrine, leaving them uneasy with the idea that they could grow into the future proletarian hegemony of the ideal communist society. Heavy metal musical acts such as Citron, Vitacit, or even the thrash metal group Arakain had, however, guaranteed access to state-wide media, and the depoliticized heavy metal subculture was, similarly to that of punk, not perceived by the cultural authorities as a threat. This, however, could have varied geographically as well as in time since, for public performances, metal bands needed agreement from the cultural authorities, something which was not always easy to obtain.

During the second half of the 1980s, the first generation of Czech BM acts such as Törr, Master’s Hammer, and Root came into existence, influenced by the first wave of BM (Korál & Špulák 1993). These musical groups were key BM acts for this period: Törr was a Venom-like proto-black metal project; Master’s Hammer was occultist and musically influenced by Bathory; and Root mirrored the LaVeyan, US version of Satanism. Most of these bands were based in the Czech part of the socialist federation; however, the number of Slovak BM bands increased in the 1990s. In Slovakia, BM concerts (by Czech bands) took place even before 1990 and one of the noteworthy concerts was played by Törr in August 1988 in Bratislava, resulting in a media campaign against BM, and extreme metal in general, started by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia’s daily, *Rudé právo*, in a manipulative article ‘The Cult of Death and Violence. Why?’ (Urban 1988).



Live performance of Czech Black Metal band Törr (Vlasta Henych)

These hostile reactions from the mainstream media as well as the state apparatus, however, did not result in the open politicization of the scene, despite its already strong non- or pre-political positions against mainstream culture. The subcultural anti-communism in extreme metal scenes was very apparent and is documented by presented testimonies. Many bands, however, wanted to obtain the state's agreement to public performances. Moreover, for many, anti-communism did not result in any further engagement in politics. Anti-Christian and anti-humanist topics, characteristic of BM, can also be explained in the local context through primarily aesthetic opposition resulting in a cultural transfer, without any direct political implications for the predominantly secular Czechoslovak society.

After the fall of state socialism during the period disputably labelled as post-socialism (Verdery 1996; see Chelcea & Druta 2016 for the argumentation of 'zombie socialism'), the reappearance of violence in the public sphere, as well as in subcultural practice, has been extensively analysed for almost all countries of the regions of

Eastern, South Eastern and Central Eastern Europe (Borenstein 2008, Pusca 2015, Baker 2010, Kürti 2003, Pullmann 2011). In the Czech media, the discussion of violence in relation to BM took the form of moral panics (Cohen 2002). Mentions in newspapers about the black masses or a Satanist murder in prison can be understood as the result of a temporary hunger for the New Age-related topics. Violent anti-religious statements by BM fans and musicians were limited mainly to verbal expressions, but later there were also attacks against cemeteries and churches in the Czech Republic. An act of vandalism against a chapel in Brno, linked to the BM scene, is more or less proudly reclaimed in fanzine *Eclipse* in 1997. In Brno, six years earlier, the Czechoslovak Church of Satan had been founded by Jiří 'Big Boss' Valter, frontman of the BM band Root (for Root, see Vítková 2011, for the context of the Brno metal scenes, see Nesvadbová 2012). Valter followed the LaVeyan version of Satanism, often described in opposition to the Satanism of 1980s and 1990s Scandinavian BM that was not well known in Czechoslovakia at the time. Valter enjoyed much media attention with many controversial political statements praising simultaneously both Satanist and capitalist egoism:

'Everyone who achieved something had to work hard for it. This is the central thought of Satanism, owing success only to oneself. That is why I think a Satanist is anyone who is successful.' (Škarda 2008)

Egoism can be described as an integral part of LaVeyan 'Hollywood Satanism', echoing one part of the early BM scene. Contemporary red and anarchist black metal (RABM) fans, who can be understood as marginal in an already marginal BM subculture, describe this philosophy with a hint of irony glance as 'Ayn Rand with an occult tinge' (Red & Anarchist Black Metal). However, ideas like Valter's were also strongly present in the late 1980s and 1990s mainstream ethos of public space privatization.

Even if Root, and its frontman Jiří 'Big Boss' Valter in particular, enjoyed contacts with Satanists overseas, and his Czechoslovak Church of Satan was a franchise of the Church of Satan led by Cal-

ifornian Anton Szandor LaVey, it was not this Czechoslovak BM band that became the true legend abroad. This was left to Prague-based Master's Hammer, which, despite its origin outside the global cultural core, became a legend of the genre's first wave. Articles on the band appeared in fanzines all over Europe and the world, including the fanzine *Witchcraft*, issued in Germany in 1994. At the time, the band, and specifically its frontman František Štorm, did not give many interviews and had become reclusive. The author of the review managed to interview Štorm and, in its introduction, used many of the orientalist clichés linking the Czech Republic with Transylvania due to the bad weather and pitiable conditions of its public space.

#### FROM ANTI-CHRISTIANITY TO ANTI-SEMITISM

The same author had also reviewed, a year earlier in *Witchcraft*, a BM band named Amon that linked the first and second generation of BM in the Czech Republic. With personal links to Root, the Brno-based Amon – performing for German audiences under name of Amon Goeth – can, at least since the mid-1990s, be considered one of the pioneers of national socialist black metal (NSBM) in the country. Its tracks, such as 1998's 'Kike Priest', turned BM anti-Christianity into anti-Semitism, which would become one of the important ingredients of Eastern Central European BM. With the opening of Czechoslovakia and its successor states, information about the Norwegian black metal scene and its numerous show-off hate crimes started to flow into the Czechoslovak BM scene. By the second half of the 1990s, local BM bands started to imitate the visuals of the mainly Nordic second wave of BM. The key role in the establishment and dissemination of NSBM was played by the (East) German band Absurd, which elaborated on the already criminal actions of the Norwegian scene further and leaned even more openly towards Nazism (Moynihan & Söderlind 2003: 271-304). NSBM would come to have an important influence on the BM scenes of Poland and Ukraine.

Czech and Slovak BM bands were somehow more reluctant to adopt open NSBM stands, and in the fanzines, such as *Hallelujah* or *Eclipse*, one could find by the mid-1990s mixes of all BM influences: first and second wave, political and apolitical. *Hallelujah* took stands against Christianity and the left as well as pro-patriotic positions, but as a fanzine it was not openly political, and it also embraced other scenes, namely death and doom metal and grindcore. This mélange of apolitical and political is identified by Dayal Patterson even among pioneering Polish BM record labels and fanzines (Patterson 2013). Later, by the end of the 1990s, distinctive Czech and Slovak NSBM scenes crystalized with the help of the two above-named fanzines. *Eclipse* was, by its fifth issue (1999), issued in English, presenting openly NSBM musical acts such as Ogmias and Silva Nigra to international NSBM readers.

The move towards openly neo-Nazi activism is documented in *Hassgesang*, a fanzine similar to *Eclipse*, issued in Brno, Czech Republic starting in the mid-2000s. The mix of BM and White power (WP) symbolism is visible in the *Hassgesang* logo. Similar processes sidelining BM symbols, such as inverted crosses and pentagrams, in favour of the far right symbols of Celtic or Thor hammers, runic ornaments, and spears referring to heathen and other pagan traditions, as well as specific numeric combinations (mostly 18, 88, and 14) are documented also by other NSBM researchers and served often as the most distinctive feature (Granhölm 2011, Lucas et al. 2011, Olson 2011, Vrzal 2009, Venkantesh et al. 2015). As one of my informants stated:

Once, without knowing the band, I bought a CD by the Argentinian band Wolf & Winter. On the cover and inside the booklet were classic BM visuals: a forest in fog, a wolf, guys with metal bracelets and spikes à la Kerry King, and here and there some rune, misanthropic lyrics, hate, and paganism, but no Nazism. Even if the graphical font was gothic and something even the Nazis like, it's not only them. And at the end, in small letters, there was a contact for the band, something like wolfandwinter88@hotmail.com, and it became clear to me that I had supported a NSBM band. Nothing else, just the number was a

clear distinction. If I had not noticed the number, without knowing it, I could have easily been listening to raw Nordic pagan BM from Argentina and not some Nazi scum...

The topics of heathenism and other kind of paganism had already been introduced to the Czech NSBM scene through the fanzine *Eclipse*, which had made reference to the mythic last fortress of the West Slavic Rani tribe of Arkona. Following the examples of some predominantly Eastern European pagan metal bands in its English language 6<sup>th</sup> issue, it argued in favour of Slavonic traditionalism against the predominantly neo-Nazi inclinations of NSBM scenes. The overall porosity and overlap between several scenes and linguistic fields is illustrated by means of an existing translation of the book *Vargsmål*, written by Varg Vikernes, the head of a one-man BM project called Burzum and an exponent of the NSBM politicization of one part of the Norwegian BM scene. It had been translated to Czech from Russian.

During the decade in question, when Czech and Slovak NSBM was crystalizing, the above-mentioned fanzines carried not only articles on bands and recordings, but discussion of several crucial topics. Crucial for the establishment of a scene that took as its example of 'true Norwegian black metal' were articles criticising bands seen as BM posers, in other words trendy BM bands, such as Britain's Cradle of Filth, as well as articles against LaVeyan Satanism, often described as a product of Christianity (about the question of authenticity in BM, see Kuppens & Van der Pol 2014, for 'true Norwegian black metal', see Beste 2008, for the reception of 'trendy' bands, see Lucas et al. 2011). Other articles criticised WP scenes that emphasised the BM ethics of misanthropy in opposition to the WP neo-Nazism. In general, the BM underground ethos positioned itself in strong opposition to the commodification of the genre by some of the bands producing a cleaner sound with elements of symphonic music (Dimmu Borgir), female vocals (Cradle of Filth), as well as by the open merchandising of musical production and memorabilia such as T-shirts, patches, or badges.

Some contacts were documented between Czech BM in general and NSBM scenes in particular, other subcultural communities, not only those such as football hooligans and far right skinheads, both predominantly linked to political activism, but also death and thrash metal and grind core music fans. Editors of the above-mentioned fanzines nevertheless often found themselves in isolation within the wider extreme metal community (*Břítva* 2002). In response and opposition to NSBM, red and anarchist black metal (RABM) emerged from within the scene with important links to the crust punk microscene (using the inclusive label of ‘blackened crust’). Moreover, so-called Cascadian BM communicated ecological and anarcho-primitivist messages. A subgenre called blackgaze encompasses elements of the early 1990s indie rock subgenre of shoegaze. All these provoked the interest of a selective type of hipsters, who found BM—one of the least commoditized musical genres—corresponded to their interest in rare, left-over, and presumably authentic White male working class cultural manifestation.

#### MODE OF TRANSGRESSION?

In the working conclusion to this study it should be stated that this phenomenon was only a part of the production of the BM scenes studied here. Many other motifs could have been identified, not just band photos but also landscapes with forests, mountains, and other natural elements, as well as castles, tombs, churches, and other religious buildings (destroyed or not), pseudo-gothic prints, lithography, sci-fi and fantasy motives—some of them already discussed in this study. Pagan motifs, visualized through historical stylizations, have only been partly touched upon here. What is, however, crucial for the topic of this study is that Nazism was considered a mode of transgression. Following the politicization of the BM scenes in the second half of the 1990s, I have aimed to show how this mode was negotiated inside the scenes and how they were able to enter a dialogue with mainstream society and culture.



Skinheads at Black Metal band Törr live gig in Prague, 1990 (Jan Charvát)

In the cases of Czech and Slovak BM scenes, one can observe a trajectory from an originally purely (anti-)aesthetical community, manifesting non- or pre-political anti-communism, to several particular microscenes, differentiated following their (de)politicization. Politicization of the first generation of BM bands and fans was catalysed through the decisive role of the dominant liberal/conservative ideology following the changes of 1989–90. As stated in the study, Satanism was able to be depoliticized and articulated as a form of extreme individualism in keeping with the hegemonic reception of Thatcherism in ‘zombie socialist’ politics.

Racism was also part of the BM scenes from their beginning in the Czech and Slovak context, since mainstream politics and society has never distanced itself from racism, at least since the second half of the 1990s. Politicization in this context can be understood as a result of (sub)cultural transfer, either in the second half of the 1990s with the creation of local NSBM scenes or RABM scenes later. In both cases the politicization of the scenes, was catalysed through the involvement of new social movements. Moreover,

it was accompanied by the processes of hybridization, making NSBM part of the wider Rock Against Communism (RAC) scene and RABM even closer to punk and hardcore/crust punk. This hybridization can also be documented visually through the 'Black Metal Mafia' t-shirts worn by neo-Nazi skinheads as a reference to the 'true Norwegian black metal' scene of the first half of the 1990s. In most of the Czech parts of former Czechoslovakia, BM was not likely to be considered nearly as shocking as in more religious societies. There were obvious possible exceptions in more religious parts of the country, such as the southern and south-eastern parts of the country where the strength of Catholicism could also mean a transgressive position comparable in direction, although not entirely in extent, to that of BM in Slovakia, Latin America, and Southern Europe, and even more so to that of Poland, Norway, and the USA. This also could be why the BM scenes in the town and region of Brno were mentioned on several occasions in this study. On the contrary, in other local contexts, such as that around the undated Czech fanzine R.U.M., which existed in the early 2000s, Satanism could be considered a humorous provocation of the tabloids, from whose interest it was fed. Nevertheless, the temporary hunger for New Age religiosity, which Satanism indisputably takes part in, is documented in the Czech Republic as well as in Serbia, Russia, and other 'zombie socialist' countries (Menzel et al. 2011). It is, however, a crucial finding that the BM scenes, at least by the end of the 1990s, used English as their main communication language in fanzines and, later, on the Internet.

The study also stated that BM can be considered one of the least commercialized subcultures, and this attracted the interest of hipsters. By the mid-2000s, hipsters acted like carnivores, devouring many subcultural practices with their own amoebic construction of selves and others. However, this statement came up against its limits with the commodification of some BM features in spring 2015 with H&M's rage of T-shirts, displaying the name of the Swedish disco band Abba in BM calligraphy referring to the Norwegian band Darkthrone, the use of post-BM act Deafheaven tracks for iPhone marketing purposes, and the creation of BM-inspired visfor

the rock band Foo Fighters. The anecdotal band Mortus, created by Finnish BM fans for the purposes of trolling H&M's visual marketing, presents another current in these commodification trends. Mortus was a provocation from inside the BM scene containing NSBM-inspired visuals that H&M did not notice.

## **Formation of a Racist Skinhead Identity: Analysing the Lyrics of Czech White Power Bands**

*Jan Charvát*

In the early 1990s, some new elements were introduced in the post-socialist society of the Czech Republic, including subcultures and political radicalism. What had taken several decades to form in Western Europe was accomplished within a few years here. However, the resulting situation was somewhat different. Whereas skinheads were only one part of the far right in Western Europe, their position and relevance in Czechoslovakia, and subsequently in the Czech Republic, were different. During the so-called First Republic (1918–1938), there had been a self-standing far-right; however, the communist era (1948–1989) eradicated it entirely. Thus, after the Velvet Revolution, the far right had nothing to build on, and it was the skinhead subculture specifically that became its vital constituent part. Whilst the skinhead subculture was an essential part of the far right in the 1990s, it became outright dominant from 1998 to about 2010, with all essential organizations having their roots just in that subculture. For a long time, the combination of subcultural appearance and far-right ideology became symptomatic of what used to be a youth music subculture. The term ‘skinhead’ even became synonymous with members of the far right—for some time, when skinheads were referred to in the public space, it was automatically a reference to racists and neo-Nazis, and vice versa. The existence of different branches of the skinhead subculture was only known to an extremely limited number of people, even though information about the subculture’s history was available in the Czech Republic, including the simultaneous existence of non-racist skinhead groups in the country from the very start of the 1990s. However, the racist branch dominated the skinhead subculture, being able to form a self-sufficient, strong, and relatively stable scene that importantly shaped the Czech far-right. Additionally, White power music became the central ideological factor and means of recruitment,

concentrated around a few dozen White power bands that formed in the Czech Republic after 1992 (cf. Mareš 2003, Charvát 2018). It was this music scene that shaped the attitudes of the skinhead subculture, spread its messages, and fortified its ideology.

However, this situation also affected the type of research that was typically undertaken into Czech skinhead subculture. Political science owned issues of political radicalism. More specifically, building on the approach of German extremism theory (U. Backes, E. Jesse), Czech researchers sought to determine whether the groups or organizations studied deviated from the established constitutional order, but showed little interest in other research questions. This is why there are still relatively few studies in the Czech context on questions other than how dangerous the skinhead subculture is; studies focusing primarily on issues of the subculture or of Czech White power music as such are absent.

It is in this regard that we have focused on these questions in the present study: Since skinhead subculture has become an essential factor of the Czech far-right, what exactly does it mean ‘to be a skinhead’? What are the fundamental building blocks on which the racist skinhead identity rests? And what role therein is played by political opinions? In short, the present text addresses the following primary research question: *In what ways is racist skinhead identity defined in the lyrics of Czech White power bands?* Our second question is: *Have there been any changes to that definition over time?*

## METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

To answer the research question, we implemented a content analysis (Dvořáková 2010) of racist skinhead band lyrics, supplemented by an analysis of subculture fanzines, interviews with the subculture’s participants, and nonparticipant observation. We relied on a sample that comprises the works of leading skinhead bands from 1990 to the present. The criteria for the inclusion of bands were included in the sample were longevity as a group, number of records published, supra-regional activity, and relevance to the scene as such. Interviews and mentions in fanzines verified their relevance. The sample con-

sists of 20 bands and approximately 50 albums from the context of racist skinheads, plus 101 fanzines of racist provenience. Content analysis of the music lyrics was our primary source of information, for these bands have long been the source of critical messages resonating within the subculture (after all, it is referred to as a 'youth music subculture'). They are generally shared and available to most members, and cover all issues and themes—as opposed to fanzine articles, which were used rather as a complementary resource.

In our analysis, we focused on how the concept of a skinhead is defined within the racist skinhead subculture: How can one tell skinheads apart? What do they wear, do, believe in? And what kind of actions and behaviors are typical of them?

We aimed at inductive building of categories (Dvořáková 2010: 98) that are primarily attached to the definition of a skinhead identity; in other words, what makes one a skinhead in the context of subcultural studies. In this research stage, we sought to define categories that (a) related to the definition of a skinhead, (b) occurred repeatedly with most of the bands and, subsequently, (c) showed indirect traits that further defined the identity (especially political attitudes), whether or not they were directly related to the skinhead identity.

Our goal was not to determine how frequently such categories are employed but rather their very existence, their forms, and whether or not they are shared and accepted as part of the notion of skinhead identity. We found it advantageous that the music and especially lyrics produced by skinhead bands are highly schematic and not so rich in metaphors that they might be difficult to interpret.

## STATE OF THE ART

The skinhead subculture has been an attractive object of social research from its inception. It was covered as early as 1975 in Stuart Hall's (2006 [1975]) *Resistance through Rituals*, and again in 1979 in Dick Hebdige's (2012 [1979]) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. In both cases, the research focus was primarily on the subculture's relations with the working class. However, after the racist branch

of skinheads came to the fore and spread practically all around the globe, most authors (both abroad and in the Czech Republic) began to emphasize that specific branch. This gave rise to a large body of literature, especially from the US (Dobratz 2000, Hamm 1993, Moore 1993, Ridgeway 1995). The authors focused on manifestations of racism and anti-Semitism or links between skinhead 'crews' and traditional (US) organizations such as the Ku-Klux-Klan, White Aryan Resistance, or Aryan Nations. However, most of them failed to define, or only briefly mentioned, the basic attributes of a skinhead identity. In this respect, it was Hamm's work especially that attested to the (notable mobilizing) potential of White power music in the shaping of racist skinheads' opinions, along with the relevance of their subcultural clothing style. In an interesting contribution to the study of the skinhead subculture, Robert Wood (1999) worked with a 'subcultural frame of reference' as a set of definitions, norms, and values of the subculture, yet he did not seek to identify its content. In contrast, Sarabia and Shriver (2004) elaborated the formation of a skinhead identity (specifically non-racist skinheads) as relying on the key elements of style, music, and language. The latter was treated as a means of distinguishing the in-group from other groups within the skinhead subculture (especially the racists); politics was also treated as an important element of the subcultural identity. Borgeson and Valeri (2005) also focused on 'skinhead ideology and culture,' studying it through an analysis of websites. For them, the concept of identity served merely as a categorization device, whereas identity formation is not addressed. On the other hand, when elaborating the issue of culture and politics among skinheads, the authors did identify some formative moments (specific forms of the skinhead visual style, political opinions, and so on), although their treatment was rather loose and the results questionable (for example, the content analysis of the website found that most skinhead bands did not work with the theme of violence, which contradicts other research evidence including that presented in this chapter). According to the authors, the skinhead subculture evolved primarily around music, clothing, tattoos, beer, and scooters (this is a rare documen

tation of scooters as an element of skinhead subculture), yet they worked with these terms somewhat erratically. This is also the case with the skinhead ideology, which was primarily associated by the authors with racism and anti-Semitism. Alex Campbell (2006) also observed some elements constitutive of a skinhead identity (style, music). In what he presented as a struggle for a 'true history of skinheads,' he emphasized the importance of skinhead band lyrics in forming a skinhead identity. Furthermore, Campbell distinguished between racist, non-racist, and anti-racist skinheads, something other researchers did not do explicitly. To sum up, some authors acknowledge the importance of subcultural and political identities, but few of them go on to analyse them—most tend to take them for granted.

The first works on the skinhead subculture in the Czech Republic (understood rather as synonymous with the neo-Nazi movement) were purely descriptive and provided basic information about the different groups that had formed in the country. These include the pilot study of the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention, *Extremismus mládeže v České republice* (Youth Extremism in the Czech Republic, 1996), and a subsequent volume edited by Petr Fiala, *Politický extremismus a radikalismus v České republice* (Political Extremism and Radicalism in the Czech Republic, 1998). Whereas the latter opened the subject matter and offered different conceptualizations, Mareš's *Pravicový extremismus a radikalismus v ČR* (Right-Wing Extremism and Radicalism in the Czech Republic, 2003) made a relatively clear choice in using the German-origin *Extremismus-theorie* (extremism theory) as its basic methodological framework for the study of the skinhead subculture. Josef Smolík followed in Mareš's footsteps with his comprehensive monograph, *Subkultury mládeže* (Youth Subcultures, 2010), which examined the skinheads from a security perspective. This author, Jan Charvát, also treated the skinhead subculture marginally in his work *Současný politický extremismus a radikalismus* (Contemporary Political Extremism and Radicalism, 2007), which also viewed these issues primarily through the lens of extremism theory. A few other Czech

authors studied the skinhead subculture while focusing on branches other than racist (Bastl 2001, Stejskalová 2012, Novotná 2013, Novotná, Heřmanský 2014). Ondřej Daniel's *Násilím proti „novému biedermeieru“* (Fighting the 'New Biedermeier' through Violence, 2016b) paid some attention to Czech skinheads, especially in the context of violence, applying a historical perspective primarily. Hedvika Novotná and Martin Heřmanský partially addressed the subcultural identity in the context of Czech skinheads, yet these authors only focused on the non-political part of the subculture. Even though the racist branch of skinheads became an essential agent of the Czech far right after 1989, only limited attention has been paid thus far to its subcultural, political foundation.

## HISTORY OF SKINHEADS

The skinhead subculture emerged in late 1960s England and primarily appealed to young men from working class suburbs (Marshall 1996). Its predecessors were the English mods, and African-Caribbean immigrants from the Antilles, referred to as rude boys (Hebdige 2012 [1979]). At their intersection, an utterly original subculture emerged that placed a strong emphasis on clothing-style references to its working class roots, music and a culture of dance halls, football fandom, and violence (Marshall 1996). Membership in the working class is the fundament with which most skinheads continue to identify to the present day. However, although the first generation of skinheads were recruited from both White and Black working class communities in Britain, their coexistence was not always unproblematic (Hebdige 2012 [1979]). Despite that, the early form of the skinhead subculture in the 1960s was not racist, and it could hardly be defined in terms of a political movement (Moore 1993) as later became the norm in the Czech Republic.

The original form of the skinhead subculture peaked at the end of the 1960s (Marshall 1996) and then its popularity in British society faded (whereas it was still non-existent in other countries).

A comeback occurred at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s when skinhead groups joined the emerging punk revolt. However, conflicts between the two groups soon emerged because many skinheads perceived punks as a new version of hippies due to their tendency toward drug use, rather leftist political orientation, and the anti-social image many orderly skinheads despised. The movement itself was going through some changes at that time (Hebdige 2012 [1979]). The first generation of reggae and ska bands subsided (also because many Black skinheads shifted to Rastafarianism— Hebdige 2012 [1979]) and made room for a more vigorous style referred to as

Oi! (basically, a simplified and more aggressive variant of punk music); the appearance of skinheads themselves changed somewhat (they started wearing the now typical bomber jackets and embraced a general paramilitary appearance), and the subculture became much more racist (albeit not necessarily neo-Nazi). However, under the influence of bands such as Ian Stuart Donaldson's Skrewdriver, a considerable part of the skinhead subculture shifted to the adoration of racism and, relatively soon after that, also neo-Nazism. This is when the subculture split (Moore 1993) into three main branches: racist, non-racist, and anti-racist. The present paper focuses exclusively on the racist branch.

Without a doubt, the initial catalyst in the growth of skinhead subculture in Bohemia was provided by the band Orlík, which also laid the foundation of the skinhead identity.



Aged traditional skinhead  
(Jan Charvát)

## 1. Formative period, 1990–1992: Orlík and Braník

In the initial period of the early 1990s, it was Orlík that shaped the nature of the entire subculture and laid the foundation of how skinheads continue to be perceived to this date, even though its so-called Calixtine vision for the skinhead subculture did not eventually prevail. As for the very definition of who is a skinhead, our main sources are the lyrics of two tracks from Orlík's first album, *Miloš Frýba for President* (1990), namely 'Skinhead' and 'Orlík'. The former song begins with the statement that 'The same blood is circulating in our veins' and repeats it as the opening of every other verse—a reference to unity, community, as well as ties of kindred. The lyrics, as well as the context of other tracks on the album, make it relatively clear that this 'same blood' refers to membership in the nation. The lyrics go on to outline the basic subcultural attributes of a typical skinhead uniform—bomber jacket, boots, and a shaved head. The subcultural identity also contains a reference to national symbols ('The lion is what I want to bear on my chest'), which are dealt with more intensively in other tracks. The song's concluding verses contain two more references to the definition of a skinhead, namely beer and violence. In short, the skinhead's image here consists of references to his basic style (clothing and hairstyle), basic ideological framework (nationalism), specific leisure activities (beer, football), and type of behavior recommended under certain circumstances (violence). Towards the end of the song, there is also a motif of deviation from the mainstream society, specifically in two instances: the verses 'But they don't do anything / They only come here to drink' and subsequently 'Everyone is a criminal in their eyes / Yet they won't lock up those that they should'. Both cases can be interpreted as an effort to legitimize skinheads and reject the anti-social or criminal behaviors that are stereotypically ascribed to them. The final important element that defined Czech-skinheads is a short verse from the song, Perník (Crystal Meth). By stating that 'skinheads do not do drugs', the song establishes the tradition of rejecting psychotropic substances. This later underlays the formation of the Czech skinheads' negative relationship to the

formerly affiliated punk subculture when its members came to be stereotypically referred to as 'junkies'.

Other tracks off Orlík's first album are not explicitly linked to the skinhead subculture but provide a relatively detailed map of the political horizons at which the subculture aimed, according to the band. The principal motifs include anti-communism (Zahrádka [Garden]), racism ('Bílý jezdec' [White Rider], 'Álīb agil' [White League spelled backwards]) oscillating between its cultural and biological forms ('They will never be like us / Don't believe in miracles'), Hussitism ('My proti nám' [Us Against Us], 'Vozová hradba' [Wagon Fort]), football fandom ('Viktorka Žižkov', the name of a club in Prague), and nationalism (Čech [Czech Man]).

Other lyrics repeat the previously defined subcultural attributes such as beer (Oioioi, Pivečko [a diminutive for beer]) or the specific music style ('Noční kluby' [Night Clubs]), as well as contempt for Germany and Nazism ('Faschos'). In the song, 'Zelený krávy' (Green Bitches), Orlík expresses a seemingly atypical criticism of women in the military, demanding a 'natural' (these days, one might say 'traditional') form of womanhood that is incompatible with masculine behavior.

Orlík's second record, *Demise* (Resignation, 1991), contained several tracks aimed against specific ethnic groups. The anti-Ziganist lyrics come as little surprise ('Dvojí metr' [Double Standard], as well as part of 'Ty vole, Láďo' [Láďa, Dude!]), but less expected are songs against Arabs ('S.O.S.') and Turks ('Praděda' [Grand Granddad]). The latter track also contains a verse about 'White Europe'. Specific lyrics occur in the song, 'Terror', which criticises Nelson Mandela (and secondarily also from Yasir Arafat and Fidel Castro), arguing that they are terrorists.

All in all, two categories comprise Orlík's definition of a skinhead. First, subcultural attributes include appearance (bomber jacket, heavy boots, shaved head) and concrete activities (music, football, violence, and beer). Second, political opinions include nationalism, anti-communism, and racism. Along with its raw and straightforward music, nationalist and offensive lyrics and, last but not least, unique paramilitary fashion, Orlík—and the skin-

head subculture in general—provided Czech youth with a new and highly attractive subcultural object. Thus, the early 1990s band played the leading role in popularizing skinhead subculture in Bohemia, a subculture whose members would later predominantly go through strong radicalization and assume positions of neo-Nazism and neo-fascism.

Braník was the first band that ventured in this direction. It often performed side by side with Orlík, and published a record (Braník Power, 1991) that got official distribution and whose songs are still alive on the skinhead scene. Its message was undoubtedly ‘clearer’ and more open than that of old Orlík songs because the lyrics of Braník were openly racist and called for violence.

Braník’s and Orlík differ considerably in their structure. First, Braník places much weaker emphasis on the subcultural attributes of skinhead identity, which are otherwise viewed in line with Orlík (and are practically the defining traits of the skinhead style as such). A skinhead is defined by ‘rolled up jeans and laced boots’ (‘Vaše cesta’ [Your Way]), bomber jackets, shaved heads, and heavy boots (‘Bílá Evropa’ [White Europe]), and also beer or alcohol in general (‘Branická šlechta’ [The Gentry of Braník], ‘V Braníku je živo’ [It’s Lively in Braník], ‘Pivopád’ [Beer-fall]). Braník does not elaborate this question further, even though the term ‘skinhead’ is voiced much more frequently in its lyrics. In these additional instances though, skinheads are associated with political rather than subcultural motifs: The less attention Braník pays to defining skinheads as a subcultural phenomenon, the more its lyrics elaborate their political fundament. Whereas Orlík defines the skinhead as a nationalist, Braník professes open racism as their central value. The opening track of the album entitled laconically, ‘Oi na ROI’ (Oi Against the Roma Civic Initiative) clearly expresses not only a negative opinion of the Roma (they steal, rape, hustle, avoid work, and do not feel any fear when they ‘do something bad to White people’) but also a clear skinhead attitude towards them (‘We don’t want them here / There will be peace in a White Bohemia’). Open racism occurs in many additional lyrics (‘Praha’ [Prague], ‘Vaše cesta’ [Your Way], ‘Bílá Evropa’ [White Europe],

‘Svítá’ [Dawn], ‘Čechy Čechům’ [Czech Land for Czechs]), which often can be interpreted as highly aggressive. ‘Bílá Evropa’ [White Europe] talks explicitly about ‘race’, a term that was never voiced in Orlík lyrics. In addition to racism, the skinhead political identity is now importantly shaped by direct references to the political- or far-right. The rather simple song entitled, ‘Doprava’ [To the Right] contains one central message: ‘There is only one way / one that goes to the right’. However, this idea is treated somewhat differently in another track, ‘Samet’ (Velvet):

Enough with the left  
We will overthrow those Jewish Bolsheviks  
The right-wing must advance!

The left is associated with ‘Jewish Bolsheviks’, a term with relatively close ties to historical Nazism. The lyrics of ‘Teď je náš svět’ (It’s Our World) go in the same direction in referencing Hitler’s Endsieg: ‘It is clear to everyone at once what the matter is / The struggle must continue till final victory.’ Finally, ‘Samet’ (Velvet) is the only example of anti-communism in Braník songs—and this very instance links anti-communism to violence (‘Forget about the Velvet / We will sweep the commies away!’).

The lyrics of Braník also contain, whether or not in the context of skinheads, references to nationalism (‘Čechy Čechům’ [Czech Land for Czechs], partially also ‘Šance’ [Opportunity] and ‘Kudy dál’ [Which Way Next]), and local patriotism (‘Praha’ [Prague], ‘Branická šlechta’ [The Gentry of Braník]).

The defining categories are basically equal to those of Orlík, albeit with an apparent shift in subcultural attributes (whereas orlík also define the skinhead’s appearance, the activities mentioned are limited to beer and violence, which are paid much less attention) to political attitudes, accentuating primarily open (biological) racism, which is dramatically more prevalent than references to anti-communism and nationalism.

## *Summary*

In the formative period (1990–92), two essential categories occur in the lyrics of crucial bands: subcultural attributes and political identification. Subcultural attributes can be further split into the categories of appearance (shaved head, bomber jacket, heavy boots) and activities (beer, music, violence and, partially, football). Political issues are related to nationalism as well as to open racism (of both the cultural and the biological type), support for the political right and anti-communism.

## **2. OPEN NEO-NAZISM: 1993–2005**

The wave of skinhead bands established at the turn of 1991/1992 was identified with a racist and neo-fascist tradition and quickly shifted towards open Nazism. For this reason, these bands were not inclined to sell their music through official distribution and instead self-produced their records—first demo-tapes and later CDs. Several dozens of these bands emerged gradually in the Czech context, becoming the primary agent of the ideology and recruitment for the racist skinhead subculture; only some of them can be seen as key. Chronologically speaking, Buldok was the first skinhead band to assumed the positions of neo-Nazism, with strong British or Anglo-Saxon influences, and practically achieved cult status on the Czech White power scene.

Buldok's first record, *Patriot* (1992), postulated a perspective on skinheads that would become crucial for the future orientation of the subculture and would be followed by most bands within the subculture until about 2005, when the general orientation of Czech White power music underwent a revision.

Buldok continued on the path set by Braník and paid only marginal attention to the outward appearance of skinheads. Subcultural attributes can only be found on two tracks, 'Buldok' (Bulldog—'braces, boots, shaved heads') and 'Elita' (Elite—'braces, boots, tattoos'); however, the latter song, 'Buldok', disputes the

perception of skinheads as a fashion style ('Skinhead—is not a fashion for us / Skinhead—is a way of life').

Although the skinhead identity is still essential for the band on this album (whereas it no longer appears on its other records), other lyrics no longer associate skinheads with their subculture, but rather with political opinions and, newly, with social status and emotions. An interesting motif, one that stood out from the sharply anti-communist discourse of the time, was Buldok's glorification of the working class background of skinheads, such as in 'Elita' ('Skins—the elite of the working class'). The chorus of 'Pátek' (Friday) says: 'We cannot be stopped, that is what I wanted to say / Heroes of the working class, and who is more?' A similar motif is voiced in the opening track, 'Náš hněv' (Our Anger), as well as in 'Skinhead'. Skinheads are described primarily as workers who only experience 'hate, blood, sweat and tears' in their lives. Not only their hard work but also the state of their country is a reason to hate. In reference to the First Lady's charity, Buldok sings: 'Committees of goodwill and nothing for you / Lies about liberty, love, and equality!' It also criticises the alleged 'Havlistm' of the time (although, the term had not yet been coined), namely the country's overall orientation towards liberal capitalism with a strong emphasis on human rights. According to the band, the latter is merely a pretense, a liar's concept, for exploiting White people and making life easy for the pseudo-elite, the Roma, and foreigners of colour. It is exactly this sense of injustice (and, paradoxically, also inequality, although it is not elaborated in depth) that appears in 'Bílý králík' (White Rabbit), a song which depicts the Roma minority negatively, as aggressive, racist, and advantaged at the expense of White people. Buldok demands: 'Equal laws and justice for all / No more advantages for Black parasites'. The skinhead is supposed to be the answer to this adverse situation:

A working class hero  
The last hero of the White race  
A warrior in European unity  
The only hope for better times!

Although the band avoided the term class due to its rhetorical contamination of it by the Communist Party, it did consider the skinhead's social status (as a worker), his racial identity, and the role he is supposed to play in society to be considerably more important than his appearance. This supposed role is nothing less than to fight for the essence of European civilization. It is precisely this goal that brings all skinheads together ('our anger and fight unite us') and legitimizes the anger and hatred they feel. In fact, Buldok revives the original ethos of National Socialism, albeit without directly referencing it on this record. It also rejects democracy, as in the track entitled, 'Bílá bouře' (White Storm): 'Liberal politicians, the democratic filth / Allies of the reds, they have betrayed their country'. Buldok delegitimizes liberal democracy by linking it to communism.

These motifs—proletarianism, race, anger, unity—are subsequently repeated and tied together in Buldok's other songs, with the central progression from hate to anger and anger to fighting. Thus, hatred becomes the emotion that gives strength to skinheads, as repeated in 'Bílá bouře' (White Storm—'You waited long tied up in shackles / Your hate and strength grew with the years'), in 'Zítřek' (Tomorrow) as well as in 'Buldok' (Bulldog—'In your hate is your power / your pride, the White race'), where the progression from hatred to power is juxtaposed with one from racial identity to pride. Whereas Orlik completely avoided the term race and Braník used it with great caution, for Buldok it is a fundamental concept. The very term 'race' is again voiced in the tracks 'Buldok' (Bulldog) and 'Bílá bouře' (White Storm—'The voice of the White race must never rest / The Celtic chorus and the new day that comes with it'); a reference is also included in 'Zítřek' (Tomorrow) and another reference in 'Bílá bouře' (White Storm) reads:

Where did White pride go?  
Dirty streets of beautiful cities  
Black hordes, the Zionist curse

White pride is weakening and dying

The terms pride and honor that appear here are associated with racial identity to complete the picture of a decline of European civilization struck by a 'Zionist curse'. Only the skinhead can stop this infection because he is 'the last warrior' that rises 'like a Phoenix from the ashes' ('Zítřek' [Tomorrow]). Finally, a quasi-sacral orientation towards ancient Germanic religion, which appears throughout the record, represents a specific motif that will later become the staple of not only this band but also the entire racist branch of skinheads.

### *Summary*

In Buldok lyrics, skinheads are depicted as members of the working class, filled with anger and hatred; they are defined by braces, boots, tattoos, and their racial identity; and they are the last people with a capacity to defend the European civilization from enemies both within and without. Interestingly, Buldok perceives skinheads primarily as a pan-European phenomenon, and although it tends to be perceived as a nationalist band, it has never touched upon issues of Czech nationalism in its lyrics—the term 'Czech nation' cannot be found. Also missing from the band's other albums is the theme of skinhead identity, since it is replaced by general political or mythological messages (the latter being one of Buldok's characteristic traits). Subcultural attributes only appear in the first album.

A comparison with the previous bands reveals clear differences. In building the skinhead identity, Buldok relies not only on the categories seen in the cases of Orlík and Braník but adds some new ones which later form the identity's central framework. Little attention is paid to subcultural attributes: appearance is utterly marginal (in addition to the obligatory boots and shaved heads, Buldok adds tattoos and braces—the symbol of a skinhead identity—that were not thematised by the previous bands) and subcultural activities are entirely missing, although they will appear on future albums.

Political opinions are, however, frequently mentioned and are dominated by racism and nationalism (albeit in its universal form, detached from all concrete countries), and secondly, by anti-communism and anti-Semitism with hints of direct support for historical Nazism (a glorification of Adolf Hitler in the song 'Patriot'). Additional emerging categories include social status (an emphasis on a working class background), mythological or quasi-religious motifs, and emotional charges (hatred and anger). These five basic categories, around which the skinhead identity is formed, can subsequently be found in the lyrics of all other racist skinhead bands, practically unchanged, up to the present day.

### **3. SUBCULTURAL ATTRIBUTES**

#### *Appearance*

The central subcultural attributes that define a skinhead's appearance are practically the same for all bands: a shaved head, boots, and tattoos. Most bands share this definition but, as in the case of Buldok's lyrics, devote little attention to it, even if it appears as a continual interest. Bands that present the skinhead's appearance in this way include Diktátor (song 'Správná cesta dnešní mládeže' [The Right Path for Today's Youth], 1993), Agrese 95 ('Vyholení a tetování' [Shaved and Tattooed], 1997), Adler ('Party' [Cliques], 2002) and Randall Gruppe ('Skinhead', 2005). The skinhead appearance is communicated somewhat unwittingly, and there is no effort to either problematize or advocate for that appearance. This suggests that the skinhead appearance was taken for granted; no one questioned it, and thus there was no need to explain or emphasize it.

A slightly different take appears only in the song, 'Skinheads', by Agrese 95 (album *Hard Reality*, 2002). This is practically the only instance of the history of the skinhead subculture being addressed in depth. Moreover, according to Agrese 95, that history is entirely unambiguous:

East London, late 1960s

A new order is ascending, the youth revolting

The protest, pride, honor and new ideas

[...]

Solid bond of brotherhood and shaved heads

Uniforms, heavy boots, the first tattoo

The nation, patriotism, being proud of one's ancestors.

The history of skinheads is presented as that of the racist skinheads, and any Black influences are wholly ignored. This is mainly in line with the central strategy assumed by racist skinheads when it came to their history, namely denial and silence.

### *Activities*

Subcultural activities are also addressed in the same way by most of the bands. They mostly include just two elements: beer (or alcohol in general) and skinhead music. Songs glorifying beer, the pub, or cliques are in the repertoire of most skinhead bands, practically irrespective of their political orientation. Interestingly, some of them simultaneously have lyrics that criticize excessive drinking for diverting skinheads' attention away from activism. The theme of skinhead music is shared to a lesser extent, but still appears relatively frequently; the term 'White rock 'n' roll' was soon coined by skinhead bands to refer to their music. This term is often voiced by Vlajka (Slovanská hráz [Slavic Barrier] 1995, Skin 'n' Roll 1996). Agrese 95 also links both activities on the track mentioned above, 'Vyholení a tetování' (Shaved and Tattooed, album *Povstaň* [Rise Up], 1997):

You are a soldier, above all

Your uniform is shining in the distance

However, we have one thing in common

Beer drinking is our culture

White rock is your music.

The clause, 'Your uniform is shining in the distance' is a reference to the traditional neo-Nazi slogan, 'Your skin is your uniform'. Thus, this major category has remained practically unchanged since the times of Orlik. Exceptions aside, subcultural appearance and activities do not change.

### *Social status*

The question of one's position in society is not entirely fundamental to the racist skinhead scene, yet it is relatively apparent that most bands tend to identify with a working class background. Two bands formulate this precisely. Indeed one of them, Vljajka, has a track actually called 'Dělnická třída' (Working class) on its 1995 album, *Slovanská hráz* (Slavic Barrier):

We are the White working class  
The largest part of the Czech nation  
That is raising its arms like a warrior  
To defend the race and the nation

The other, Agrese 95 uses fairly similar language in its song, 'Nová generace' (New Generation, eponymous album, 1998):

Communism fell, the rule of the Jews began  
And continues to destroy our working class  
For we are the foundation of the whole State  
We are feeding the bellies of the government apparatus.

In both cases, working class membership is perceived as being part of the nation's majority. Of interest are the contexts in which references to social status appear. Vljajka associates the working class with a fight for the race and the nation, whereas Agrese 95 supports the same conclusion from the other side when it perceives Jews as a threat to the working class.

#### 4. POLITICAL ATTITUDES

In contrast, the question of political attitudes changed substantially. As in the previous cases, nationalism and anti-communism resonate here, but the contrast that we were able to see between the performance of Orlík and Braník intensifies, and racism and anti-Semitism come clearly to the fore, including direct references to the adoration of Nazism.

##### *Nationalism*

Nationalist rhetoric is something the media typically associates with the (racist) skinhead subculture. In fact, nationalism is not a fundamental theme on the Czech scene, and it occurs in slightly different forms than could be expected. Czech racist skinheads perceive their nationalism as an effort to defend rather than glorify the nation. Their lyrics are almost entirely devoid of positive statements in relation to the nation (except the occasional reference to the words of national anthem, ‘the beautiful Czech land’). Instead, the construction of nationalism revolves mainly around defense against the nation’s enemies or concern about its decay (in his thesis, R. Griffin argues that a palingenetic myth of national rebirth is fascism’s fundamental notion). In the words of Vlajka’s song, ‘Do boje’ (Let’s Fight, 1995): ‘We cannot go on like this / Don’t let the Czech nation be afraid.’ Similarly, the band Zášť 88 sings: ‘The only, the last patriots, don’t let them stop us / For it’s up to us alone to defend our nation’ (‘Znovuzrození národa’, Rebirth of the Nation, 1995).

Aside from defense, loyalty is also among the most frequently occurring nationalist motifs. As the band Útok sang on its track ‘Otevři oči’ (Open Your Eyes, 1998): ‘We pledge allegiance to you and to those / Who will save our homeland from decay’. The same motif occurred in Beowulf’s 2001 eponymous song: ‘Pride and loyalty to the homeland / The priority and foundation of existence.’ The band Attack added in ‘Síla bouře’ (Power of The Storm, 2008): ‘Love for the homeland, loyalty to the skinheads—this is my way’.

Similarly, a band named Florian Geyer sang in 2010: 'For God, for the nation, for the love of our homeland, without reservations'.

It is apparent that most of the lyrics do not specify which nation is being referred to, a choice that might have a rationale in the case of Florian Geyer (which identified with the traditions of the Sudetenland). As stated above, Buldok, the seminal Czech band, does not have a single reference to Czech nationalism in its lyrics.

### *Anti-communism*

Anti-communism has always been a part of the ideological repertoire of racist skinheads and, at the same time, the theme has brought the subculture the closest to the political mainstream. Despite that, it has never been the most frequently occurring theme. Vljaka launched the theme with its song, 'Zničte rudý' (Eliminate the Reds, 1995), whose chorus goes: 'Eliminate all reds, just like the skinhead can'. It continued in 1996 with 'České legiony' (Czech Legions) that glorified both the legionary tradition and the fight against communism, as well as the character of General Gajda, leader of the National Fascist Community between the world wars. Excalibur followed up with its 'León the Brave' (1997): 'Under the red flag—animal hordes / Servants of the East—sickle and hammer'. The text exhibits a relatively high degree of schematism—a shared aspect of skinhead lyrics. In 1999, Vljaka published a record entitled, *Kill Communist for Your Mother* (probably in reference to Colonel David Hackworth's motto, 'Kill a commie for mummy'). One of the tracks, 'Rudá prasata' (Red Pigs) draws links between communism and squatting: 'Hunting them down through the reddish city / Squats being turned into mass graves'. In a similar vein, Imperium's song, 'Anti-Reds' (2004) describes communism as a 'perverse religion' and declares: 'The day has come / when we will cut your throats!' Here, communism serves as the antithesis of civilization and the nation, a perverted ideology that must be destroyed—a task for the skinheads.

## *Racism*

Racism became a central theme after 1992. It resonates in the lyrics of almost all the bands, only varying in the degree of aggressiveness with which it is presented. For it is primarily aggression, or fighting, that is typically associated with the racial motif. As in the case of nationalism, the lyrics repeatedly depict the nation as threatened by someone who must be fought against. This is not as much a direct threat, one represented by concrete, tangible foreigners, but rather the threat of ‘contamination of clean blood’. This is how Útok put it in the title track of its record, *Poslední boj* (The Final Fight, 1997): ‘You are wandering through streets in confusion, your homeland hard to recognize / It is all dirty from crime and inferior races’.

Similarly, some other lyrics associate questions of race with ‘cleanliness’: ‘A clean Europe will once again / belong to White nations only’. (Conflict 88–‘Boj národů’ [The Fight of Nations], eponymous album, 1994), ‘A fight for the White race and a clean homeland’ (Hlas Krve – ‘Skinhead navždy’ [Skinhead Forever] of the album *Nenávist vnás* [The Hatred in Us], 1997), ‘She hates inferior people / who seek to contaminate her blood’ (Conflict 88–‘Renee’, album *Boj národů* [The Fight of Nations], 1994), or ‘Clean blood circulating in the veins’ (Agrese 95–‘Skinheads’, album *Hard Reality*, 2000). The problem is the very existence of people of colour, which poses a threat—because one must fight for a country free of people of colour. This problem exists because people of colour are not like us, a belief explicitly stated in Vlajka’s track, ‘S.H.A.R.M.’ (Skinheads Against Racial Mixing), on the album *Kill Communist for Your Mother* (1999):

A man and a negro—there is a difference  
Not only in colour  
You cannot hide that  
The race and the nation first  
Do you have anything against it?  
You will get a taste of my fist.

These lyrics seem to allude to a difference from anti-racist skinheads (collectively referred to by racist skinheads as members of the S.H.A.R.P. movement—Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice). Furthermore, they link the theme of racism with violence.

The fight for the White race is the overarching theme shared by all racist skinhead bands. That fight is often depicted in highly vague terms (merely as a fight), but it is apparently perceived within the skinhead scene as something entirely fundamental and decisive for the entire framework of existence. It is often linked with the nation, which is perceived in similar terms. Subsequently, of course, the absolute value of the race and the nation helps legitimize violence against all those who do not fit into the framework of the race and nation, whether they are Black, Roma (as the most frequently mentioned group), or Jewish.

### *Anti-Semitism*

Whereas nationalism and racism resonated even with bands such as Orlík or Braník, open anti-Semitism was primarily a matter of third-generation skinhead bands and related to their apparent shift to neo-Nazism. Here, nationalist, racist, and anti-Semitic elements interweave to depict a nation threatened by a Jewish conspiracy and a flood of foreigners of colour. Violence is the only solution to each of these issues, and neither of them is a specifically Czech issue—they are shared across Europe, as Conflict 88 reminds us in the track ‘Sionismus’ (Zionism, album *Boj národů* [The Fight of Nations], 1994): ‘Wake up, warriors of White Europe / Bring them finally to their knees, those Jewish dogs’. Through the neo-Nazi lens, Jews represent, above all, the same problem as any other foreign race, namely the threat of ‘contamination’ of Czech blood. This is precisely formulated in Excalibur’s song, ‘Hej bratře’ (Hey Brother, album *Apokalypsa* [Apocalypse], 1996):

A country in Hebrew hands  
Your culture is dying

Your blood is mixing with that of swine  
Is this supposed to be the end of my race?

In contrast to other races, though, Jews are also viewed by neo-Nazis as the embodiment of lies and oppression. This is exemplified in Vljaka's song 'Kamarádovi' (To My Friend, album *Skin 'n' Roll*, 1996): 'You have become the voice of White conscience / the light in a country full of Jewish lies'; or more dramatically, on the track 'Exodus' by Buldok (album *Triumf* [Triumph], 1997): 'The vampire of the Judaic breed is disseminating / the madness of diphtheria— Armageddon!' In the same year, Vljaka sang in its 'Bůh je s námi' (God Is with Us, album *Made in Prague*): 'They brought envy, lies and murders / All of the world's evil is of their own making'. To avoid any ambivalence, the song continues: 'Servants of Hell on Earth have their capital / there at the Dead Sea', which shows us one of the ways neo-Nazis masked their anti-Semitism. Members of the racist skinhead subculture were entirely clear on how they related to Jews. As their arch enemy, Jews were the primary target of hate, and it comes to little surprise that physical elimination was supposed to be the solution. Several bands were very open in this respect. For example, Hlas Krve sang in its song 'Freedom' (album *Fight in Bohemia*, 2000):

Set the ghettos on fire  
Destroy their houses  
Kill them all  
Their families' friends too

Alternatively, in the same year, Agrese 95 put it as follows in the track 'Cesta rájem' (Through Paradise, album *Hard Reality*):

History will be repeating  
Zyklon B and fire are death's messengers  
Now we will complete the final solution.

Interestingly, these very lyrics contradict the neo-Nazis' usual denial of the Holocaust.

## *Neo-Nazism*

Support for historical Nazism and neo-Nazism is the logical conclusion of all of the above political postulates. Most bands voiced their support, once again, quite explicitly as early as in the first half of the 1990s. An example is the song 'Poslední bojovník' (The Last Fighter): 'The final fight has begun / The swastika is flying up to the sky!' The above-mentioned Agrese 95 identifies with historical Nazism in several of its lyrics, including the above-quoted track, 'Vyholení a tetování' (Shaved and Tattooed, 1997): 'Right arm extended above is always the greeting / Belief in the swastika and respect for values and traditions'. In a direct reference to Adolf Hitler, Attack sings in its 'Věrní zůstaneme' (We Shall Remain Faithful, album *Kill Your Fear*, 1998): 'April 20, the day of your birth / Maybe once it will become the day of the final battle'. Finally, Imperium is completely explicit in its song 'Zabíjej' [Kill, album *Nelze zapomenout* [Can't Forget], 2004): 'Swastika instead of a heart, hatred in the mind'..

## 5. EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The title of this category is perhaps not entirely apposite, but we intend to refer to a set of primarily emotional motifs that recur in the lyrics of racist skinhead bands. The sense of unity is one of the most frequently occurring motifs. In its track 'Azylantí' (Asylum Seekers, album *Boj národů* [The Fight of Nations], 1994), Conflict 88 sings that 'skinheads always stick together!' The motifs of pride alongside hatred are much more widespread. They appear side-by-side in Zášť 88's song 'Cesta životem' (Life Journey, eponymous album, 1995): 'Pride and hatred is their power / The race and the nation their only religion'. Agrese 95 uses similar language in its track quoted above, 'Vyholení a tetování' (Shaved and Tattooed, 1997): 'Death is again shining in their eyes / Hatred is written on their forehead . . . Honor and pride, oi in the body, the hardness of steel in the fists'; the latter band in particular frequently uses the hate motif in its songs. This is also the case in Randall Gruppe's track, 'Skinhead' (2005):

Proud and hard—skinhead! Skinhead!  
They keep trying to steal your pride;  
Hatred is growing every day.

After all, even following the subculture's transformation around 2010, when many former skinheads reoriented themselves towards the hardcore subculture, it was Martin Frank's HateCore Shop, and hatecore music more generally, that became the new standard denominator. The essential emotional states include hatred and anger (as exemplified by Buldok above) on the one hand, and pride and honor on the other hand.

## 6. RELIGIOSITY

In line with White power bands from Western countries, the early 1990s Czech skinhead scene embraced the idea of following the ancient Germanic religion of Odinism. Buldok was the first to open the theme, and it became one of its most vocal promoters. Following its example, practically all racist skinhead bands had a valkyrie-themed song. The valkyries brought together several motifs that were symptomatic of the scene. First, following the example of the Third Reich, there was a reference to ancient Nordic sagas. Second, there is the symbol of death in battle, a theme closely associated with neo-Nazism. Moreover, and finally, valkyries also represent and help to glorify the female principle. Eponymous tracks can be found on Buldok's album *Screwface* (1996) as well as Conflict 88's album *Svatá zem* (Holy Land, 2004), and the theme occurs in some other lyrics. Tracks named 'Valhalla' are found on the records of two bands, Zášť 88 (album *Cesta životem* [Life Journey], 1995) and Vlajka (album *Made in Prague*, 1997). Agrese 95 has a song entitled, 'Prosba k Odinovi' (A Plea to Odin, album *Povstaň* [Rise Up], 1997), and Excalibur has its 'Ragnarok' (album *Auri Sacra Fames*, 1997). Hlas Krve glorifies the valkyries in its song "Tvý poslední zvolání" (Your Final Cry, album *Fight in Bohemia*) from 2000, and Beowulf, a band whose very name evokes Germanic myths, published the record *Hranice*



The performance of rock band Ortel, their roots can be traced back to the subculture of racist skinheads (Jan Charvát)

*slávy* (Boundaries of Glory, 2001), with as many as three tracks on the theme—‘Naglfar’, ‘Rest in Peace’, and ‘Když osud zavolá’ (When Fate Calls). Finally, Imperium has the song ‘Berserker’ on its album *Nelze zapomenout* (Can’t Forget, 2004) and ‘Zářící runy’ (Shining Runes) on *Triumph of the Will* (2006).

Some lyrics specifically connect the motifs of Germanic sagas to Celtic mythology. For example, Agrese 95’s track ‘Keltská síla’ (Celtic Power) on its album *Povstaň* (Rise Up, 1997), apparently does not go to great lengths in distinguishing between the Celtic and Viking traditions.

## 7. AFTER 2005

The period after 2005 sees a gradual decline of both the White power music scene (fewer bands, less frequent concerts, less numerous audiences) and the skinhead subculture as such. This trend is closely associated with the ascent of autonomous nationalism, which publicly rejects the skinhead identity because it considers it

a burden to political activism. According to the autonomous nationalists, skinhead uniformity has earned a bad reputation, and most people have come to associate it with individuals who are orthodox racists, anti-social, and violent. The new phenomenon gives up on the skinhead identity, preferring a civilian appearance, and gradually becomes a scene in its own right (some authors refer to it explicitly as a subculture per se, see Vejvodová 2008, 2011). Largely inspired by the far-left, autonomous nationalists strive to incorporate some of its external manifestations (black bloc, graffiti, hip-hop, and so on). However, this met with a strong backlash among traditionalist skinheads in the neo-Nazi scene, headed by older members of the subculture, who are unwilling to abandon their habitual behaviors and forms. Another part responded to the new situation by reemphasizing their subcultural appearance and the traditional skinhead fashion, somewhat distancing themselves from an explicit neo-Nazi ideology (while keeping their racist, ultraconservative, and anti-communist positions). They see themselves as descendants of the 1980s wave of British skinheads, which had often mixed neo-Nazism with British nationalism and racism without necessarily relying on a solid ideological foundation. However, this scene is largely marginal, confined mainly to the city of Brno, and devoid of any major influence in terms of activism and subculture. It basically serves as a community of aging skinheads enjoying subcultural activities in their group of long-time friends, which makes this part of the subculture enclosed and isolated from others. In this form, a sort of heritage site is created that provides a safe space for aging racist skinheads.

## CONCLUSION

Five key categories have emerged in our study of the ways skinheads are defined in the Czech White power music scene: subcultural attributes (appearance and activities), political attitudes, social status, emotional charge, and religion. A closer look at them reveals that heavy boots, braces, and a shaved head form the basics of the skinhead appearance. As attested by frequent depictions in

skinhead iconography (without explicit mentions in the lyrics), skinheads have in common a strongly masculine subcultural appearance. Subcultural activities include adoration of violence, alcohol, football, and indigenous music. Only 'White rock 'n' roll' is acceptable for racist skinheads, whereas Black music is explicitly rejected. Interestingly, few lyrics support football fandom among racist skinheads. We believe that certain tensions between skinheads and hooligans can explain this: Whereas the former view themselves primarily as 'political soldiers', the latter is seen as a disorderly crowd (something that contradicts the 'warrior' image). In contrast, there is a shared opinion of violence, which is entirely acceptable and is, in a way, characteristic (or affirmative) of the skinhead's authenticity.

In the case of social status, racist skinheads identify with the working class, but in their eyes, that class is 'White' and represents the majority of society. Membership in this social group endows racist skinheads with a sense of social relevance and makes their demands legitimate in their eyes.

As for emotions, racist skinheads share an emphasis on pride and honor; both qualities considered fundamental to the skinhead nature. However, there is one more emotion that plays a key role: hatred. It is even surprising how often open adoration of hate occurs in most racist skinhead lyrics and how positive a connotation it enjoys. Hatred is also mostly perceived as an expression of authenticity, a factor of internal mobilisation and activation, but also a legitimate reason for violence. As long as the state of affairs drives people to hate, it is the right thing to intervene against such a state with full force, including violence.

The political dimension of a racist skinhead identity consists of an adoration of nationalism, historical Nazism, and contemporary forms thereof. An emphasis on political activism is another crucial element of racist skinheads' approach to politics (mobilization and recruitment are among the most salient themes in the works of Czech White power bands, see Charvát 2018 for more details) and is practically a part of the (racist) skinhead identity as such.

Religiosity represents an entirely different category. References to ancient Germanic religion bring together two motifs that are viewed positively by racist skinheads, namely the general masculinity of their romanticized image of Viking history and the links to historical Nazism, which also made ancient Germanic religiosity a part of its repertoire.

By looking at the central categories, we can separate three developmental stages of Czech White power music. The formative stage covers the years 1990–92 and is characterized by the salience of subcultural attributes and political opinions. The subculture was still in the making and had to be presented in detail. At the same time, from the very first moment, political opinions formed an integral part of the subcultural identity and are, in the case of racist skinheads, inseparable from the fundament of subcultural appearance. The fundamental political postulates comprise a combination of nationalist, anti-communist, and racist elements, while there is no adoration of Nazism or anti-Semitism.

The second period (1993–2005) can be labeled the ‘golden age’ of Czech White power music. The culture was clearly established, and there was no more need to elaborate its image—this is why lyrics on the theme became less and less commonplace, although it never disappeared entirely. A stronger emphasis was placed on political orientation, which at that point was evolving not only around nationalism and anti-communism but especially around issues of racism and anti-Semitism, resulting in the adoration of Nazism or neo-Nazism. Finally, the period after 2005 sees a decline in the importance of Czech White power music and a shift away from focusing on the Czech extreme right. Over the course of its transformation, the far right subculture has been influenced by autonomous nationalists, reorienting itself toward other subcultural settings (hardcore, hip-hop, and so on) and strongly distancing itself from the ‘mother’ subculture of skinheads, which has come to be seen in apparently negative terms. In the eyes of the racist branch of the subculture, the process of de-Nazifying skinheads was driven by autonomous nationalists, rather than anti-racist and non-racist skinhead groups.

Since post-socialism played a central role in the formation of the Czech racist skinheads' identity, can we then tell how this fact influenced the development of this subculture and its aspects? In the early nineties, there was a significant effort to represent skinheads in a way that did not match the subculture's Western form. The Orlík skinhead was not openly racist and indeed did not support neo-Nazism. He put more emphasis on the combination of nationalism and anti-communism, which was generally accepted by Czech society throughout the nineties. In this form, the subculture of racist skinheads expanded rapidly in the Czech Republic, however, soon after that the Western form of the subculture began to influence its change. The specificity of post-socialism partially disappeared at this point, although we can point to a particular restraint in the use of the term 'working class.' In other areas, the Czech racist skinhead very soon began to resemble his Western European companions. We can also see the specificity of Czech post-socialism in a reversed perspective, in the case of the experience of a post-socialist society with the skinhead subculture. Unlike in Western Europe, the skinhead subculture here has become a dominant force within the Czech far right (at least between 1998 and 2012). The skinheads gave the Czech far right the form of a subculture. This was a crucial moment for the Czech far right since it affected both its functioning and its mobilization, as well as its fragmentation following the destabilization of the subcultural framework.

## When ‘Likes’ Are Not Enough: Political Rap and Hip-Hop Activism

*Anna Oravcová*

Over the four decades of its existence, hip-hop culture in general and rap music in particular have become a global cultural force. What was initially considered a passing fad created by underprivileged youth from the boroughs of New York City in the 1970s has become a multimillion-dollar business machine. The shift from a local, underground genre to a major influencer of global popular culture is also apparent when looking at the 2017 Grammy nominations, where Black and Latino musicians dominated the four major categories, (Associated Press 2017) with the veteran Jay-Z and the critically acclaimed Kendrick Lamar leading the number of nominations (eight and seven respectively).

The definitions of hip-hop culture and rap music vary based on who you ask.<sup>25</sup> One thread of the mythologized origins of hip-hop insists on the inherently political nature of the movement. In this chapter, I focus on approaches to rap and hip-hop and their relationship to politics. The difference between political rap, ‘conscious’ hip-hop, and hip-hop activism represents the main area of my interest.

In the first part, I provide a theoretical framework based on studies within and outside of the United States which focuses on the global resonance of hip-hop. In the second part of the chapter, I focus on forms of political involvement and grassroots activism in Czech rap music. In this part, I rely on different data sets and their qualitative content analysis. These include (a) fifteen in-depth interviews collected between January 2014 and June 2016 for grant research; (b) participant observation and informal interviews at rap shows and fieldwork carried out while working on my disser-

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25 Generally hip-hop as a culture is considered to be comprised of five elements (rap, DJing, graffiti, breakdance and knowledge), while rap music is specifically a form of expression. Rap techniques can be used in other music genres.

tation; (c) interviews with artists on hip-hop Radio Spin 96.2; and (d) a content analysis of selected rap songs<sup>26</sup>.

### THE DUALITIES OF RAP MUSIC AND HIP-HOP

The fundamental role of music in social movements is well-documented (Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Street 2012; Rosenthal and Flacks 2015; Bonette 2015). According to Malone and Martinez, 'hip hop in both its core and its elements contains a unique movement culture, which carries with it certain cultural, social, and political possibilities other musical genres rooted in specific traditions do not' (2015: 2). This is because hip-hop is rooted in African-American oral traditions. From slave songs, the blues tradition, the Black church, the Black Renaissance, the Black arts movement, all the way to hip-hop, coded language and hidden messages as a form of resistance have had a permanent position (Bonnette 2015: 32, 39; Stapleton 1998: 220-221).<sup>27</sup> In this way, hip-hop becomes political precisely because it is a part of the African-American musical tradition and struggle (Deis 2015: 272). Thus, rappers are considered to be the 'organic intellectuals' (Forman 2010; Malone and Martinez 2015), documenting the life experiences and conditions of the Black communities in America's inner cities, a form of 'social anthropology with a rhythm' (Lusane 1993: 50). The music of hip-hop artists not only mirrors the social world but can also be the engine for social transformation (Trapp 2005).

In her analysis of the political power of hip-hop, Stapleton (1998) recognizes three different categories: (1) Protest or confrontation

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26 I am approaching this research from the position of an insider. For over two decades, I have been a member of the Czech hip-hop community. I have been interested in the interdisciplinary field of hip-hop studies since 2006, considering myself a so-called hip-hop scholar. Since 2010, I have been involved in the 'underground' scene as an event organizer as well as a host of the radio show *Street Cypher* on Radio Spin 96.2, where I focus on the history of hip-hop and political rap in particular.

27 For a more comprehensive account of resistance in Black music see, for example, Neal (2016). For a comprehensive account of grassroots hip-hop organizations see Ogbar (2015).

political action aimed at resisting the status quo and the dominant social order, exemplified by groups like Public Enemy, N.W.A, or KRS-One.<sup>28</sup> (2) deliberative political action, which Stapleton understands as a process of ‘establishing where the boundaries of hip-hop should stand’ (1998: 227)—what is and isn’t hip-hop related in the intense debates over authenticity and identity of the members of the hip-hop community. Whenever music serves as a platform for different organizations whose goal is to promote awareness of a specific issue, we can speak of (3) pragmatic political action. This category includes different projects that aim to give back to their community and considers among them numerous youth projects and youth hip-hop activism.

It is important to point out that hip-hop in today’s United States operates simultaneously as (1) a considerably profitable cultural expression in a commercial industry; (2) a network of grassroots organizations working to point out issues related to social justice; and (3) a platform for political activism (Malone and Martinez 2015: 14–15; see also Neal 2004: 308–309). With the commercialization and commodification of hip-hop and rap comes the tension between understanding these cultural expressions as a key part of the popular culture industry on one hand, and an oppositional culture on the other (Gosa and Nielson 2015: 2). In other words, hip-hop finds itself in a state of perpetual duality as a vehicle of expression for rebellious youth and, conversely, a carefully packaged social discontent that has been marketed all over the world (Lusane 1993: 42; Rollefson 2017: 8). Furthermore, as Clay asserts, ‘This duality is expressed in popular culture, where youth, particularly youth of color, are simultaneously vilified and celebrated’ while ‘consequently, a dual identity has been carved out for youth as powerful consumers and a disenfranchised, oppressed minority’ (2006: 110–111).

These debates revolve around the discourse of authenticity in hip-hop. Based on lyrical content analysis, interviews with rap-

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28 Bailey (2014) recognizes hip-hop and protest as representing one and the same: ‘the act of taking a stand, making your voice heard, and tracing your roots to the streets’ (113).

pers, and hip-hop record reviews, McLeod (1999) identified five markers of authenticity in rap music: race, class, gender, relationship to the music industry, and hip-hop culture. A male rapper of colour representing the low-income class, knowledgeable about the history of hip-hop, and representing the ‘underground’ is then perceived as more authentic than a White rapper from the suburbs trying to get a record deal with one of the top five record companies. The relationship to the music industry and knowledge of the history of hip-hop are important in regard to whether or not one is expressing social commentary in one’s music or is involved in activism.

The binary distinction of mainstream vs underground is of particular importance. While the so-called underground provides a relatively independent space, free from market forces, and therefore allows for genuine grassroots activism and unrestricted musical creativity, the possibilities of political expression in mainstream music are limited. A case in point: The political engagement of Jay-Z, informed by opportunism and self-enrichment, embraces the rhetoric of neoliberalism (ibid: 9). This puts hip-hop icons in a double bind of simultaneously being progressive as well as co-opted (Boyd 2004: 327). According to Bailey, ‘this phenomenon reflects the adaptive nature of rap and its ability to work with or against political and social transformation, depending on the context in which it is presented’ (2014: 119).

### CONSCIOUS HIP-HOP, POLITICAL RAP, AND HIP-HOP ACTIVISM

Among scholars in the interdisciplinary discipline of hip-hop studies as well as hip-hop heads,<sup>29</sup> there is an inherent underlying assumption that hip-hop’s nature is always already political. As Deis states, ‘The logic at work here is direct and simple: because hip hop is a type of social commentary, it is therefore inherently “political”’ (2015: 267). The author also suggests that rather than

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29 Hip-hop head is a colloquial term used among hip-hop fans usually implying that the person has substantial subcultural capital and knowledge of the history of hip-hop as well as current trends.

asking how people participate in politics through hip-hop, it would be more beneficial to focus on the reason why they do so.

Melone and Martinez (2015) recognize three contemporaneously operating stages in the political development of hip-hop. The first stage represents a specific, community-based ability to express oneself, articulate everyday experiences and create new and original forms with the limited resources available. The second stage is defined by the growing number of artists that began to address issues including different forms of inequality, gang violence, and police brutality, among others. Thus, the second stage is when artists create a network of grassroots social institutions focusing on the issues of social justice. The final, third stage is where hip-hop becomes an avenue for political activism and participation with the ability to influence electoral outcomes in the United States (5–12).

A specific strand or subgenre of rap music that focuses on social commentary has been often labelled ‘conscious’ or ‘socially conscious’ rap. According to Forman (2010): ‘Conscious rap also functions in ways that are highly responsive to contemporary socio-political context[s] and conditions, aligning it with various community interests and artistic strategies now (most often involving themes of racial and class struggle)’. We can trace the beginning of ‘conscious’ or ‘message’ rap back to 1982, the year ‘The Message’ by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five was released, arguably the first significant political rap record (Neal 2016: 455). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, acts like Public Enemy or Paris were considered too political in their promotion of Black nationalism and had a hard time being signed to record labels. Conscious rap has therefore been relegated to the supposed underground. With the digital and technological advances, the boom of the Internet, and the rise to prominence of different social network platforms, artists nowadays are no longer dependent on contracts with record labels. With the freedom of not being prescribed what to rap about or censored too much, artists have become fairly independent.<sup>30</sup> There are a few particular instances of highly visible

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30 Talib Kweli uses his website kweliclub.com to sell all his records and other

hip-hop artists using their platform to promote political issues. Kanye West's 2005 'George Bush doesn't care about black people' statement, in which he criticized the former president for insufficient attention to people affected by Hurricane Katrina during a live broadcast, represents one of the most notable of these instances (Forman 2010; Bonnette 2015). Other prominent hip-hop icons have used their celebrity status to influence electoral politics. For example, Russell Simmons organized the 'hip-hop vote', and Puff Daddy has used his mogul status for his campaign Vote or Die to encourage the hip-hop generation to register to vote (Clay 2006: 117).

With the visibility and mainstream success of hip-hop as well as the rise of the rap mogul phenomenon, it has become impossible to ignore the influence rappers have had on a whole generation and youth especially. This became apparent with the Obama presidency as, according to Jeffries, 'he could not ignore hip-hop, so he carefully incorporated it into his public image' (2016: 432). The 'Obama Era' received substantial attention from hip-hop studies academics as well as hip-hop heads. Gosa and Nielson (2015) consider the 'Obamafication of rap' a brief renaissance of socially conscious lyrics and widespread participation of celebrity rappers in the political process.

In the presidential elections of 2016, Beyoncé and Jay-Z endorsed Hilary Clinton and Killer Mike supported the presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. Kendrick Lamar is another acclaimed artist that uses his mainstream platform to spread awareness of is-

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products, including other artists signed to his label and books while also taking the time to communicate with his fans directly. In a similar way, Run the Jewels decided to release their first album for free with an option to donate that is dependent on how much the fans enjoy their music. Today they represent one of the most requested groups combining great beats with a political message. Lupe Fiasco, on the other hand, was signed to Atlantic Records where he promised five albums. After the record label postponed the release date of the album *Tetsuo & Youth*, the hacker group Anonymous threatened the label with the release of their sensitive information unless they released the album as well as dissolved the contract with the artist.

sues related to the struggles and inequalities of Black and Brown<sup>31</sup> communities. His 2015 single 'Alright' has become an unofficial anthem of the Black Lives Matter movement, and his performances at the Grammy Awards between 2016 and 2018 have addressed the struggles of Black men in America as well. Most recently, Eminem used his mainstream success during the BET cypher session and offered a four-minute long criticism of President Donald Trump while also suggesting that his fans must decide whether they stand with him or with Trump, because there is no position in-between.

According to Gosa and Nielson (2015: 7), any hip-hop driven political platform must prioritize issues including, but not limited to, aggressive policing and racial profiling of people of colour, the War on Drugs, and mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex (see also Lusane 1993; Ards 2004; Ogbar 2007; Ogbar 2015: 42-43). However, politics and activism in hip-hop do not necessarily lead to the desired outcomes, nor are the expressed political attitudes always 'progressive' or 'liberating' (Malone and Martinez 2015: 15; Deis 2015: 270). This is most evident when so-called 'conscious artists', referencing all the themes mentioned above, are still lacking in their understanding of gender as a political topic. Sometimes even the most 'woke' artists express blatant sexism and misogyny in their lyrics.

The reason why hip-hop artists frequently refuse to be labelled conscious or political is not only that it puts the artist on the margins of the rap genre but that it also puts an unfair burden on their artistic expression. Following the rigid ideology of mainstream vs underground, the artists are then put in a box and are expected to ALWAYS include a substantive message in their lyrics. Rather than using the label 'conscious hip-hop artist', it would be more productive, as Bonnette (2015) argues, to look at a specific song to see if it can be understood as political. It gives the artist the freedom to change their mind, grow in their understanding of issues, as well as consider the multiple identities they

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31 'Brown' refers to the distinct racialized identity of Arabs, Middle Easterners, South Asians and other 'Muslim-looking' people portrayed as dangerous beings, especially post-9/11 (Sharama 2016).

might have by belonging to different groups at the same time. According to Bonnette (2015), what qualifies as political is ‘rap music that provides political information by detailing political strategies, injustices and grievances’ (22). A political rap song then must satisfy certain criteria: (1) It must contain implicit or explicit political references while also either (2) referencing a social problem or issue, or (3) proposing a solution to an injustice or problem in society (ibid 25–26).

The role of rap artists concerning politics and activism is a much-debated topic in the hip-hop community. The attitudes depend on the preferred definition of hip-hop and rap as well as what is considered art and artistic expression. While some claim that rap artists must have a substantial message related to the current social conditions in their repertoire, others, like Jay Smooth, claim that it is unrealistic to expect a rap artist to come up with a detailed political program and in-depth analysis of current issues. He insists that the role of an artist is to inspire a movement and political action. Moreover, there is no doubt that artists like Kendrick Lamar provide inspiration for youth in their hip-hop activism.

Arguably, there is no other music as central to the mobilization of youth, especially for youth of colour. According to Parmar and others (2015), hip-hop serves as a safe space, a community where they can identify with other youth, share experiences and knowledge, as well as a place where they can gain new skills and new tools of expression (see also Clay 2006: 118). Rap and slam poetry as forms of self-expression rooted in African American oral traditions have particularly shown themselves to be great vehicles for youth around the globe (Ards 2004, Clay 2006, Forman 2010). For example, Clay (2006) focused on how youth of colour activists in Oakland used hip-hop to raise awareness and mobilize other youth around issues such as ‘inadequate school programs, the erosion of affirmative action in California, violence on their school campuses, and racial profiling by law enforcement officials’ (107). Similarly, Forman (2010) uses the term ‘hood work’, which includes all the instances of young people working in their communities to address the issues that are relevant to them at a particular time.

Hip-hop activism does not only relate to youth organizations. ‘Conscious’ hip-hop artists<sup>32</sup> provide an example of community involvement by standing on the ground during various protests, possibly inspiring others to join them. There are independent artists involved with community organizing, such as Jasiri X, who created the 1 Hood Media platform combining arts and activism. Other well known artists participate in hip-hop activism as well. For example, MC Lyte is curating a platform for women called the Hip Hop Sisters Network, Kendrick Lamar is serving as a mentor for young Black men in President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative, and Nicki Minaj has announced on Twitter that she will pay the tuition of everyone who shows proof of straight As.

### GLOBAL HIP-HOP ACTIVISM

As rap music and hip-hop become a globally exported commodity, hip-hop scholars have asked a fundamental question: What is it about hip-hop that resonates with youth globally? And, more specifically, how do youth around the world use hip-hop to raise awareness about issues pertinent to their communities?

Pfaff (2009), who focused on the ‘importance of youth cultures as agents in the process of political socialization of adolescents’ (171), suggests that ‘identification with a style is concomitant with holding a certain political position’ (180). Hip-hop and rap are believed to be THE global protest music essential to the mobilization of youth (Lusane 1993; Clay 2006; Jeffries 2015). Osumare (2015) finds that there are cultural connections of hip-hop throughout the African diaspora, as well as what he calls ‘socio-political “connective marginalities”’ (6), different forms of social inequalities and historical oppression linking the young people together.

Afro-Brazilian hip-hoppers focus on issues including poverty, violence, stereotyping, surveillance and abuse by the police, and

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32 For example, Talib Kweli was heavily involved with the protests in Ferguson; Q-Tip has been known to march the streets in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement; and various artists have used their platform to raise awareness of the Flint water crisis.

their negative portrayals in the media while educating youth in the community based centre Casa do Hip Hop (Osumare 2015). Hip-hop also serves as a form of cultural resistance for Afro-Cuban youth living in housing projects (mainly Black, working class communities) with rappers addressing the issues of race, marginality, and police harassment and stereotyping (Fernandes 2003). However, it is not only youth; dominant groups too have recognized the power of critical resistance that hip-hop provides. The Cuban state represents a form of rap co-optation, as the government supports rappers to meet their political ends of promoting 'the image of Cuba as a mixed-race nation with African roots' (Fernandes 2003: 595).

The digital and technological advances combined with the platform rap music provides were also essential in the Arab Spring (Sharma 2016), where 'activists . . . used rap music as a means of dual expression, both as a genre to connect with fellow pro-liberty activists and to send out a plea for aid and solidarity among liberals throughout the world' (Bailey 2014: 110). Rap played a role in motivating the youth in particular to partake in the protests of the Egyptian revolution of 2011 as well as 'raising awareness and fomenting resistance against neocolonialism in modern-day Ghana' (ibid: 114).

In Europe, according to Rollefson (2017), hip-hop found its place as a specific expression of social solidarity and political opposition 'especially among the children and grandchildren of migrants from former colonies and peripheries', where it 'challenges ahistorical notions of national belonging' (2). On the other hand, Franz (2015), focusing on hip-hop in Central Europe, 'a region which has almost no colonial past', suggests that it took a longer time to see the potential of hip-hop as a tool to express political attitudes and social issues and inequalities. This is usually because commercial rap is generally the first to be promoted (on MTV and other platforms), while more politically oriented 'underground' acts must be actively searched for. Based on Franz's analysis, hip-hop in this area has two unique elements: (a) rap has been adopted and adapted as a middle class commodity, and (b)

there is a specific understanding of Blackness associated with American hip-hop. This specific understanding stems from identification with Blackness in its broadest sense, as inclusive of any 'other' minority. Franz argues, 'hip hop has become THE medium to express the mix identity of young artists who find themselves between two or more cultures' (2015: 160, capitalization in original). More importantly, she also points out that hip-hop may as well be an important identity marker for youth that not only feel neglected by the dominant culture but are also bored by what the mainstream has to offer. Therefore, hip-hop identity might serve as a form of rebellion.

The dominant narrative African-American hip-hop artists have established, in relation to the influence of hip-hop and rap beyond the United States, stresses the importance of racial identification, and some authors are hopeful that this will provide insight as to the tough realities of different cultural, social, and political oppressions. However, Raphael-Hernandez insists that 'this ready acceptance of and fascination with African American, African Caribbean and African influence among the youth in Europe does not reveal that these young generations have grown in their understanding of black issues' (2004: 6). Consequently, rap can be understood solely as a specific form of expression that allows more space for expression than the regular format of a popular song. By denying or ignoring the whole history of the development of hip-hop, it is not surprising that rap can function as a platform for right-wing and neo-Nazi attitudes (Franz 2015).<sup>33</sup>This approach resonates with

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33 In her essay, Raphael-Hernandez (2004) examines what two groups of young people from different backgrounds, African-Americans and 'Skins', could have in common. She finds that while the former come from inner-city low-income, poverty-driven communities and the latter from the rural areas and small towns of former East Germany, both are 'products of economically heavily disadvantaged communities' (2004: 285), affected by the 'aftermath' of the civil rights movement and German reunification respectively. Furthermore, the imperative of 'individual responsibility' for personal advancement does not take into account the structural discrimination and that the new possibilities might not be available to everybody. This leads to nihilism, violence, and concern over the future, resulting in higher crimes among African-Americans and an uncritical acceptance of right-wing ideology by East German youth (ibid).

Walach's (2010) analysis, in which the author concludes that there are essentially two ways of approaching hip-hop: instrumental and subcultural. While the instrumental approach suggests that one is inspired by and appropriates the elements of hip-hop (its slang and fashion), the subcultural approach also includes a specific hip-hop attitude (47). Returning to the discussion of authenticity, it would then mean that a subcultural approach is the one needed in order to claim the hip-hop head label.

### **POLITICS AND ACTIVISM IN CZECH RAP MUSIC**

Hip-hop in general and rap music in particular represent not only the youngest, but also most imported music scene/subculture in the Czech Republic. The establishment of the hip-hop community occurred after the first graffiti crews were able to travel to West Berlin, thanks to newly opened borders. These crews formed the first rap groups in the Czech Republic (Walach 2010). The cultural translation was carried out in a specific way and mainly by White middle class men, who appropriated the phenomenon of hip-hop; in order to participate in the Czech hip-hop subculture, one had to have access to disposable income, to technology and the Internet, and to opportunities to travel (within the Czech Republic as well as abroad, Oravcová 2016).

Even though the Czech hip-hop subculture is more than two decades old, and there are rap music fans who do not listen to anything other than Czech hip-hop production<sup>34</sup> (partly due to the language barrier), I argue that it is impossible to analyse this subculture without referencing the original, American hip-hop. The ongoing debates of authenticity, boundaries and, specifically for the purpose of this article, the relationship between rap and politics are also reflected in Czech rap music.

Based on my fieldwork, interviews with rappers, and active in-

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34 For a somewhat comprehensive list of Czech rap production see <https://rapovyseznam.cz/>.

volvement in Czech rap music for the past 10 years, I have noticed three main narratives. First of all, since rap came to Czech Republic through the mainstream media (especially MTV), it was taken up as a commercial commodity. When we look at the first Czech rap music productions, which for the most part copied the American style (albeit in the Czech language), the lyrics are rather playful, addressing the everyday life of middle class Czech youth. Since Czech Republic is considered a racially homogeneous country, the argument then is based on the premise that everyone in the Czech Republic is doing considerably well, so there is no need to address a specific social issue. On the other hand, when American rappers visit the Czech Republic, one of the first questions they ask me is, 'Where are all the Roma rappers?' based on their assumption that hip-hop, being the platform for the expression of marginalized voices, should be taken up by this particular group.

A second recurrent theme related to the question of a substantial 'message' in rap songs dismisses the possibility on the premise that music is supposed to entertain, help people to get their mind off the realities of everyday struggle. This is followed with the third prominent statement of Czech rappers: everybody is free to do whatever they want, to 'do them'. So, if they decide to include social commentary, the choice is completely up to them and their definition of what hip-hop music is supposed to address.

With its visibility and commercial success, the debates regarding 'mainstream' vs 'underground' ideology are not lost on Czech rappers either. Following this ideology, the mainstream rappers have 'sold out' to the demands of the market, which means 'dumbing down' lyrics in favour of topics like ego boosting, accumulating wealth, and enjoying a life of endless parties, women, and drugs. 'Underground' rappers criticize the Czech rap elite for not caring enough about the hip-hop community and grassroots activism since they all have their big brand sponsorships. In the eyes of 'underground' rappers, mainstream has forsaken the roots of hip-hop by focusing on materialism rather than a substantial social commentary with a 'message'. 'Underground' rappers would like

to think they are more political<sup>35</sup> as some of them do participate in hip-hop activism.

Based on my interviews with rappers and participant observation at various ‘underground’ events over the years, I will now focus on the different forms of political engagement and activism in Czech rap music. Following the specific discourses of authenticity in Czech rap music and the distinction between ‘mainstream’ artists and ‘underground’ hip-hop communities, I look at the activities of BiggBoss and Smack as examples of how they relate to politics, as well as the hip-hop activities of the groups Memento Mori and Pio Squad.

### **1. When mainstream rappers go political**

Walach (2010) insists that the rejection of racism and right-wing extremism always has been (and probably always will be) a permanent topic in the repertoire of Czech rappers (52). At the beginning of 2016, the record label BiggBoss, ran by Vladimír 518, one of the pioneers of Czech rap music, released a statement regarding the ‘current atmosphere in the Czech Republic’. In this statement, the record label, defining itself as ‘an artistic as well as political space’, addressed the nature of discussions in the Czech Republic, namely the populist spread of hatred and hysteria around the ‘refugee crisis’ and the activities and behaviour of President Zeman.<sup>36</sup> The artists that signed the manifesto called for solidarity, tolerance, and a willingness to be open and learn to live in a complex multicultural world. James Cole,<sup>37</sup> the author of the statement, wanted

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35 In my fieldwork, I focus on participant observation at open mics, events where anybody can come on stage and grab the mic. In their freestyle, as well as written work, so-called ‘underground’ rappers rarely address political issues in any other way than a superficial reference. The topics revolve around prevalent themes in Czech rap music including: rap on rap, diss tracks, living from paycheck to paycheck, the life of a (struggling) rapper, and an ode to marijuana (see also Oravcová 2016; Oravcová 2017).

36 For the full statement see <https://www.biggboss.cz/news/4226>

37 Currently, James Cole is no longer signed to the BiggBoss label.

to make clear that this was a statement against the radicalization of society and the legitimization of violence.

Upon the release of the statement, the members of the Bigg-Boss label were frequently asked about their decision to release the statement rather than, as would normally be the case in hip-hop, a song addressing these issues. The reason behind this decision was twofold: One has to do with the limited exposure of rap music, presumably reaching only members of the hip-hop subculture. The other reason has to do with a different understanding of the relationship between music/art and politics.

In the interview with James Cole for *Radio Wave* (Šichanová 2016), he expressed his beliefs about the role of art, stating that:

Art is in the realm of imagination, and it should be free and unrestrained. When art is used for a certain agenda, it ceases to be art in the truest sense of the word. I approach my art differently, and I want to have these two things separated.

The host of the radio show *On Air* followed up with a question about the roots of hip-hop, which is tied to politics and activism. James Cole insists that ‘we have received rap in a different form. I do not feel obliged to recreate the atmosphere of the early era of rap music. For me, rap and revolutionary attitudes are not at all connected’. On the contrary, when reacting to the flood of comments after the statements’ release, especially arguments insisting that artists should not talk about politics and try to influence people, Vladimír 518 dismissed these statements: ‘These people do not know how rap was formed or how society in general works’.

The discussion below the statements on the official BiggBoss label site, as well as on their Facebook page, clearly shows the two camps. On one hand, there are hip-hop heads congratulating the band for the ‘courage’ of publishing a political statement referencing the roots of hip-hop as a platform for expressing dissent. On the other hand, there are those who wish music had nothing to do with politics and that Czech hip-hop per se is an empty expression.



Vladimír 518 and Orion performing at Hip Hop Kemp 2016  
(ChuckDiesal Photography)

Even though Vladimír 518 claimed that a rap song dedicated to the issue is not enough, by the middle of 2016, PSH (Vladimír 518 and Orion) released a new single called *Fuck Off*. In the song and the video, the group gives the middle finger to everyone from President Zeman, Prime Minister Babiš, and Martin Konvička, the leader of the now defunct initiative against the ‘Islamization’ of the Czech Republic, as well as all xenophobes, racists, and the spread of fear and hatred by the media. Although this could be considered a political song, as argued by some academics, the attitudes expressed may be neither progressive nor liberating. While the gesture of the middle finger to the representatives of hegemonic power structures might be a strong gesture, rapper Orion especially is stepping on a thin ice when he also dismisses everyone who is ‘not trying enough’ to fulfil their dreams along with all the non-working, lazy people who only complain that their lives are too hard. In this way, Orion is supporting the idea of individualism while completely dismissing the structural barriers at work, especially concerning minorities.

The BiggBoss label is not the only one to be inspired by current Czech affairs. In November 2015, grime artist Smack<sup>38</sup> released his song entitled *Kdo neskáče není Čech!* (If you’re not jumping, you’re not Czech!) referencing a popular slogan chanted during sport events especially, expressing national pride and belonging. Smack released the song after President Zeman’s speech at the commemoration of the events of November 17, where he appeared side by side with Konvička, the aforementioned supporter of the fight against the perceived “Islamization” of the Czech Republic. In the song, Smack addresses the different sources of national pride: the nostalgia for socialism, where everyone was doing well; the practises of telling on other people; the jealousy expressed when one is successful; the perceived purity of Czech people; and the perceived threat

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38 Although it could be argued that grime is not technically hip-hop, but a separate music genre coming from the United Kingdom, the technique of delivery is rap. Smack also holds two Anděl Awards in the hip-hop category. The Anděl Awards are a Czech version of the Grammy Awards given away by the Academy of Popular Music.

that the immigrant poses to the good hard-working Czech people. In the last verses of the song, Smack dismisses all these statements as being outdated and backwards propaganda while sending his regards to all the Nazis that do not consider themselves Nazis, they just do not like anything.

In an interview for the web platform protisedi.cz, Smack insists that he does not want to be considered a ‘political rapper. I just talk about things that are pissing me off’ (Synek 2016). However, taking into account Bonnette’s classification, Smack’s repertoire includes political rap songs. Another example is the single *Strach* (Fear) from his 2015 album *Sick*. As with the previous example, in this song Smack addresses fear spread by the mainstream media. Smack makes the comparison between people that are artificially scared by false propaganda and people that have lived in ‘real’ dangerous situations (referencing war in Balkan countries). He does this while insisting that fear is the ‘most dangerous emotion’ spread by populist politics, the education system, and mainstream media. Smack concludes the song by claiming that people are not sheep or monkeys, they are just too influenced by the television and the information they gain from primetime news rather than being self-reflective about the ways in which they are being brainwashed. Smack is definitely a Czech artist that is not scared to express his opinions in his songs as well as on social media, where he is known for posting his perspectives on politics and electoral candidates.

Rap music, full of codes and hidden meanings, has always been difficult to decode. It is particularly important to know the background of a certain artist to be able to decipher the lyrics expressed. In 2013, rapper eLKa released his solo album *Apokalypsa*, which fulfils the definition of a ‘conscious’ rap album since, in a rather dark mood, the artist discusses different social issues including materialism, neoliberalism, the disinformation of the mass media, political corruption, and so forth. In one particular song, *Čechy Čechům* (Czechia for Czech People), similarly to Smack, eLKa addresses the symbols of national pride in Czech Republic, the fear of multiculturalism, and shady politics. The title itself references a racist slogan that has been used specifically by right-wing parties during

their marches against Roma communities, especially in the south of the Czech Republic where eLKa himself comes from. However, what caused the controversy is the ambiguous reading of the song. While Smack, addressing the same issues, directly states that he is against racists and xenophobes, eLKa does not explicitly state so in the song. After the release of the song, there was a brief upheaval and eLKa was even labelled racist himself (the comments on the video were later disabled). All the while, the underlying motive of this song was to pinpoint the attitudes of ‘regular people’; the song was written based on dialogue eLKa overheard as a bartender while feeling very bitter about being misunderstood as an artist.

## 2. WHEN ‘LIKES’ ARE NOT ENOUGH

For the sake of comparison between political rap songs and hip-hop activism, I will now discuss two particular cases of hip-hop activism using the example of the groups Memento Mori and Pio Squad.

Memento Mori, a group from Havlíčkův Brod, which self-identifies as representing hardcore hip-hop, released their first LP *Politika života* (Politics of Life) in 2010 and their second LP *Překrásný nový svět* (Brave New World), inspired by Aldous Huxley, in 2015. The band has always focused on the reflections of the current era and society; therefore, they could be labelled ‘conscious’ hip-hop artists:

In our music you can hear our critique of the status quo. And of course, we are not offering any real solutions, but that is not why we are here anyway. We are not here to provide a whole political platform. But we have an opportunity to help others. Just bitching about the situation will not help anybody.

When the members of the group talk about ‘helping others’, they refer to other activities besides performing their music. The group is, for example, in charge of the Hardcore Hip Hop channel on YouTube, where they post political rap music with Czech

subtitles. Besides other themes, they also support squatting and Prague's autonomous centre *Klinika*, specifically in a track and a video called *Enkláva* (Enclave). In an interview for *Radio Spin*, the group also said that they do not feel that they are a part of the hip-hop scene, preferring to associate themselves with the hardcore scene.<sup>39</sup> Not only do they share a studio with the HC bands *Highstreet Hooligans* and *Chasing Christy*, but they also joined forces in creating an initiative called *Show Your Help*. The aim of this initiative is to collect donations at different concerts and festivals for periods of six months at the time and then donating the proceedings to a specific cause, which in the past has included support for people with disabilities, homeless people, and halfway houses. Rather than donating to big charity organizations, where one cannot be sure if the money actually goes where it is supposed to, these groups prefer directly 'helping others'. In our interview, we also addressed the hysteria around the 'refugee crisis'. The members of the group are among the few that took the initiative to visit refugee camps, stating that:

We don't like it when somebody says there is no place for them here. These people are trying to escape death. We went to the borders in Serbia and in Hungary. And once you witness that, your whole perspective changes. It is no longer influenced by the aggressive rhetoric of the media and the leaders who offer simple solutions while no one has offered a complex one either.

The group *Pio Squad* and their activities provide another example of hip-hop activism. *Pio Squad* from *Jihlava* has been active on the Czech rap scene since the second half of the 1990s. In 2014, the group set out on a journey to Bangladesh. During their travels they visited *Dhaka*, the capital of the city, as well as one of its poorest parts—the *Chalantika*. While there, they recorded a music video

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39 Czech rap music is to this day a strongly masculine domain. There are few female rappers, of which some, like *Fakné* and *Potmě*, address issues related to gender and sexism. These groups, similarly to *Memento Mori*, prefer to identify with the anarchist scene rather than hip-hop (see also *Oravcová* 2017).



Pio Squad opening the eight season of Freestyle Mondays open mic events in Prague, January 2018 (ChuckDiesal Photography)

with the same title (Čalantika) and set off on a journey to support education for those that cannot afford it. After they returned from their trip, a whole tour was designed to support donations for the project in cooperation with the ADRA non-profit organization. The group also called for others to join in the movement with direct action because ‘likes are not enough’.

Joining in the initiative is a collective of rappers running the *Freestyle Mondays* open mic shows, a monthly event established in 2009 that gives rappers the opportunity to perform with a live band as well as with a DJ. The Freestyle Mondays crew consists of ‘underground’ rappers connected to the heyday of the underground hip-hop movement around the now defunct Pantheon club (Oravcová 2011). Over the years, the event has been held at different venues, and for the past two years the concept of the show has changed as well. After some accusation of doing the event for the perceived enrichment of the organizers, members of the crew, the participating band, as well as the DJs all decided to decline any fees; the proceeds of the events now go to a specific charity. In 2017, the crew joined forces with the

non-profit organization Whisper, helping to send medical supplies to Uganda. Not only did the proceeds from the entry fee go to this organization, the Freestyle Mondays crew provided additional funds by auctioning paintings of the children that would receive the donations. The Freestyle Mondays crew continued with these efforts into 2018 when, inspired by Pio Squad, they joined forces with the ADRA organization. Each month a different graffiti artist provides a painting of a specific child that will receive access to education. Pio Squad also came to kick off the efforts by supporting the event and performing free of charge.

However, it did not go unnoticed that some of the hip-hop fans were critical of these efforts while pointing out that there are enough children in Czech Republic that need help, so why would they support some other children out there. This led the organizers to create additional support for the oncology centre in Motol Hospital. During the Freestyle Mondays event, the proceeds of the foosball table go to this specific cause.

These are, of course, just a few examples of hip-hop activism. Hip-hop elements and rap music are also used in after-school programs at youth centres, especially those for Roma children. For example, the Prague 3 youth club Beztíže hosted rap workshops led by MC Metoděj, MC Riko, and Refew among others. Bonus (also known as Martin Tvrdý) has mentored youth at the Plechárna youth centre in Prague 14, and together with Mary C they provided specialized workshops for aspiring producers. Hip-hop activism is not strictly related to the element of rap either. For example, the breakdance scene organizes an initiative called Build Ya Foundation, focusing on sharing the knowledge and history of hip-hop elements, which holds discussions with the pioneers of Czech hip-hop as well as providing a space for presentations and lectures.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter was to provide background to the discussion of the presence of politics and activism in hip-hop culture and rap music, and the particular forms these take on in the con-

text of the Czech Republic. While hip-hop in the U.S. is closely related to the African-American oral traditions, of which the expression of resistance is a permanent feature, rap was brought to Czech Republic as a specifically marketed commercial commodity. While some hip-hop scholars point to the way hip-hop serves as a platform for marginalized youth in a postcolonial world, the situation in the Czech Republic is quite different.

It has been predominantly middle class White men who have taken up rap music in the Czech Republic. Based on my interviews with rappers and longitudinal fieldwork in the so-called 'underground' hip-hop space, I look at the forms of expressions of politics and activism. Following the debate on the distinction between the politics and activism as well as the dualities of mainstream and underground, I then discussed examples of political rap songs by PSH and Smack and forms of activism by underground hip-hop groups.

In conclusion, I suggest that whether one is inclined to be interested in or expresses political attitudes and social commentary in rap songs depends on several factors related to the discourses of authenticity and the preferred definition of hip-hop. These include: (1) beliefs regarding the purpose of rap and hip-hop (whether music is supposed to entertain or educate); (2) the period of socialization into hip-hop, suggesting that fans that grew up listening to hip-hop in the so called 'golden era' of the 1990s would consider social commentary a necessary part of rap music; and finally (3) the reference group of peers, whether one moves in mainstream or underground circles, also influences the inclination to express some form of activism through hip-hop.



## **Subculture as Heritage? The Myth of the ‘Golden Age’ in Czech Underground, Punk and Rave**

*Michaela Pixová and Ondřej Slačálek*

Music subcultures are conventionally associated with novelty and youth. In our chapter, we focus on an aspect of music subcultures that contrasts with this perspective. Music subcultures often last a long time. During this time, some of their members grow old, and the subcultures thereby become multigenerational. However, different generational experiences may become a source of potential pressure and conflict.

In the past, music subcultures were mainly perceived as a space for young people to protest and find self-fulfilment. Although they are still mostly dominated and shaped by the imagery of youth and youthful revolt, we need to see contemporary subcultures as a social space occupied by multiple age groups. Subcultural practice, symbols, even mythology, are experienced from different perspectives of generational experience. As such, a subculture may fulfil different social roles; for example, rebelling against parents or constituting a source of memories of youth. Different age groups may also encounter different pressures regarding the negotiation of their own authenticity and participation in the subculture. In brief, young members must typically prove sufficient maturity and ‘toughness’, while older ones must reassure others that they have not yet become overly ‘soft’.

Assuming that socialization into youth music subcultures has always involved socialization into a particular subcultural mythology, today this mythology is often one that has lasted a long time and is based on a range of legacies from multiple layers of the ‘great subcultural past’. This past is then revealed, shared (or handed down), and also saved, reconstructed, or even musealized. At this point, (post-)subcultural studies meet the study of the collective memory.

A particularly important factor is that of the idealized subcultural past. In our own research, as well as in that of colleagues deal-



Friendship between different punk generations  
(Archive of Karel Vyskočil)

ing with other subcultural scenes (for example, Jan Charvát's (2018) research into skinheads, and Petra Kumová's (2018) work on hardcore), a strong image of an idealized subcultural past forms an important part of subcultural mythology. We conceptualize this image as 'the golden age' and employ it in reference to a mythologized imagery of the subcultural past that tends to be shared across the subculture, and as such, gradually becomes an important component of the subcultural ideology and sometimes even part of disputes

within the subculture. The imagery spreads with different intensity and may sometimes be shared only by some members of the subculture. Most typically, it contains memories of transgression, conflicts with societal norms, nonconformity, or moral panic (compare with Thornton 1995; Muggleton, Weinzierl 2003).

Talking about a 'golden age' always means talking about the past—and logically also about loss. We are therefore interested in ascertaining what kind of values in the given narratives about the 'golden age' have been lost. What is it that actors consider to be formative for their subcultures but can no longer be found in the subculture of today? A further question is, logically, the reasons for the given loss. Following the 'golden age' metaphor, we may designate the moment of loss as 'the expulsion from paradise': What, according to subcultural participants, caused the given loss that causes them to distinguish the 'golden age' from the current state? In some cases, the rhetoric of the 'golden age' is not just a critique of the current state but also a mythological source of, or reason for, certain conduct in the present.

Different subcultures have their own characteristic myth of the 'golden age', but the nature of those in the post-communist

context is specific because of the regime change. In some subcultures, the change of regime divides the 'golden age' from the present. The generation of those who participated in the subculture before the regime change is divided from the 'post-revolutionary' generation.

We will therefore focus on how subcultures change in relation to the length of their existence and the presence of different generations. We shall also aim to find out whether this change has been reshaped into a specific characteristic within the context of political change in the East.

Our main questions explore the following issues: the impact of 'multigenerationality' on music subcultures; the role, construction, and characteristics of the 'golden age' (with special focus on the role played by legendary personalities and bands, and memories of one's subcultural past) in subcultural scenes; the main driving factors behind the 'expulsion from paradise', 'return strategies'; and the implications of the 1989 regime change on subcultural transformations.

## METHODOLOGY AND DATA

In the case of punk and freetekno we draw on our original research, while in the case of the underground we mainly use preliminary research notes for research which has not yet been conducted.

For the purpose of collecting and analysing data for this chapter, we used qualitative methods. In the case of the punk and rave subcultures, the main source of our data was research that we conducted in 2009–11 as part of a research project concerning the values of Czech subcultural youth (Kolářová 2011). This extensive research, which studied four subcultures together (rave, punk, skinheads, and hip-hop), used methods that were largely inspired by ethnography and the insider approach. We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews—16 in the case of freetekno (see Slačálek 2011) and 12 for punk (see Pixová 2011)—and longitudinal participant observation, which was mostly carried out at events such as concerts, parties, demonstrations, in squats, and so on. We also

analysed additional sources, such as printed materials, internet discussions, film documentaries, and more.

In order to tackle the questions posed in this chapter, the data collected between 2009 and 2011 was further enriched by additional interviews and analysis of other sources conducted between 2014 and 2016. In the case of rave, the topic of the ‘golden age’ emerged intensely and was often mentioned by the interviewees themselves, in spite of it not being the main topic of the research. As a result, four other interviews were recorded in 2014–15 with selected participants from the previous research. In the case of punk, the topic of the ‘golden age’, or reminiscing about the past, emerged less frequently and in a much less explicit way in comparison with the interviews conducted within the rave subculture. As a result, 12 more punks were contacted in 2016 in order to obtain data focused on the topic of the ‘golden age’. With four of them, the data was obtained via interviews, while eight of them answered questions in written form.

As regards the underground, the conduct of in-depth interviews was beyond the scope of the work for this chapter. Given the existence of large numbers of memoirs concerning the Czech underground, we believe that the published interviews, documentaries, and other artefacts provide sufficient data for this kind of analysis. We are nonetheless aware of the limits, in terms of mutual comparability, of the three subcultures. Our understanding has been further shaped by informal conversations with a number of participants in the underground, although we naturally did not use this in our analysis for ethical reasons.

When quoting our participants further in the text, we use their nicknames and indicate their approximate age; the generation they belong to in other words.

## **PUNK**

Punk is one of the oldest and best known youth music subcultures. It first appeared in the 1970s, and, despite the Iron Curtain, arrived in the former Czechoslovakia by the late 1970s and

early 1980s. Today, members of the punk subculture or scene range from teenagers to people of retirement age. The younger and older members are, on one hand, united by associating themselves with punk but, on the other hand, divided by their age and their differing relationship to the subculture and its origins. As is aptly shown by Clark (2003), during its existence punk has undergone a tremendous shift from being a mode of spectacular rebellion to becoming just another consumer choice co-opted by the mainstream, eventually re-emerging in the form of a scene stripped of punk's original orthodoxies but embodying new forms of anti-capitalist politics.

In the Czech environment, the heterogeneity of punk is further enriched by the role played by the historical experience of those who started with punk in the 1970s and 1980s, during the period of Communist rule known as 'normalization'—the return to greater repression following the Prague Spring. As shown by Filip Fuchs (2002) in his fan history of Czechoslovak pre-1989 punk rock and hardcore, the regime not only systematically prevented the subculture from spreading but also delayed its commercialization and fragmentation. In the case of Czech punk, the fragmentation did not occur until after the boom and differentiation of the punk scene in the early 1990s. The period of 'normalization', as well as the subsequent regime change, had a fundamental influence on the distinct features of the punk scene in the Czech Republic. This peculiarity manifests itself in the nature of relations between various punk generations, their relationship to punk and the subculture's past, and in what they consider an imaginary 'golden age' of punk subculture and the reasons for its end.

The beginnings of Czech punk took place during the above-mentioned 'normalization' period. At that time, the subculture was united in its opposition to the regime, which suppressed punk as a Western element harmful to socialist youth (Vaněk 2002). However, contact with Western punk was limited, causing Czechoslovak punks to have a rather nondescript identity. They often had little notion of anarchism, anti-fascism, or anti-capitalism; indeed, some were even friends with far right-wing skinheads

those exhibiting racist attitudes. They tended to see punk as a specific musical trend, an unconventional fashion, or an entertaining anti-conformist protest. It was only as a result of unnecessarily strict repression, ranging from complications faced in listening and producing subcultural music to frequent police violence, that punks became enemies and opponents of the totalitarian regime (Vaněk 2002; Fuchs 2002; Pixová 2013).

The Velvet Revolution was a major milestone in the development of Czech punk (see Pixová 2011). It resulted in punk ceasing to be a protest against the regime and state socialist society. Some individuals abandoned the subculture, some took the opportunity to pursue punk as apolitical entertainment, while others threw themselves into the consumption of drugs, or became adherents of other subcultures.

Along with the advent of new influences, movements, ideologies, and cultural trends, the 1990s also saw the differentiation of the punk scene. Part of the scene became depoliticized, as a result of the former regime's departure, and commercialized, similar to that observed by Clark (2003) in Western countries more than a decade earlier. Another part of the scene took a direction that represented underground in the context of the new regime and followed the example of the Western post-punk scene, which according to Clark (2003) reinvented punk's social critique and style through replacing its 'performances of anarchy' with 'the practice of anarchism' (Clark 2003: 230). This was accompanied by the spread of hardcore and the appearance of crust punk, grindcore, anarcho-punk, and so on, and with punk beginning to be associated with the DIY attitude and squatting. Many punks started to move towards vegetarianism, animal protection, various forms of activism, and later feminism and similar movements. As shown by Muggleton (2000) and Clark (2003), in this new post-subcultural context, characterized by the normalization and commodification of subcultural deviation and revolt, subcultural identity became much more reliant on selected attitudes and their professing. As a result, some punk scenes in the Czech Republic experienced the subcultural form being replaced with political content to a degree

that, in some cases, even resulted in the abandonment of the punk label and the denial of earlier forms of punk subculture.

However, the unceasing influx of new influences and trends that led to punk's differentiation into several more or less consolidated sub-scenes has also come along with a considerable fragmentation or even atomisation of the subculture. Like other contemporary musical subcultures, punk became a post-subculture, within which individuals and groups modify and combine their subcultural identity in various ways (Muggleton 2000) and adapt their relationship to the subculture to other aspects of their life, such as their personal preferences, values and attitudes, tastes, employment, particular life stage, general lifestyle, and so forth (Davis 2006; Pixová 2011). Unity and solidarity, which previously connected the entire subculture, is now present only in particular scenes. These scenes are, on the other hand, divided by their attitude towards influences and elements of other subcultures, as well as punk's increasing co-optation by the dominant culture and the fashion industry.

### 1. 'Golden age'

Quickly becoming a victim of commerce and fashion trends, punk in the West was proclaimed dead not long after its greatest heyday. The still popular use of the motto 'punk's not dead', which was supposed to demonstrate punk's continuing relevance shortly after its biggest boom fizzled out, can also be understood as a recurrent return to the origins of punk. While Clark (2003) suggests that punk and its classical archetype first needed to die in order to make space for a new subcultural discourse, one based on new forms of anti-capitalist political action, the motto itself can be also understood as a fetishization of the subculture's origins. The interviews show that in many cases punks find their subculture's 'disintegration' difficult to bear. They perceive it as a loss of many of the primary punk attributes, which include its ability to shock, to deny social norms, and to define itself as running counter to the mainstream and commercial culture. Even here, however, we encounter the subculture's fragmentation, as everyone connects

the 'true' attributes of punk with something else. While some cling to memories of an idealized form of the archetypal punk, whose appearance and musical taste contrast sharply with the greyness of conventional society, other punks display disapproval of the superficial approach, where punk is just a content-less shell—music and fashion devoid of its former protest spirit, no longer capable of taking a critical stance towards current problems.

Fragmentation is also reflected in the different periods people associate with the 'true punk'. Punk's biggest boom is conventionally associated with its beginnings, when it shocked the most. But associating the 'golden age' with the subcultural origins is ambiguous in the case of Czech punk. As illustrated by the following quote from an older participant who dropped out of the scene after 1989, punk in the former Czechoslovakia can be said to have started twice, each time in a different context, and each with its own relevance for the subculture:

Although there was a split, here it [the 'golden age'] was the nineties. For me, the eighties were the golden age; I basically dropped out of it in the nineties. But in the nineties, so much stuff got going, even skinheads, Nazi skinheads, and all that. For punk here, it was the best time—though. The eighties rocked, but in the nineties, people weren't afraid to wear it. To meet a punk in the eighties was unique. They listened to it at home, but they were afraid to go out in the street with a mohawk. In the nineties, it was all free, everyone did what they wanted. There were bands. In Smíchov there was a bunch of about 50 to 100 people lying there every day in front of the entrance to the subway, begging and boozing—a fantastic time for punk. (Dušan, older generation)

As we can see, for many punks the 'golden age' started in the early nineties, during the early post-communist transformation, a time favourable to a boom in anything coming from the west. Another older participant, a musician from a famous punk band, compares the nineties with the previous period as follows:

The regime, before '89, was unnecessarily tight-laced, and freedom was so curtailed that there was a big difference when you were suddenly able to play freely. You could call a promoter on your own, send him a contract, posters, and then you're going to play. He decides on an entrance fee and then gives you some money out of it, [. . .] you no longer needed to have mandatory employment and a stamp in your ID. I sensed immediately after the revolution that the subculture was on the upswing. . . . When there was no longer an obligation to work, people gave it up and decided to live life. . . . So many were from rich families, their parents started to give them pocket money. They didn't go to work, they didn't give a fuck about anything, they lived like punks. People started to appear who lived in a squat somewhere. [. . .] In the first few years after it opened, loads of drugs sprung up. Western phenomena began to fully appear. Only later did it start to settle into some sort of order, with the State beginning to take control of it. (Vlasta, older generation)

The nineties are labelled the 'golden age' both by participants who associate punk mainly with music (the opportunity to organize and attend concerts, access better audio equipment, records, and so on), and those who connect it with politics (freethinking years, the end of obligatory employment, the opportunity to live 'alternatively', squat, along with others). They associate this time with the euphoria of a liberated society and with the opening of, until then unheard of, opportunities to experiment with almost everything that the former regime used to ban. The freedom to conduct business led to the opening of a multitude of music clubs, large numbers of musical events, the production and sale of music records, as well as to the spread of narcotics. People and bands could travel abroad, and vice versa, with foreign bands coming to the Czech Republic. Punk started to make connections with squatting and anarchism. However, after 1989, punk also lost its original unity and began to disintegrate:

There was one good thing about it [the 'normalization' period]: everyone stuck together, or at least they didn't fight with each other. Very occasionally skinheads fought with punks, and so on. But oth-

erwise, there was just one enemy. There was no enemy in the nineties, though, so they began to fight among themselves. Suddenly there were thousands of skinheads, thousands of punks here. You went to see the Exploited—it was in 1991, I was there as an organizer—and there were Molotov cocktails flying between the two camps, they were thrashing each other with sticks. Hundreds of people. That sort of thing would be unthinkable today or in the eighties. (Dušan, older generation)

The 1980s also had significant positives. Older participants have fond memories of how close punks were in the face of a common enemy like the totalitarian regime. Nostalgia can also be sensed in Fuchs's (2002) retrospective, which portrays Czechoslovak pre-1989 punk rock as an exciting and original scene, built on improvisational skills and the true commitment of its followers. The exclusivity of the scene was further increased by the difficulties associated in maintaining and developing its existence, including the subcultural identity of individual members.

However, oral and written histories indicate that the conditions for the subculture during the 1980s were too tough for the period to be described as the 'golden age' of Czech punk. Punks in the streets would often end up at police stations, concerts were almost impossible to organize, and punk bands were punished for their activities. During this period, punks were faced with a subcultural hunger (see Vaněk 2002, Fuchs 2002) and their own exclusion from the public space (Pixová 2013). According to some, the 'golden age' could perhaps be associated with the end of the eighties, when the atmosphere in society began to be more relaxed and the regime started to collapse. One participant recalls the decreasing intensity of repression, and that organising concerts became easier:

Eventually it happened anyway, because they [the regime] found that they had no chance of suppressing it and that they were actually just digging their own hole. In the end they chose a tactic of just letting go entirely and, before the revolution, even bands that were completely banned began to play. (Vlasta, older generation)

On the other hand, another participant likes to remember the increasing willingness of some punks to bring down the regime completely.

The moment they killed Wonka,<sup>40</sup> those of us who had experienced several arrests and beatings in cells, we knew then that anyone of us could die, and that there was no way back, really, or anywhere else to go. It was really a matter of survival. It was time to start a regular fight, not just to be a rowdy, who dresses a certain way and knocks over garbage bins or goes to illegal concerts. It was about systematically destroying the regime. . . . It was '87, '88. That's how it got going. Punks, guys, who up until then had nothing to worry about, started to have these serious debates about what to do next. What to do, how to organize, whether to take the path of sabotage, or some kind of resistance—what are all the things that can be done to destroy communism. This could be sensed throughout the whole movement. (Billy, older generation)

Some participants' positive memories of the 1980s can nonetheless be linked to the nostalgia associated with one's subcultural beginnings, which tend to be the most exciting thanks to the feeling of discovering something new and original, and thanks to finding new friendships with other like-minded peers. This can also be observed in the younger generations of punks, who consider the 'golden age' to be their own subcultural beginnings, often connected with the discovery of a long sought after ideological shelter. For example, Pedro associates such beginnings with the Milada squat:<sup>41</sup>

When I started to go to the concerts at Milada, it came with a whole bunch of things all at once—anarchism, nihilism, alcohol, drugs, anti-fascism, rebellion against the mainstream culture. Meanwhile, the bands at punk concerts were altogether quite open to starting new

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40 Pavel Wonka (1953-1988) was an anti-communist dissident and political prisoner.

41 After 2000, Milada was practically the only squat in Prague due to the increasing repression of squatting and a temporary decline of anarchism in the Czech Republic.

friendships. There was no reason why I would have to feel bad among others. (Pedro, younger generation)

Fragmentation and the many years of the subculture's existence in the Czech Republic means it is only to be expected that the 'golden age' signifies something different to everyone. For some, it may be the period of their own activity in the scene, whether as a musician, concert-goer, promoter, or perhaps a cloakroom attendant. For others, times of intense friendship and spending lots of time in a particular crew, living in a squat, or engaging in intense political activity, whether directed against communist totalitarianism or against capitalism. For some, their 'golden age' started when they took on a new orientation within the subculture; for example, moving towards straight edge, anarchism, or crust punk.

A similar fragmentation is also reflected in accounts of the end of participants' 'golden age' in the subculture. Collectively, a declining interest in punk could be related to the departure of a common enemy in the form of the totalitarian regime, or vice versa, with the end of the euphoria of the liberal nineties. On an individual level, the loss of the punk identity may be due to drug addiction, groups of friends splitting up, starting a family or a new job, and other reasons.

## **2. Subcultural legends and history**

Another theme that we analyse in connection with the search for the subculture's 'golden age' is the role played by legendary personalities and bands in the punk subculture/scene, and the role of the subcultural past and memories. Some participants displayed a certain reluctance to celebrate famous representatives of the scene as well as a tendency not to reminisce about the past very often. Both activities appear as inauthentic for punk, although it is not clear whether participants truly avoid them or claim to do so in an attempt to appear consistent with punk ideals. In an ideal world, punks ought not to care about 'stars' and nostalgia, and rather than glorifying the old days, they ought to



Young blood at the concert of hc/punk legend Balaclava (Jan Charvát)

focus on criticising what is going on here and now. The famous nihilistic punk slogan ‘no future’ could be thus supplemented by the motto ‘no past’. As a subculture, punk is mainly based on personal authentic experience in real time and space—the actual experience of music, dance, provocation, revolt, protest, reactions to current events and challenges, and of the real practice of punk attitudes and lifestyle.

It thus seems to be very non-punk to celebrate punk legends, patronize others, or ‘lecture’. The same approach is often expected from those who hold the status of subcultural legend. Ideally, real subcultural capital should be primarily based on an ability to respond to contemporary challenges, constantly updated punk authenticity, savagery and crudity of expression, as well as on the consistency of one’s punk identity with punk ideals. The Czech punk scene nonetheless appears to have many legends, and some participants certainly do not hold back from celebrating them, or at least implying a certain admiration for them and their role in the development of the local subculture. This fact uncovers another

division in Czech punk that may be related to the former regime.

As mentioned above, part of the contemporary punk scene in the Czech Republic was depoliticized by the departure of the former regime, and it treats punk as entertainment without any deeper overlap in terms of values and ideas. To date, this part of the scene has stood apart from the post-1989 development of punk underground, whose followers are more oriented towards politics and incorporate punk into their everyday lifestyle. On the other hand, some bands, which had existed before 1989, took advantage of the newly-gained freedom to expand their music activities. They became semi-professional and commercialized, and thereby distanced themselves from many punk ideals. As a result of their memories of communist totalitarianism, it is not uncommon for members of this depoliticized scene to incline towards right-wing values and opinions. It is therefore paradoxical that this part of the scene has become the most visible representation of the Czech punk scene and represents the first contact with the subculture for many young punks. The bands that form this scene are seen as legends of Czech punk by their fans as well as by mainstream society. Followers of 'punk underground', meanwhile, tend to distance themselves from these bands, even in cases where these bands represented their introduction to the subculture. Frequently, they plead youthful ignorance. They complain that these bands are outdated, their members are old, or that they treat punk as a form without content. This is illustrated through a quote by eighteen-year-old Janek:

There is this trend now that a lot of punks, who listen to that sort of basic Czechoslovak punk, such as HNF, Čertůf punk, Visací zámek, Hasicí přístroj,<sup>42</sup> and so on—now a lot of these bands' songs are overplayed— and a lot of those people are switching to crust punk. It's faster, more energetic . . . And all these people are now saying that they're crust punks, and they no longer listen to Visací zámek and N.V.Ú. and

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42 Some of the oldest Czech and Slovak punk bands founded in the 1980s or early 1990s.

have never ever listened to it. [. . .] In the 10 years that they've been listening to E! E, SPS, they listen to it all the time. They go to every gig, they always hear the same songs, and the songs no longer have the same energy. If the singer's been singing it for 10 years, the lyrics can't have the same relevance as when they were new. Because when it's new, it has an impact and hopefully makes people think. But if they hear it 10 times, they see it more like entertaining music. (Janek, younger generation)

It seems obvious that legends are an inherent part of punk subculture, but at the same time their existence also embodies a denial of punk itself. The popularity of legendary bands is often built on old songs, and their current production lacks the ability to address current events in a sufficiently critical way. The age of these musicians may also be problematic. Older age is not something to be celebrated in punk subculture. Davis (2006) suggests that the preservation of the punk identity at an older age is the result of either stagnation or, conversely, the ability to make a living within the subculture or connect subcultural identity with conventional work. But, as shown by the following quote from a participant who currently follows punk underground and recently returned to punk after ending a drug addiction of many years, negotiating punk identity at an older age may also mean a negation of punk ideals:

. . . but now it's just about money, not punk ideas. I don't know how much Plexis play for, say 20 000 [CZK].<sup>43</sup> Hošek doesn't work, he just does punk. He doesn't work, he drinks, he lives off his concerts. It's about money, it's not about anything else, it's all slick. Don't trust anyone over 30. People start to think selfishly, they have families and it's all about money. Up to 30, they still have ideals and that drives the movement forward. Once money gets involved and people pass 30, it's about fuck all. (Dušan, older generation)

In the case of Czech punk, it is evident that the 'golden age' is

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43 Approximately 740 EUR, 790 USD for a concert. Plexis is a Czech punk band founded in 1984 by the frontman Petr Hošek.

hard to determine. If we were to consider the true and real punk as being represented by its underground scene, which is constantly seeking to update its content, then probably the most fitting way of expressing one's relationship to the 'golden age' of punk would be to shout, 'fuck the golden age', and perhaps even, 'fuck off punk'. The same might also be declared by the depoliticized part of the scene, to which the true revolt never really mattered. With a subculture as fragmented as punk, it is also quite possible that there is a whole range of 'golden ages' which everybody defines in their own way, based on their own feelings and their current relationship to the subculture.

### **FREETEKNO**

Freetekno first started to appear in the Czech environment after 1994 under the influence of travelling sound systems, which came to Central Europe in search of new spaces in the aftermath of repressive laws in Great Britain and elsewhere in Europe. The launch of the Czech scene was especially influenced by the sound system Spiral Tribe.

In the Czech context, the scene took on deep roots. In terms of the number of individual sound systems and party attendance, especially at the annual Czechtek techno-parties during the years 2000–05, the scene is considered to be very big, not only in comparison to the rest of Central Europe but also within Europe as a whole (cf. St John 2009). The number of followers gradually rose to tens of thousands, changing the events' character. Czechtek was violently dispersed in 2004 (just as it was ending) and even more repressively in 2005, when a massive and brutal police attack prevented the teknival from happening. After it was announced that in 2006 Czechtek would take place on army land following negotiations with the State, a range of Czech sound systems issued a declaration that no more events would be organized under the Czechtek label.

The 'golden age' is associated with the first years of the subculture's emergence in the Czech Republic. An important distinguishing feature of this subculture in the Czech context is the absence of

the pre-1989 past. Freetekno started to spread in the Czech Republic in 1994, and the founding generation had no experience of the repression of the former regime.

When characterizing the ‘golden age’, the main emphasis is placed on the characteristics of the wider society, and of the scene itself. As regards the wider society, there are references to its unpreparedness, ignorance, as well as the lack of attention paid to the subculture’s events by the media, police, and politicians. These conditions provided a relatively wide open space for freedom of action, which did not have to overly consider the unprepared of society and the State. Some participants associate this situation with the widespread availability of opportunities (especially for actors from the West) in the immediate post-revolution decade:

Back then you could get out your speakers anywhere you wanted. The police would come along to see what was going on, and they’d have a beer. And because they [freetekno sound systems from abroad] had Western brands [of cars] they thought it had something to do with capitalism. . . . Or they just didn’t know. There were no laws, there were no bylaws. . . . It went on like that for many years, which is how the freetekno scene put down roots here. (Libor2, older generation)

The fact that a considerable number of techno-parties could be thrown in the Czech Republic stemmed from the unpreparedness and relative openness of the society as a whole and from the novelty and unfamiliarity of the subculture. The scene’s nomadic nature meant it was able to use surprising tactics in relation to the unprepared mainstream and mostly settled society. These ‘macro-level’ circumstances were nonetheless also influenced by the ‘micro-level’ of the scene itself. Its character was determined by novelty and the discovery of a new style, a certain openness, the opportunity to experiment, and a sensation of free space. Throwing illegal and semi-legal parties was possible thanks to the unpreparedness of the authorities. Moreover, the absence of a negative media image (the image of ‘catastrophic’ techno-parties was only established later on) made it easier to negotiate with local residents and landowners in

cases where the organizers of techno-parties needed to do so. From the perspective of the scene itself, frequently mentioned aspects of the freetekno scene include a smaller scale, members of the subculture knowing each other, events being bolder, and an atmosphere of greater mutual trust as well as the absence of thefts among participants. In connection with this description, some people talk about authenticity and their relationship to the scene and its ideas. In many cases, these ideas are not further specified, which suggests that the scene was endowed more with a spirit of solidarity and trust than with any specific ideas. It is the very term ‘spirit’—which sounds unusual when used in Czech, and less archaic and spiritual than its Czech equivalent, ‘*duch*’<sup>44</sup>—that became the label for the notion of a lost paradise. It has been connected to the idea of the loss of belonging and of the specific atmosphere of the parties, which could not be retained when attendance became massive (sometimes it was also ironized together with nostalgia, which it denoted).

It thus becomes apparent that the ‘golden age’ is contrasted with subsequent trends. For most research informants, these trends were strongly associated with the last few years of Czechtek (c. 2003–06). As regards the wider society, the main emphasis is placed on its newly-gained ability to react, including initial moral panic (Czechtek is expected and receives a priori negative media coverage) and, in 2004 and especially 2005, brutal police raids. The scene is no longer a moving space of autonomy, which can be formed within a few days in a given location and then dispersed again. It is drawn into a political conflict and must defend its ‘right to party’. It gets involved in large-scale protests (taken over by other actors for their own political goals, especially criticism of the then Social Democratic Prime Minister) and in negotiations with the political power.

At the same time, the fame and media attention transform the parties themselves. Participants perceive parties as much more alienated, changing in terms of the attendants’ composition. Frequently, these attendants ‘have nothing in common with the ideas

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44 Can also be translated as ‘soul’ or ‘ghost’.

of Freetekno'. This statement appeared not only in the accounts of our research informants, but, after a legalized version of the Czechtek techno-party was announced, it also appeared in a declaration, in which the majority of Czech sound systems announced that no more parties would be organized under the Czechtek label.

The key element that actors reject is the mass character, which immobilizes this originally nomadic subculture and turns its parties into a social problem and an easy target for media attention, political rhetoric, and police repression. The mass character also alienates the subculture's events from its own members and leads to a debate about 'originality', 'authenticity', and the borders of this originally open scene, about who is 'ruining the scene'<sup>45</sup>, and so on. Such debates, in turn, produce an atmosphere of conflict and alienation. The alienated mass parties are contrasted with the 'golden age' of smaller and 'more authentic' parties.

These debates are nonetheless accompanied by a paradox, which further contributes to the image of the golden age. They are often conducted online, in the relatively alienated environment of web discussions and chats. Both their content and form are frequently divisive, contradicting virtues such as solidarity, spontaneity, and sharing, which some actors see as inherent to the subculture. On one hand, internet discussions have thereby contributed to an explicit formulation of the values associated with the 'golden age'. On the other hand, these values have been suppressed by the very form of these internet discussions, which has contributed to an even stronger nostalgia for the 'golden age'.

Some discussants perceived online discussion as a possible tool for improving the situation in the scene and for a return to its key values: 'I blasted them publicly, I even called them names publicly, not that I expected that anything would change. But some people ought to realize that throwing megalomaniac parties was not the right way' (Študák, younger generation). Others, on the contrary, perceived the internet discussions as a contradiction of the parties'

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45 Word 'kurvit' is derived from the Czech expression 'kurva,' which is vulgar, but the very common word for prostitute, 'kurvit' can mean both 'ruin' and 'sell out'.

atmosphere, as a communication tool that divides the scene even more and thereby negates its values. What happens is a 'dissection of problems on the Internet, when people are not able to say things to each other's faces' (Ilja1, older generation). Meanwhile, the very nature of internet debates makes them typically accessible to people who have only little in common. People who live a more traveller-like life, which corresponds to the scene's ideals, have, on the other hand, much more difficult access to the Internet. Online, the 'golden age' is therefore evoked and at the same time reminisced about as a time that preceded the mass proliferation of the Internet, or a time that was not affected by it.

The topic of the 'golden age' is so widespread in the scene that sometimes it becomes the subject of ridicule and parody ('The grass used to be greener'—Jakub, older generation; even the word 'spirit' is often used ironically). Often the attachment to this 'golden age' and certain elements of behaviour associated with the 'golden age' (nomadism) are sources of significant subcultural capital, including tolerance of situations in which these values are betrayed by the bearers of the subcultural capital themselves (for example, when they organize mass events). 'If anyone messes up, then let it be them', one respondent (Lola, younger generation) says when talking about a sound system she considers to be 'pioneers', well known in the past as travellers with a strong relation to authenticity. However, later they were criticized for selling drugs and throwing events in halls.

A link to the 'golden age', as well as the materialisation of subcultural capital arising from one's relationship to the 'golden age', is often created by the name of a particular sound system. One of our respondents described the origin of his sound system as a fusion of two existing ones, where one of these sound systems had a big debate about dropping its original name. The respondent further considers the decision to abandon the original name as something fairly exceptional: 'It was not very standard, . . . that we erased it completely and started from the beginning' (Jakub1, older generation). Another respondent, a member of a sound system that enjoys legendary status, backs this up when he talks about his un-

successful attempts to suggest changing the sound system's name:

I was pissed off when people were celebrating our 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was as if we were Olympic.<sup>46</sup> So how about changing our name? Let's change our name. Let's do it differently, under a different name.

**But it didn't work out??**

Of course it didn't work out, because some people were hung up on it.

**What was their reaction?**

I can't remember what they said. I had already wanted to stop a few times, because it was pissing me off – the creation of a legend, getting hung up on the name, and so on. I think it was always perceived as some kind of lunatic idea of mine: 'Yeah, cool, let's keep going. Ilja's thought something up again, some rubbish, so let's keep going, do something.' (Ilja2, older generation)

Above, we interpreted the discontinuation of Czechtek as one of the strategies for ridding the scene of its mass character, which destroyed the original 'spirit' of the party. This effort was nonetheless only partly successful: It rid the scene of the most significant media attention and also of the unmanageable number of attendants at the outdoor events. Annual summer techno-parties continued to take place with attendances of several thousand, and they regained part of their spirit. However, the scene changed, manifesting itself in the organisation of mass events in halls in particular, which some respondents saw as confirmation of their suspicion that the independent scene had turned into a business activity.

A return to the 'golden age' is perceived as impossible, partly because of the new participants in the scene who did not know the scene during its beginnings and therefore lack the key initiatory experience. The image of the 'golden age' therefore reinforces the position of the older and more experienced participants of the scene, sometimes to the point where the idea of returning to the

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46 A Czech rock band that has been playing since 1962, now a symbol of a pop band. In 2012 the band had a huge concert to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

‘golden age’ contradicts openness as one of the scene’s values. One respondent expressed this in an extreme way:

My ideal . . . I would be really happy if things returned to where they were. And as nasty as it sounds, if people under 18 were prohibited from attending (Lola, younger generation).

In an attempt to return to the spirit of the original parties, some sound systems opted to hold smaller, private parties. This strategy nonetheless had significant limits—according to our respondents, these smaller parties lacked the authenticity of the original parties (‘fetishizing smaller parties . . . more like little get-togethers, continuing something that is no longer true—Libor2, older generation) and also their original openness:

It seems to me that private parties still have the same enjoyable vibe that they always had. . . . but I just feel like, that in some way . . . they are a little like their own memorials. [. . .] People used to make flyers for private as well as smaller parties so that people from outside would come too, but now it feels as if they are some kind of family session only for people from the sound systems, who throw little events just for themselves, where they reminisce over a couple of beers. (Jakub2, older generation)

## **UNDERGROUND**

The milieus around bands such as DG307, The Plastic People of the Universe, and many others, including local formations, constituted a significant part of the alternative culture after 1968. During this period, these bands represented a highly nonconformist form of artistic expression connected with socially unacceptable features such as long hair, highly experimental rock music, vulgar lyrics, and so on. As such, these bands and the scene around them were a major target of repression, as well as part of the history of opposition to state socialism. It was the trial of The Plastic People of the Universe that created the solidarity network that later brought into

being Charter 77.<sup>47</sup> According to Martin C. Putna, the court cases against the underground and solidarity with persecuted musicians even played the role of ‘foundation myth’ for Charter 77 (cited according to Daniel 2016a: 43). At the same time, the repression of underground musicians, accompanied by extensive propaganda activity, had broad societal support, and according to some historians even helped the regime to gain legitimacy (Pullmann, Kolář 2017).<sup>48</sup> After the regime change in 1989, a whole range of new possibilities opened up in front of the underground participants. The main ideologue and organizer of the underground, the poet and manager of The Plastic People of the Universe, Ivan Martin Jirous, expressed these possibilities in his own way, triumphantly and perhaps ironically, in *Respekt* magazine: ‘We are the winners and we must act accordingly. Just like in a conquered territory. We have saved the country, we saved the remnants of what’s left of this

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47 Charter 77 was the most noteworthy expression of civil disagreement with the regime in Czechoslovakia. It was created in reaction to the repression and 1975 adoption of international human rights agreements in Helsinki by the regime. Charter 77 criticized the regime for not adhering to the human rights agreements and proposed dialogue regarding this issue. The publication of Charter 77 was followed by repression and a propaganda campaign against persons involved with the initiative.

48 AAt the time of writing, there was no publication about the memory of the underground. A book by Ondřej Daniel et al. *Kultura svépomocí* (2016a) [Culture of Self-Help] was published only after the first draft of this text had been written. The book’s chapter 1.1 (written by Martin Mejzr) partly overlaps with this section and is highly recommended to those with a deeper interest in the topic, as it goes into much more detail. Its focus is nonetheless slightly different; it does not deal with the reconstruction of the social function of contemporary reminiscence and, instead, reconstructs the contents of the subcultural memory of the past. As a result, the study provides a clearer image of the way different layers of subcultural history are shifted in memory; however, it does not focus on contemporary memory evocation and does not fully exploit the opportunity to show what happens when, in the words of the book’s conclusion, ‘the story about “young people who just wanted to play their music” entered into the official memory. . . and the underground community, which originally identified itself on the basis of the resistance against the authoritativeness of the Communist establishment, became the authority itself’ (Daniel 2016a: 146). In this sense, this section of our text, to a certain extent, complements it. At the same time, we are of the opinion that both contributions are opening up new research terrain rather than fully exploiting it.

country.’ One of the editors of *Vokno*<sup>49</sup> replied: ‘Some say that the only winners are those who manage to win over themselves. Others say that the only winners are those who remain themselves. Yet others are convinced that only constant change is victory’ (cited according to Slačálek 2013). This triumphalism was probably out of place, but it captured something of the atmosphere in which unexpected possibilities had opened up in front of former participants of the underground. Some continued their cultural activity, this time legally, while others engaged in other forms of self-realisation. A number of former participants in the underground culture even entered politics or participated in the control and transformation of the security forces.

New opportunities and the urge, on both an individual and societal level, to ‘catch up’ with everything that the regime used to make impossible led to the fragmentation of the underground community and to the transformation of the subculture itself: ‘Personally, I think that after November ‘89 the underground events almost disappeared and were replaced by mega-concerts’ (Hrabalík 2016: 46). With new activities came new acquaintances, to whom the previous experience of the underground community was not transferable..

But the sharing of common values—I enjoy saying that we ‘kept quiet about the same things at the same table’ or, as Magor used to say, ‘memories from the trenches’—just did not exist in those new friendships, and it could not do so. The underground aesthetics and concept of life in its simplest form was something really specific. (Hrabalík 2016: 46)

Indeed, the differences in its members’ new trajectories had a centrifugal effect on the old underground community. A key figure of the underground František Stárek—Čuňas, former editor of *Vokno* and political prisoner, was invited by President Vaclav Havel

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49 *Vokno* was a samizdat magazine founded in 1979 which served as the main medium of the underground subculture (there were 15 issues up to 1989, and a few more after 1989).

to become an (high-ranking) officer in the new democratic secret police. He himself says that he considered this to be a service to the new order and recalls:

What had been the biggest part of me, the underground, was suddenly something I did not have time for, I grew apart from it. When I went to a concert, we'd say to each other 'hi, hi', and then suddenly: 'Bloody hell, you're a colonel? You can fuck off then'. Then I thought, well, of course [laughter]. (Fenómén underground 2015b)

In a sense, the underground represented a post-community: A community bonded by a shared experience, which was not transferable because of the radical change in conditions. It also stands for the painful experience of persecution and repressiveness of the former regime, and at the same time it is a memory of the cohesion of this community, which faced this repression and stood against the majority on what is now acknowledged to be the 'right side of history'. In this sense, this often painful and oppressive experience represents an inaccessible source of superiority to the present and its current actors, a source that today is not attainable by any means. The experience becomes a source of both authenticity and inauthenticity.

It is a source of authenticity because the experience of subcultural activity in conditions of repression is confirmation that the participants' involvement was not a pose but a deeply felt attitude, guaranteed by their experience. The bearers of such experience may, by their mere existence, unintentionally challenge the authenticity of the subcultures that exist in the new regime, as these newer subcultures are not subject to the same degree of repression and, therefore, cannot prove their own authenticity. We may call this an 'emanation of authenticity'. Former participants in the underground often challenge the authenticity of new subcultures inadvertently and sometimes even against their own intentions. Many of them have expressed support for the new alternative subcultures; for example, in times of repression against rave parties or squatting. Some even implied that there might be an uncertain

continuity. However, if the authenticity of the underground became the ‘gold standard’ of subcultural authenticity, experience in the new democratic regime could hardly compete. Some former participants in the underground from the period before 1989 even explicitly talked down the prospect and authenticity of new ‘underground scenes’, as shown in an interview with a punk from Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, active since the early 1990s:

The ‘máničky’<sup>50</sup> felt sudden relief that the Bolsheviks would not give them a hard time for their long hair any more. It’s true that they lived under the Bolsheviks longer than I did, of course, so they felt the change as a major change for the better—their euphoria was huge. They laughed at us pretty intensively then, and they still find a certain enjoyment in doing it now, because they have not come to terms with the fact that it is kind of enough for them, and they’d rather not say anything any more, because let’s be happy with the way it’s turned out. For me, this made the beginnings very hard. They thought I was an idiot and kept saying to me, ‘why are you playing at being a punk here when it’s all good now? What rebellion? It’s all over. What do you want to protest against?’ I didn’t really know what against, because I was just pissed off—that was all I felt. Angry with my parents, with school, with all the shit that very quickly began to appear around me. So it was complete chaos in my head, but I did know for sure that I didn’t want to play any mánička stuff, no pseudo-underground. No stupid shit. (Kuřík 2018)

This quotation, too, shows that the underground’s ‘emanation of authenticity’, especially when actively displayed, provoked an inverse reaction—its authenticity might have been acknowledged, but it was also discounted as something irrelevant under the new circumstances, or it was confronted by the new roles taken on by the underground members in the new regime.<sup>51</sup> In the imagina-

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50 Slang nickname for men with long hair, originally derived from a diminutive of the name Maria.

51 See, for example, S.d.Ch. (2015). Other commentators also had similar feelings about the former underground, as shown, for example, in this quote from

tions of the participants of the new subcultures, the underground members were now in the position of symbolic 'fathers'. Despite certain mutual sympathies, the representatives of new subcultures had to critically surpass these 'fathers' if they wished to gain their own space and entitlement to their own critical horizon.

The memory of the underground might be a source of superiority in terms of authenticity, but it can also be a source of inauthenticity. The past, which gave authenticity to the subcultural experience, is not only inaccessible to those born at a later date but also to those who witnessed it. The latter are perceived mainly through the lens of their achievements during the former regime, which may inhibit their own evolution or make it irrelevant. When the key music band The Plastic People of the Universe was revived in 1997, most of its repertoire consisted of the band's songs from the 1970s and 1980s. This was partly due to expectations, since the band's new songs were far less well received. Eva Turnová, a singer one generation younger, who replaced frontman Mejla Hlavsa after his death, had to deal with comparisons and being perceived primarily as a substitute (compare, for example, with Houfková 2013) by both the rest of the band and the audience. In general, it may be said that some of the underground bands have got themselves into a situation in which they are constantly performing their own selves from twenty or more years ago.

With an irretrievably lost past being an important source of authenticity, an important part of the subculture is the reconstruction of its own story. In this, a key role is played by music publishers who reconstruct recordings, as well as by documentary filmmakers, historians, and others who write about history. Several prominent former participants in the underground are now active in a highly controversial para-historical institution—the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, which was founded, as

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a younger mid-generation author, reflecting the climate after 1989 in his speech to the writers' congress: 'Representatives of the former underground have proven that they are truly not used to living above the ground, where everyone has to adapt to a certain extent and make compromises if they prefer to live with others rather than in an incestuous union with their own superiority' (Němec 2015).

a consequence of certain anti-communist laws, for the purpose of documenting the dictatorship of the Communist Party. The history of the underground is partly being documented within this institution. This has resulted in two interesting paradoxes: (1) While the underground is still occasionally evoked as being ‘suppressed’ or neglected and despised by the ‘Charter establishment’, its legacy is much better documented, elaborated in more detail, and more visibly commemorated in the public space than in comparison with many other parts of this alleged ‘Charter establishment’ (for example, historians and left-wing intellectuals within Charter 77). (2) The nonconformist culture that stood in opposition not only to the regime, but also to the petty bourgeois values of mainstream society, is presented to members of contemporary society as an example of ‘civic virtues’ through its institutions, including schools. In the words of Martin Mejzr, ‘The picture of an originally subversive community has entered into the new official interpretation of the national history, and the members of this subculture, who were until recently officially regarded as deviants and eccentrics, have become national heroes’ (Daniel et al. 2016a: 50). We may add that some of them co-produce this image in the role of state priests from the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes.

Under the dictatorship of the Communist Party, as well as later, the underground declared itself apolitical, and its real politics was its attempt to escape repression and to have the freedom to create alternative culture, including personal and social protest against the social order, civilizational standards, and so on. In the new regime, it seems that its main political content has become its own past, loyalty to its own story, and the spreading of its testimony. In a documentary series about the underground, the music journalist Petr Korál comments on the annual festival in Trutnov, which is particularly associated with the underground, as follows: ‘A lot of younger people will become aware of some of the historical consequences here’. Another participant asks Vlastimil Třešňák, a folk singer persecuted by the former regime, whether younger participants ‘are still interested in the time that we experienced’ (*Fenoméni Underground* 2015a). It is the past, the preservation of memory,

that becomes the main content, the main connecting element of the subculture, although it does provoke reflection and doubts in some participants. Ivan Martin Jirous, a key figure and the main ideologist and organizer of the Czech underground, reflected on his role a few years prior to his death as follows: ‘Telling those kids something about the totalitarian regime, it’s like when they used to tell us about the partisans in the war’ (13. komnata 2011). His stance suggested considerable criticism of the new regime, but also implied resignation:

As regards the old regime, I’d say that I beat it. As regards the current one, unlike the former one, I have no idea how to fight it. I think that pseudo-capitalism, the global domination of money and stupidity, the pseudo-culture of those so-called celebrities, the general idiocy, offends anyone’s senses. I cannot say that I lost to this regime, because I’m not fighting it. But I think it has beaten all of us. (13. komnata 2011)

In order to construct its own memory, the underground has found it essential to distinguish itself from the memory of dissent. This is logical, given that the dominant memory associates the underground with dissent because of its importance to Charter 77, its relationship to Vaclav Havel, and the high number of Charter 77 signatories among the underground participants. According to some ideologues of the underground, this erases the uniqueness, the meaning, and the nature of their protest. This is also why, according to them, it is important to emphasize the specific nature of the underground and to reconstruct its legacy. While František Stárek, with the help of positivist anti-communist historians, is concerned with documenting the underground, Martin Machovec and a few others are publishing its literary remains and remnants. Mirek Vodrážka, the former editor of *Vokno* and a feminist philosopher, attempts to capture the underground legacy in his writings, in which he aims to exceed the scope of traditional history writing and theorize the emphasis of the underground on physicality and music. To a great extent, the results of analyses oriented in such a way

represent a subjective testimony. In comparison to classical historiography, these insights are sometimes deeper and more reflexive. However, their focus and points of departure often resist generalization, while eventual attempts to generalize sometimes end up with highly essentialist and binary conclusions (the authentic bodies of the underground versus the 'totalified' bodies of the socialist petty bourgeois, the insincerity of the dissent versus the spontaneity of the underground, the positivism of history versus the openness of the alleged potential of music) (compare Vodrážka 2016).

Vodrážka rejects the idea of the underground being associated with Charter 77, as well as the idea that the underground was 'apolitical'. According to him, the politics of Charter 77 were insincere, because it pretended to be willing to discuss with those in power, despite knowing that those in power did not have and would never have any intention of entering into discussion. Vodrážka pits these tactics against the politics of immediate physical resistance, manifested by long hair, for example. The feelings of the underground members who signed Charter 77, but afterwards felt alienated from the Chartist concept of 'dialogue with power', is captured in a quote by Miroslav Skalický: 'We should have never acceded to this method. To discuss and argue with someone who does not discuss and does not listen to what the other is saying. We should have kept doing what we were doing, until they maybe killed us, but never talk to them' (cited according to Vodrážka 2013: 245-6).

While the authors find it important to distance themselves from the dissent and classical political opposition, they are not motivated to be critical by the concept of the 'third resistance'. Law no. 262/2011 'on the participants in anti-communist opposition and resistance' defines anti-communist resistance as a form of 'violent or other comparable struggle'. While many former Chartists protested against the law, perceiving it as a denial of the meaning of their activities, which were non-violent as a matter of principle, many participants in the underground saw it as an expression of recognition and appreciation to be perceived as participants in a struggle that was compared to the violent anti-communist resistance of the 1950s.

Historicizing witnesses from the underground often display indignation towards historians, especially the new generation of left-wing historians. These are denounced as ‘revisionists’, because they point out that the socialist dictatorship, in addition to occupation and repression, also relied on societal ‘consensus’ (Pullmann 2011). In this dispute, some former participants in the underground put emphasis on the repression and stressed that ‘normalization and the associated regime were rejected by most of the society and sent to the rubbish dump of history at the first opportunity’, using the underground activities as an example of civic denial of the regime (Cholínský 2014: 280). A movement that was rejected by the majority society, to such an extent that its protagonist Jiří Němec even spoke about a ‘dual repression’ (by the regime and at home) (Vodrážka 2013), is retrospectively interpreted in a way that turns it into something that represented the attitudes of the majority society and, to a certain extent, also its alibi.

A large number of participants in the pre-1989 underground cannot comprehend political criticism of the new regime by some members of the post-1989 subcultures. Given the extent of the former regime’s repression, they deem any comparison unacceptable. Instead, they perceive some elements and symbols of the new regime as a source of their liberation and a guarantee of their freedom (Vaclav Havel, the alliance with the United States). Conversely, they find the left-wing discourse connected with some contemporary youth subcultures too ideological and reminiscent of the discourse of the previous regime.

While some participants in the underground activities feel gratitude or ‘brother-in-arms’ loyalty to some members of the new establishment and the country’s new foreign policy direction, they have also manifested ambivalent nonconformity, especially in relation to attitudes perceived as residues of the previous regime. These have included criticism of the petty-bourgeois mentality and consumerism, and of xenophobia towards other youth subcultures (although not necessarily of xenophobia towards Muslims—indeed, the leading underground figure František ‘Čuñas’ Stárek built his 2016 political campaign for the Senate, where he spectacularly

failed, on painting an alarming picture of a Muslim terror threat, even proposing to build a 'European Guantanamo'). They also include criticism of political forces perceived as continuous with the past regime, or as representing a petty-bourgeois and consumerist mentality, as a link between the 'normalization' period of the 1970s and 1980s, and the present (whether it is the Communist Party or leading Czech politicians like Klaus and Zeman).

The year 1989 brought an end to the dictatorship of the Czechoslovak Communist Party as well as to the classical underground. However, to associate it with the 'loss of paradise' would contradict the life experience of the underground participants. In their reminiscences they talk more about their victory over the enemy, the onset of freedom, and, if we are to stick with our metaphor, also about their 'release from hell'.

The onset of freedom, however, also meant the loosening of the solidarity and community ties within the subculture as well as the subculture's complete transformation, and therefore, for many of its former participants, also its loss. The authenticity that the underground used to embody confined even its own participants in something of a 'prison of expectations'. The past, and its memory and reconstruction, has therefore become the main source of the post-subculture's current cohesion.

## CONCLUSION

The image of the 'golden age' is an idealized idea of the sub-cultural past, which is, in all cases, connected to the notion of subcultural authenticity, youth, and novelty. In the case of the underground and punk, in other words subcultures whose experience goes back to the era before 1989, we can see that the role of the given experience is ambivalent. The period before 1989 is perceived as authentic, but given the degree of repression, it cannot be seen as a 'golden age' by the participants of these subcultures. The experience of authenticity and the memory of youth are associated with intolerable repression by the regime. The memory of the subculture's sincerity is fought for at an enor-

mous cost. However, the significance of what complements the sense of authenticity is then all the stronger: the memory of solidarity and community.

The advent of the new regime therefore has a double significance: on one hand, it means the opening of huge opportunities and freedom for subcultural manifestations and for individual participants in subcultures. On the other hand, it seems to bring a reduced need for solidarity and, in many cases, the disintegration of the subcultural community. Underground, which was closely linked to dissent and therefore also to the new power, with many participants often completely changing their careers (including gaining employment in the security forces and the like), was transformed much more significantly than punk. Both subcultures gained space for legal activities, but punk fully utilized them for its development, while many former underground participants tended to use them to realize activities outside the underground scene. Moreover, punk had the opportunity to follow the Western model of the punk scene and punk authenticity, while the roots of the authenticity of the Czech underground lay mainly in its own past. While in the memory of punk, the nineties were able to become the subculture's 'golden age', for the underground this period was a time during which the change in the participants' life trajectories turned the subculture into a past.

However, societal changes and fragmentation of the scene affected the punk subculture as well. As a result, the 'golden age' is mainly associated with the beginning of the nineties, not with the entire decade, during which many punks abandoned the style, and the subculture underwent significant differentiation (making identification of the 'golden age' highly ambiguous and something that varies greatly based on the individual experience of the participants). This brings us to the fact that other values appreciated when describing the 'golden age' are novel and unifying. This also connects all of our three cases: freetekno does not have its roots in the authoritarian dictatorship of the Communist Party but from 1994 onwards. In the participants' narration, the 'golden age' emerges in connection with the first period of about

ten years. During this time freetekno events were still able to count on an element of surprise, and the State failed to respond with repression on every occasion, nor did it always respond in a timely manner. Moreover, parties during the first decade did not have the mass character that came with the later period.

It is in the freetekno subculture that the story of the 'golden age' is the most unified and, to a large extent, also explicit. It is also here that the 'golden age' performs the most distinctive critical function: the notion is used to criticize the mass character of subsequent events, and to condemn a certain type of behaviour as commercial. Criticism of this kind had considerable significance at the collective level as it probably had implications for the cancellation of the annual Czechtek.

The image of the 'golden age' can become an important source of subcultural capital for the subculture's older generation; it is a logical source of argumentation, particularly as regards negotiating the boundaries of the subculture. Sometimes this can lead to paradoxical situations, where participants with a strong attachment to the subcultural past are 'forgiven' even for violating norms derived from this very past. However, generally speaking, 'authenticity' derived from the subcultural past can easily become a constraint even for its bearers, the witnesses of the 'golden age', not only for new subcultural generations. Witnesses, too, are evaluated on the basis of an idealized image of the past, whose characteristics are hard, if not impossible, to achieve in the new context.

## Sounds of the Underprivileged: The Case of Romania's Manele

*Valentin Nicolescu and Diana Elena Neaga*

As a presence in Romanian society, the oriental music generally known as *manele* has produced a wide debate, at least in terms of popular culture and media. Generally, it was perceived either as a musical genre suitable for lower-class parties and social events or, from a political standpoint, it was heavily criticized for two main reasons, both of them ideological: first, as it is considered a genre of the uneducated, poor, lower strata of Romanian society (this expresses the political view of the right-wing conservative intellectual elite); and secondly, as it is seen an ethnic cultural artefact of the Roma minority, which taints the Romanian popular musical culture (a purist-racist view). Both of these views appeared as a reaction to the way in which the manele genre became a mass phenomenon, proving to be one of the most or perhaps *the* most consumed types of music in Romania by both Roma and the Romanian majority.

We are aiming to explore the manele phenomenon as a twofold process: first, as the reflection of a social reality; and secondly, as a political statement, trying to raise awareness of the aforementioned social reality and also adding new issues and dimensions to it. Thus, we will first approach the social dimension of this musical genre by trying to answer the following questions: Is manele the cultural expression of a particular socio-economic position or class? What are the main discursive characteristics of this particular musical form of expression? Secondly, we will try to see how manele was politicized by a particular group of activists by using it as a political statement, a voice of the underprivileged and marginalized in Romanian society. At the end of our paper, we will discuss the point of intersection between these two very different social worlds and the possible cultural and political implications of this development.

## INTRODUCTION

In our paper we are trying to investigate a particularly under-researched topic, the Romanian popular musical genre *manele* (sg. *manea*) and its connections with a specific social reality—that of the marginalized and underprivileged—as well as with the relatively new political appropriation process of the *manele* initiated by a group of left-wing radical human rights activists, apparently in order to critically emphasize the xenophobic attitudes present in Romanian society towards the Roma minority, of which most *manele* performers originate. In this context, the subculture associated with *manele* music is still uncharted territory, with very few researchers showing any interest towards the phenomenon. To this day, the most relevant research on the subject remains that of Stoichiță and La Bretèque (2012), Haliliuc (2014), and a forthcoming edited volume on the issue done by Beissinger, Rădulescu and Giurchescu.

Therefore, we are planning to answer the following questions: What is the social and historical basis of the *manele* phenomenon, and does it reflect a historical social relationship? What is the meaning of the re-use of the *manele* genre as a political standpoint, and who are the agents of this phenomenon?

In order to achieve our goal, we will divide our paper into two parts: One dealing with the social and historical phenomenon, and the other with the discursive reshaping of the *manele* in order to politically protest or react to a reproductive, exclusive, and xenophobic social order regarding not only the Roma ethnic minority, but the marginalized, the excluded, and the underprivileged in general. If the first part of our research is methodologically socio-historical, the second is centred on a sociological investigation of the aforementioned activist community in regard to their perceived relationship with the *manele* musical genre and their political use of it. We tried to explore how they position themselves towards *manele* by doing some short online qualitative research (semi-structured interviews), in which we sent the interview guide to 27 activists known for attending *manele* parties. The subjects

were selected from the participant lists taken from maneles events organized at the Macaz - Teatru Coop, a pub and cultural space which openly promotes marginal or excluded groups and communities.

Among the people contacted, we also picked Roma activists, both men and women, in order to obtain an image of the way in which the political dimension of the maneles phenomena is built other than the one present now—one linked to critical, elitist, intellectualist discourse. What is interesting is the fact that in a relative short period of time (a week), we managed to collect answers from 13 people, the perception in the field being one of peculiar interest generated by our proposed theme. The profile of the interviewed is young people (27–37 years old) with tertiary education (many with doctoral studies), and who are actively involved in civil society (members of NGOs, informal groups, and coops). The results of this research are presented in the last part of the paper.

Our working assumption is that the activist community largely overlaps with the ‘hipster’ subculture, the resulting mixture being the social agent acting towards the politicization of the maneles phenomenon. Our subsequent interest is to provide a better understanding of the way in which the individual actors perceive their own involvement in this process, and if this can, in the wider socio-historical perspective, contribute to structural change in the societal issues they are trying to address.

## **HISTORY AND SOCIAL RELEVANCE OF THE MANELES PHENOMENON**

What is maneles and when did it appear? The simple, common sense answer is—at least for the Romanians—maneles is an oriental-influenced music that appeared (at least in its proto-form) during the 1980s. The common Romanian perception is that maneles is a national, ethnically originated and isolated phenomenon, and as a consequence, particularly in the case of its contesters, must ‘be dealt with’ locally, in terms of cultural policies, public action, discourse, and even in academia, as a field of study. Conceptualizing maneles as a solely national phenomenon has several implications

in terms of the way in which some societal issues are understood, such as national identity, social hierarchies and status, the relationship towards minorities, and so on. Moreover, this particular perception could be seen as one of the dimensions of an ‘ideological’ veil that masks historical realities and alters the understanding of the present, legitimating a racist and classist hegemonic position professed by the intellectual elites and permeating the vast majority of Romanian society.

The reality is of course completely different. From a historical perspective, *manele* is the product of several social, political, and cultural circumstances, and is not usually limited to the Romanian cultural space. This can be synthesized into four main frameworks— the Roma-Romanian relationship, the Ottoman post-imperial cultural legacy, the communist period (and its aftermath), and horizontal or geographic social mobility. The resulting cultural artefact reflects wider class, ethnic, and economic realities not confined solely to the Romanian space but also to a wider geographical area. Nevertheless, as in every country where ‘oriental’ or *manele*-type music is manifested (Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and so on), the Romanian case presents local particularities that shape the social role played by this cultural artefact.

### **1. The Roma-Romanian relationship**

The dimensions that had historically shaped the Roma-Romanian relations are *symbiosis* and *xenophobia*. These are to be understood both as specific analytic dimensions and as the margins of an interval in which the relations had usually varied. The particularity of this historical relationship is given by the social status that the Roma minority ‘enjoyed’ in Romanian society until the dawn of the modern Romanian state, that of slavery (Necula 2012). Perhaps the main consequence of this status was that the Roma were not seen, as in neighbouring Balkan societies, solely as *different* (due to their status as a minority), but also as inherently *inferior*. This in turn is reflected in the way in which nowadays the Roma community is perceived by the majority: it is perhaps somewhat similar to

the manner in which the Brazilian state and society relates to the indigenous peoples, to be precise in the condescending attitude of paternalist tolerance.

If the xenophobic attitudes towards the Roma can be widely documented throughout history,<sup>52</sup> the symbiotic relationship is harder to identify in historical records, perhaps being due to the conscious decision taken by both mainstream Romanian historians and state authorities managing the curricula in this area to ‘write off’ the Roma from Romanian history. Perhaps the best example in this respect is offered by depictions of one of the momentous events in late medieval Romanian history, namely the conquest of Alba Iulia in Transylvania by Wallachian prince *Michael the Brave*, thus achieving what later Romanian nationalist historiography would call the first union of the Romanian states into a single political entity, anticipating the modern unitary Romanian state. Both textbooks and popular culture (for example, the historical movie *Michael the Brave*, released in 1970 and reflecting the nationalistic views of the communist regime at the time) illustrate Michael’s entry to the city in the same manner: dressed in Western European style, to the sounds of trumpets, and hailed by the populace. It appears, though, that the reality was quite different. Nicolae Iorga, one of the most reputable Romanian historians, offers a very different account of the same event: On 1 December 1599, Michael entered Alba Iulia ‘to the music of gipsy violins, which was known to be played for all events in a man’s life’ (Iorga 1921: 71). In other words, the Romanian Voivode entered the city with a gipsy *taraf*<sup>53</sup> and not in the manner depicted by official Romanian historiography. This ‘forgotten’ reality illustrates not only the ‘purist’ (and consequently xenophobic) aspirations of nationalist historians regarding the Romanian past, but also the existence of a fertile, mutually beneficial, social, cultural, and economic relationship between the Roma and the Romanian communities throughout the time.

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52 For example, regarding the post-socialist period, see Kligman (2001) and Thornton (2014).

53 Traditional musical band.

According to Viorel Achim (2004), the Roma were integrated into the Romanian economy, due to their specialization in various crafts, in such a manner that during the 18th century a contemporary foreign observer could note that in Wallachia and Moldavia ‘all the mechanical crafts are in the hands of the Gypsies or of foreigners from neighbouring countries’ (Raichewich [1789] as cited in Achim 2004: 46). The different bands or clans of Roma had preserved their particular qualifications in specific crafts in an organic manner, passing them on to the family/clan. That resulted in the so-called ‘natural guilds’ of gold-washers, blacksmiths, spoon makers, bear-baiters, musicians, and so forth (Achim 2004: 46, 59). But, in everyday relationships with the Romanian community, the Roma were most popular as musicians (*lăutari*). So much so that the Hapsburg document regarding Roma in the empire, *De Regulatione Zingarorum* (1782), insisted that the Roma would not be allowed to play music unless they finished their agricultural chores, and in the final document released a year later, the number of Roma musical performers was to be kept ‘to the strictest minimum’ (Achim 2004: 72–73). All these measures were aimed at changing the Roma musician clans’ way of life, limiting or forbidding their traditional occupation (playing music for the non-Roma) and integrating them into the feudal order as peasants. This illustrates, albeit indirectly, that Roma musicians were well integrated in the social universe of the non-Roma, so much so that it required the intervention of imperial authority in order to try to break this symbiotic relationship and integrate Roma musician clans and tribes into the feudal order.

The Roma musicians were called upon when the non-Roma were celebrating, either at weddings, at communal festivities, and so on. Traditionally, all important events—either in the community or in private—for the Romanians involved, at one time or another, required the presence of the *lăutari*, who provided the entertainment, illustrating the symbiotic dimension of the Roma-Romanian relationship. The repertoire of the *lăutari* bands included ritual wedding songs, epic songs, traditional ballads, regional (Romanian but also Balkan) pieces, which coagulated into a specific style

that combined the Romanian *hora* dance with the Turkish inspired *manea* and the greek *tsifteteli* rhythm (Samson 2013: 175). The Roma *lăutari* and their music were an intricate part of the everyday life of the Romanian community, thus one of the roots from which the modern *manele* appeared. And, in our opinion, it explains what Tudor Feraru (2010) notices, that ‘it’s rather paradoxical, and perhaps unique for a musically inclusive genre to be so popular today, to be exclusively associated with or attributed to a singular welldefined group, specifically the Roma ethnic minority’ (102).

## 2. The Ottoman post-imperial cultural legacy

The second socio-historical framework that contributed to the emergence of the modern-day *manele* phenomenon is the Ottoman post-imperial heritage. We will identify two main aspects that influenced the *manele*’s emergence and its contemporary form—as a particular phenomenon within Romanian society and secondly, as a regional phenomenon. We will try to explore the historical origins of *manele* in the Romanian context and also the way in which Ottoman rule in the Balkans forged a particular frame that encouraged the emergence of specific patterns of cultural exchange.

First of all, we must examine the origins of the term and the music style it describes. The earliest references to the term *manea* in the Romanian cultural area appear in various texts from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, describing a slow Turkish dance brought to the Romanian principalities by the Phanariotes of Istanbul (Georgiev Plamen 2012: 58). During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Anton Pann collected a series of musical pieces performed by Roma bands called *tarafs* and published the very first *manele* tablatures. Nevertheless, the relationship between the original, Turkish inspired form of the *manele* and the modern one is, at first glance, not a very clear one. But, if we are to explore various attempts of defining the contemporary form of *manele*, we can almost immediately find connecting elements. For example, one of the most authoritative voices in the field, Margaret Beissinger, defines the *manele* as ‘a Romanian, urban-based song and dance style that combines traditional and

popular music with various Romani, Turkish, Serbian, and Bulgarian elements, particularly in rhythm, melody, and instrumentation. It is performed in public—especially at weddings, baptisms, and other family celebrations—almost exclusively by professional male Romani musicians. Its audience is Romanian, though also Romani’ (Beissinger 2007: 95). Moreover, Plamen Georgiev cites that Adrian Copilul Minune, a well-known Roma manele singer in Romania, described the genre as ‘Turkish’ music or ‘*turcească*’ (Georgiev Plamen 2012). Both of the above citations have two common denominators: the continuity of social roles (the Roma) and the acknowledgement of a particular origin (Turkish), implying a continuity within the discussed phenomenon.

Secondly, the regional dimension of Ottoman heritage. A brief glance at the popular musical landscape of the Balkans indicates that manele is actually a subspecies of an oriental-influenced pop genre present throughout the region: the Serbs and Croats have turbo-folk; the Bulgarians have their own branch of ethno-pop, the *chalga* (*calga*); the Greeks have the *laiko laiko*; and so forth (see Psycheva, Dimov 2004; Archer 2012). It is a trans-national, trans-border phenomenon, which methodologically can perhaps be best understood by applying Ulrich Beck’s ‘cosmopolitan’ framework of analysis (Beck 2006; Beck, Sznaider 2006). The centuries-old presence of the Ottoman Empire in South-East Europe is undoubtedly the marker of a common cultural heritage shared by the societies of the region, and more importantly in our opinion, it implies that the cultural similarities present here represent a facilitating factor for acculturation. Thus, in regard to the manele phenomenon, the Ottoman past constitutes a structural frame enabling trans-border musical influences to circulate easier, as we will try to illustrate when discussing the next frame regarding the communist regime and the post-communist transition.

### **3. The communist period (and its aftermath)**

The contemporary form of manele appeared during the late communist period and there are two main factors that essentially

contributed to its inception. First of all, the somewhat brutal Chinese-inspired Cultural Revolution, initiated by Nicolae Ceausescu in the beginning of the 1970s (Bowd 2016), had a tremendous impact on the musical life of the country, and particularly on the traditional folk music. The folk music was appropriated by the communist state in order to reinforce its 'new socialist man' ideological discourse and, during large musical festivals—of which perhaps Song to Romania (*Cântarea României*) was the largest, closely followed by the Flacăra Club (*Cenacul Flacăra*), organized by the proletkultist poet Adrian Păunescu—state-sponsored artists performed a standardized form of folk music, according to the party line. At the same time, other forms of popular music were actively marginalized by the regime, with *lăutari* music particularly targeted due to its connections with traditional Romanian music and to the fact that it was performed mainly by the Roma (which at the time were not recognized as a minority). This state of affairs stimulated a reaction within Romanian society which resulted in the emergence of the contemporary manele phenomenon; the public's dissent in regard to the 'official' folk music stimulated the underground folk scene to produce more material in a more varied manner. This, in turn, combined with the second factor presented below, resulted in a new musical style: manele. The state appropriation of popular music resulting in the development of a large underground folk scene brings to light the trans-border relations, and it illustrates once more the acculturation processes enabled by the common cultural elements inherited from the Ottoman past. During the 1970s and 1980s, the *novokomponovana narodna muzika* (newly-composed folk music) from Yugoslavia, a precursor of the contemporary turbo-folk, started to be smuggled into Romania, mainly in the border province of Banat, and later Serbian bands started to play it at Romanian weddings (Beissinger 2007: 106). Similarly, the Bulgarian *svatbarska muzika* (wedding music) gained a massive underground following in Southern Romania. Soon after, illegal studios were opened in order to record local musicians who had adopted this eclectic style, and the music was commercialized with enormous success on the black market, compelling the communist

the communist state to adopt a strong reaction against this type of music as well (Beissinger 2007: 107–108).

#### **4. Horizontal and/or geographic social mobility**

The last of the four above-mentioned frameworks links the popularity of the manele to social mobility, both during and after communism. These periods were characterized by massive population movements: internal during communism and external in its aftermath, the latter particularly after Romania's 2007 EU integration. Regarding the first phase of this phenomenon, the internal migration was caused by the planned industrialization of the communist era, which stimulated people from poor, rural areas of the country to move to newly-constructed industrial cities in order to find work. Moreover, the communist planning also involved a gender dimension, opening heavy industrial factories (which employed a predominantly male workforce), doubled by light industrial production units (textiles, for example), which used a predominantly female workforce in the same area. This alienating internal migration proved to be an exceptional vehicle for manele, since its simple, emotional approach appealed to the uprooted. Moreover, the newly formed families, a result of the communist social engineering project, found a sort of a musical lingua franca in the manele, which was a common denominator (due to its adaptability) throughout the different regional variations, therefore helping bring together people with relatively different cultural backgrounds.

A similar process took place after 1989, when the structural causes of the migration, this time both internal and external, were completely different (a high rate of unemployment, lack of infrastructure, corruption, poverty, and so on), but the effects were similar. Manele artists have themselves identified this particular issue, releasing songs which address the migratory phenomenon and, perhaps less discussed, by constantly touring the so-called 'diaspora', the 2.5–3 million Romanians living abroad, therefore proving manele is strongly connected to the social reality of its audience. As

Speranța Rădulescu puts it, manea 'has become a form of opposition for all marginals and common people in Romania, regardless of their ethnic origin' (Rădulescu 2010: 3).

### **MUSIC AND ACTIVISM: THE MANELE IN ROMANIA**

In the first part of our paper we tried to provide an overall view of manele from a socio-historical perspective in order to provide a better understanding of the social basis of the phenomenon, as a cultural expression of both the Roma minority and of the disenfranchised, poor, and marginal sections of the Romanian majority. Nevertheless, the last ten years have seen a new development as manele has begun to reach a different public (hipsters, and social and human right activists) ceasing to be just pure entertainment and acquiring a new dimension by becoming politicized. In this section of our paper, we are exploring this new turn. First, by briefly looking at the post-1989 evolution of the phenomenon; and secondly, by investigating the sociological research concerning some of the actors involved in this process.

Adi Schiop, one of the most authoritative Romanian voices in the field of manele research, and also one of the principal agents of the hipsterization and politicization of manele in recent years, has distinguished a few distinct phases in the post-1989 evolution of this musical genre:

- a. The proto-manele period. Extending from the 1980s to the 1990s, it is probably the least controversial period. Bands that combine traditional fiddler's music with party music, conveying themes such as family and love, making them accessible to a broader audience, especially at parties (see here bands such as Albatros, Generic).
- b. Manele's successful period. Ranging from the end of the nineties to the beginning of the millennium, the same Adi Schiop explains it as an illusion of capitalism's success, resulting in the 'protagonist being successful in "businesses" and gaining financial potency, which he consequently demonstrates through showing off symbols of prosperity ("Mercedes") and trough

conspicuous consumption (“throwing away money”). In the competitive jungle of capitalism, the protagonist is necessarily the strongest (“I know I have no adversary”). The envy and the enemies that come along with wealth are already present as well (“All my enemies are full of spite”).<sup>54</sup> This is the period (2000–2002 to be precise) in which manele started being broadcasted on radio and TV stations (Schiop 2011).

- c. The manelization and *DE*manelization of Romania. A period in which we can identify huge efforts to construct an anti-manele discourse, efforts powered by public persons, intellectuals with high visibility (such as Gabriel Liiceanu, George Pruteanu, Radu Paraschivescu), and by countless press articles, editorials, and material from the blogosphere directly oriented towards this goal.<sup>54</sup> The period of decline (2002–2009). A direct result of the strong anti-manele public discourse that eventually led to peculiar situations, to say the least, where manele singers didn’t want to be called *manelisti* anymore and where manele wasn’t to be called as such any more, but rather fiddler music. This is the period in which the worst thing that could happen to your cultural-intellectual identity was to be associated in any way with manele.
- d. The exoticization of manele. It seems that 2009 marked the beginning of a new era that can be better understood if we introduce globalization as a variable in our scheme. Manele has crossed the border (and not just inside the suitcases of Romanians working abroad), and the surprise here is that it is really appreciated,<sup>55</sup> a

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54 See the aggressive media campaign initiated in the pages of the *Jurnalul Național* (The National Journal) regarding the ‘manelization of Romania’. A simple Google search reveals titles such as: ‘Manelizarea Romaniei prin uitarea și îngroparea culturii’ (Romania’s manelization through forgetting and burying culture) (March 2010); ‘Cum a fugit fiica lui Adi Copilu’ Minune. Manelizarea copiilor dispăruți’ (How Adi Minune’s daughter ran away. Manelizing missing children’) (May, 2014); ‘Manelizarea României’ (‘The manelization of Romania’) (September 2008); ‘Manelizare forțată în 2 mai și Vama Veche’ (‘Forced manelization on May 2nd and Vama Veche’) (July 2012); and so forth.

55 ‘In February 2010, Sorinel Copiul de Aur was the focus of a documentary, realized by Franco-German TV channel Arte. The film was presented on the channel’s most popular show, *Yurope*. Lele, Dan Bursuc’s own discovered talent, became, alongside its mentor, the star of a short movie *Muzica în sânge*

fact which mitigates the repulsion towards this musical genre so carefully cultivated by the majority of Romania's intellectual elites and opens the way to a new phase in which accepting the phenomena of manele comes mostly from its exoticism: 'Unfortunately, the interest seen in this area doesn't function through identification ("I listen to manele because I grew up with them and they represent me") but through exoticization ("I am interested in manele because they are Roma and thus exotic")' (Schiop 2011).

So 'what's next?' Schiop asks in a rhetorical manner towards the end of his 2011 article. We believe that our research could try to provide an answer. In this sense, we will consider in this part of the paper two directions of analysis in the cultural development of manele that seem to overlay the same temporal interval (more precisely, the contemporary period, starting in approx. 2012 with the emergence of bands such as Steaua de Mare or Future Nuggets). We can therefore identify the following two directions: (1) the hipsterization of manele and (2) the politicization of manele.

### **1. The hipsterization of manele**

In the contemporary period, especially inside alternative and activist circles, we can identify a clear tendency towards revaluation and reinterpretation of manele. If you are even remotely familiar with these circles, at least in Bucharest, it is impossible not to have been recently invited (on Facebook obviously) to a manele party, where you can meet lots of people typically associated with the artistic environment, at protests, or involved in all sorts of community projects and human rights activities: people we generically call activists. For example, on the weekend of 6-8 May 2016, we identified, without much effort, two such events that for us have

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(*Music in My Blood*), that was selected at Cannes in the short movie section. A French-produced album released in 1997 and featuring an unknown Nicolae Guță (who then was notorious only in Petroșani, Romania), reached a prestigious 4<sup>th</sup> place in a chart released by *Le Monde* of the best world music albums of the decade' (Schiop 2011).

undeniable ideal-typical value (in a Weberian sense) in exemplifying and understanding the categories we introduce below: Queer Night at Jazz Pong, a party that was announced as mixing beats and manele (see Raze de Soare and Future Nuggets, who introduce themselves as producing a combination of psychedelic rock and manele; and The Vultures Celebrate, at Macaz – Bar, Theatre and Cooperative, an event that was meant as a celebration for the Roma community from Vulturilor Street, which was evacuated in 2014 and had finally received social housing, held on May 7, 2016).

We will use the first event (Queer Night) in order to understand the hipsterization phenomena, which normally flows in the same way that the exoticization did in the former period, and on the other hand, as a perverse (boomerang) effect of the hard-line phase of critique, isolation, and marginalization of manele. In order to support this affirmation, we must, however, briefly describe the ingredients of a hipster identity. In this sense, we believe that Kelsey Henke manages to describe the context in which this type of identity is constructed, as well as the controversies generated around it, very well. She identifies three contradictions in the hipster identity: relations to capitalism, class, and material culture.

One dimension of the hipster identity is that of consumption, which can in some contexts be anti-capitalist in the sense that ‘hipsters continuously plump the recent past for things not yet incorporated into the market machine’. With regards to musical preferences, ‘local or independent music, as well as music from decades past can offer the consumer a raw sound inaccessible through the music of dominant culture’. At the same time, ‘hipsters do not generate new cultural forms, but instead retool old countercultural symbols and tropes’ (Henke 2012: 121). Moreover, another important ingredient is the nostalgia that generates the appetite for vintage, old school, oldies but goodies, and this ingredient clearly shows up when picking musical preferences. In a *Vice* article, the band Raze de Soare, very hip within Bucharest’s alternative scene (see the National Centre for Dance and Control Club) and who sings psychedelic manele-rock, seems to represent the ideal musical product for a hipster. The band ‘doesn’t copy’ but pays tribute to the ‘pro-

to-manele' band Albatros ('who they've probably never even heard of', as Marius Ghent (2014) writes in an article listing five reasons to listen to Raze de Soare, a band that gives a cool twist to 'old', 'proto' manele, now becoming an acceptable product for consumption within hipster culture). And the main idea is to deliver the 'native sound of the nineties, the sound of transition . . . the epoch of the mirage of trading blue jean jackets, Turkish blue-jeans and Turkish chewing-gum that was permanently accompanied by a soundtrack of prolet-pop'.<sup>56</sup> Thus, manele has all the necessary ingredients to be appropriated and resignified by hipsters; it is surrounded by controversy, it is marginal, retro and, in this sense, a form of perceiving the authentic, the native (especially in proto-manele).

A very important nuance here, especially in comparison to the politicization process of manele and the activists consuming this kind of music (as we shall see in the following section), is that in the hipsterization of manele, we can quite obviously identify the restylization that marks the elitist dimension of the phenomena. More precisely, another important aspect of the hipster identity is that of its affiliation to the (upper) middle class, even if this aspect is masked by the appropriation of various symbols from marginalized groups (like clothing, and even manele). This aspect doesn't necessarily reflect the economic realities of day-to-day life that is mostly privileged from this point of view: 'Rather than the norm of the working class rebel, hipsters come from a wealthy background and paradoxically use their privilege in order to deny their privilege' (Henke 2012: 128). In defence of such an affirmation, we can simply take as an example Control Club<sup>57</sup> (one of the most popular clubs in the city), where such events happen and which is an expensive and unapproachable place for 'regular folks', generally requiring a fee be paid for admission.<sup>58</sup>

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56 Prolet-pop: Popular music amongst the lower classes during the 1990s, combining western influences and late communist period performers and sounds.

57 <http://www.control-club.ro/>.

58 Even if the sums do not seem to be very big—approximately 5 euros—when added to the bill, it could become prohibitive.

## 2. The politicization of manele

Groups and social movements tend to become political particularly when they start to relate themselves, often in a critical manner, to the existing power structures; in other words, when they become part of the process of generating rules and institutions used to constrain power. Can the manele social phenomenon be regarded in a similar manner, as a subculture challenging the dominant power and ideological structures by claiming full citizenship (in terms of rights, opportunities, and access to public goods and services) for its members? This is the question we are trying to answer in the following section of this paper. In this respect, Adi Schiop (2016), author of the only research in the field to this day, writes that ‘the manele phenomenon doesn’t seem to be developing a political consciousness of its own that would generate reactions of protest and revolt towards the intense stigmatization it faces; also, political themes, actors and state institutions—apart from the police—are missing from its discursive universe’ (71).

And still, as mentioned above, many of the participants at manele events are actively involved in civil society organizations, mainly in the area of fighting for human rights (feminism, Roma, LGBTQIA) and the environment. Moreover, it appears that Bucharest’s underground culture is witnessing the emergence of a new type of social event: the manele party, a place where the young radical intellectual ‘elite’ and human rights activists can meet and dance to manele music. These groups are precisely those that are supposed to (according to the mainstream discourse) reject or condemn this so-called ‘inferior’ music genre. In our opinion, this can be explained by the politicization of manele as this genre starts to expand beyond its original audience—usually characterized by a form of marginality, either rich or poor, and frequently located on the peripheries or in the small town and rural areas—and is being reinterpreted in a protest manner when appropriated by left-wing activist group-

s<sup>59</sup>This migration of the manele from the non-political and the marginal towards the political is confirmed by the answers we received to the question ‘What does manele represent to you?’, a generic question meant to underline the universe of representations the subjects have in relation to the generic theme we proposed. The answers to these questions clearly confirm the thesis of the systematic construction of the anti-manele discourse of the 2000s. The interviewed, who were adolescents in that period, were one of the groups extremely caught up in the anti-manele discourse, and the effects were somewhat similar; more exactly, the passing from a familiar universe to a rigid, elitist and even duplicitous one as an effect of having been bombarded with messages against the ‘manelization of Romania’. The theme of political representation appears in the answers concerning a power-related discourse, where the subjects are placing a direct link between the manele issue and the way in which the association with the genre has generated levels of access and manifestation of power over time. The interviews offer a spatial map of the social environments where manele is listened to and is accepted as a musical genre through the multiple references to various areas of Bucharest, situated mainly on the periphery (Berceni, Colentina), as well as small provincial towns and cities (Fetești) seen as explicative variables:

Because I used to live there, I listened/people were listening to manele. Being raised in Colentina, I’ve always been familiar with this musical genre. I even have pleasant memories thinking about the parties in the hood which, to be honest, I never had access to. (Rareș, anarchist)

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59 Adrian Schiop (2016) discusses these two categories composing the manele audience: ‘On one hand, we have a very small group of rich people who are usually linked with the informal economy, and who are practically supporting the manele industry through very large sums of money spent during parties and events, and who at the same time influence part of the discursive universe of the *manele*. On the other hand, there is the main body of the manele public, the low wage people’ (65).

At a subjective memory level, I started listening to manele in high-school, in a neighbourhood gang, at bars such as La Diham in Balta Alba, and at parties in Salajan or Ferentari.<sup>60</sup> (David, director)

Manele was everywhere around me, ever since childhood. My neighbours, from a peripheral street of a district in the city of Fetesti, would blast manele at maximum volume, especially on holidays. (Iulia, feminist, journalist).

The interviews also seem to validate the opposite inference: In the large cities, the educated centre was under the influence of the anti-manele discourse, this being the case of Sibiu, a multicultural city, former cultural European capital, and perceived as one of the most ‘civilized’ urban areas in Romania:

I was raised to hate manele as the music of the uneducated. My parents and family taught me to dislike it. What’s more, in high school, in Sibiu, we organized parties and the music we listened to was rock and manele was despised, although I listened from time to time. (Vlad, activist LGBTQ)

Another variable that brings into discussion the power relations regarding the ‘quality’ of the preferred musical genre. Therefore, unlike the hipster subculture, where the age of the music is indicative of the general lack of knowledge and of a ‘different’ way of consuming it in relation to the mainstream, for the interviewed, the age of the music is associated with knowledge of the genre, as a sort of a qualifying skill which, ironically, was seen as a trait of the cultural elites and usually associated with the anti-manele discourse.

On the other hand, I liked L.A. (a manele band), but it’s like I was ashamed that I liked them. . . . I already started operating distinctions, I was admitted to high-school in 2000 and the hip-hop phase was gone from my life, for me “old music equalled good music”. (Marius, PhD student)

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60 Sălăjan and Ferentari - two neighbourhoods in Bucharest.

The subjects are operating with a very interesting periodization of their personal relationship with the manele genre. Thus, the teenage years appears to be a key stage in their evolution, when the preferred musical genre is seen as one's definitory identity trait. In this context, manele represents a turning point in terms of appeal, usually being rejected, as it is generally associated with a 'lack of culture', inferior social status, the Roma minority, and so forth.

After being a fan of this type of music in my preadolescent years and the beginning of my adolescence, during high school I retracted from this phenomena. I was taught to think it represents a 'lack of culture', 'something you need to keep yourself out of and that it is shameful', 'gipsy music'. (Ileana, PhD student) In adolescence, my sister and I would fight back with rock music at maximum level. Of course, in those times, I couldn't identify myself with something that didn't sound educated enough, burnished enough, in the terms I used to use at the time. And I lived through the times of mutual contempt between manelists and rockers. Manele seemed to me, at the time, lacking in value, uneducated, vulgar . . . and, of course, I wanted to dissociate myself from that. (Iulia, feminist, journalist)

The most interesting aspect here is Adi Schiop's interpretation of the phenomena linking it indirectly, and as politically as it can be, to the transition period and the inferiority complex<sup>61</sup> adopted by Romanians throughout these times:

We are all haunted by the same Third World underdevelopment complex, that we are an epiphenomenon of the same basic shame of which we desperately want to evade—it is just that we offer different solutions, based on the level of education and culture in which we were formed. . . The manelists address this by imagining themselves as rich or becoming rich. [. . .] The old elites addressed it firstly by imagining themselves as dissidents, outside the games

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61 See "Complexe culturale la români", an interview with anthropologist Vintila Mihailescu, realized by Tudor Petcu, Revista AGERO Stuttgart.

of the former system and thus ethically impeccable, [. . .] and in consequence, throwing away the shameful lack of civilization part onto the ‘hayseeds’, the nouveau rich or the poor from the semirural slums (Schiop 2011).

Before discussing the factors that determined a redefinition and re-evaluation of manele amongst activists, it is important to stress the fact that these fractures and oppositions did not appear in the answers of the Roma activists, seeing as the word familiar is the one that can best describe their perpetual relationship with manele. Listened to at home, with family at family parties (weddings, christenings), evaluated as pleasant, of quality, or less pleasant, manele seems to be accepted as a part of the Roma minority identity and can thus be included in the privative communitarian dimension. So, even if on the outside the ‘majority’ was fighting Romania’s ‘manelization’, in the community this music was accepted like any other musical style.

Till the nineties I was raised with fiddler music. After, the first manea I heard was a song by Dan Armeanca. My family was a big consumer of music of different genres: fiddler music, rock, pop, etc. So, when they discovered manele, they started buying. Up to 1991 we had over 20 cassettes with Dan A, Albatros, Adi Minune and the singers of the time. Back then the lyrics from manele were a novelty. Meaning that to sing about family in that style, about enemies, about crazy love—was more realistic somewhat compared to the pop music that was too idyllic/pure. It was something new and cool. Not to mention the fact that suddenly a new style of dancing was born. I mean even if you couldn’t dance, you could just swing to those songs and still look good. For the smaller ones like us, it was so fascinating to see youngsters/adults dancing and reinventing a dance style, more lascivious, more sexual. (Carmen, feminist activist)

Manele represents a musical genre that I associate with a feel-good vibe—or bad vibe, it depends—in the same way I cheer or sob when I listen to other musical genres. That’s in general! In particular, there are songs I like a lot, lots of them. I believe it is ridiculous to praise

manele, but it shouldn't be backed into a corner! (Marian, human rights activist)

Manele is the musical genre I was raised on and that's probably why it's the genre I feel mostly comfortable and relaxed around. The messages are really diverse, from stupid to serious. In fact, manele can't be enclosed in simple patterns, the songs and the themes are very diverse—from prison to work, from love to anti-feminism. (Florin, politician)

In fact, in itself, the difference in positioning confirms once again the hypothesis of a racist instrumentalization of spite towards this musical genre, one which is definitely not produced just by Roma, adding the question: 'What is truly authentically Roma?' (see also Dohotaru 2005: 114).

Therefore, ethnicity seems to be an important variable when the subjects are giving meaning to their relationship with manele in terms of a growing acceptance of the genre, thus validating, in our opinion, the thesis that the anti-manele argument is essentially racist, even if it apparently only refers to the quality of the musical product.

### **3. How did change occur?**

There are two distinct variables that seem to offer a satisfactory answer to this question: Both contact with the social sciences, especially with critical theories of the left, and Adrian Schiop, who wrote articles on the subject that were later followed by a dissertation and a book, seem to have been important factors in re-igniting the debate of this subject that had become somewhat taboo.

Only starting in 2010, after a degree in Afro-American culture and a master's degree in cultural studies, the racism educated into me from youth gave way to the possibility of manele . . . After Adi Schiop brought fiddles to TNB (National Theatre in Bucharest), to the ex-residence of the National Centre for Dance, in December 2010, I started

listening even more and got into songs that aren't just fun and perpetually picking me up. (Marius, PhD student)

In 2012, I read one of Adi's Schiop articles on CriticAtac, 'How the Elites Buried the Manele. A Story with Chavs', that effectively blew my mind about manele, there was a 180-degree shift regarding my attitude towards the genre. (Vlad, LGBTQ activist)

Thus, the frequent citation of Adi Schiop's texts in our paper are not at all unintentional. He appears to be the main actor in manele's political revitalization even if he himself states in different instances that his only interest in the subject is his love of the music itself,<sup>62</sup> that manele has no political dimension (although it frequently does), and that all the parties and events he has organized over time were motivated only by his desire to make some money. In order to have a more complete image of the character and the way in which he has helped to popularize manele in Bucharest's 'intellectual' world, one must note that Schiop has authored a successful novel centred around gay issues, where the manele genre provides the musical background, described by journalist and critic Dora Constantinovici in strong terms:

If you are a sissy who reads dirty conversations about real life situations only in English, if you don't like the manele (at least not in public), and if you have a ton of prejudice towards sexual minorities and the Roma people, then don't read *Soldații. Poveste din Ferentari*, Schiop's book. Because, otherwise, I might see you, in front of a glass of fine booze, proclaiming the downfall of Romanian literature. . . . Schiop's Ferentari [a neighbourhood in Bucharest] has no relation to the hipster's Ferentari. The author transforms what is a semi-exotic thing for the large majority that take one-night excursions there, into his own home.

Schiop's novel, therefore, has all the ingredients to make manele a product for both hipsters and activists, a fact that made it notorious.

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62 'I have joined the PhD program because I love the manele, as a fan since 2002' (Pritulescu 2017).

We believe we can speak now of a new formula of manele politicization, an emancipatory one, an empowering one, coming this time from the leftist elite, and that effectively reaches through their developed programs to marginal groups (women, Roma, sexual minorities, the poor), unlike the hipsters who just appropriate their symbols. A very good example of this configuration manifested was the 7 May 2016 party *Vulturii Sarbatoresc* (The Vultures are Celebrating) at Macaz - Bar Teatru Cooperativa, a manele party, honouring the success of *Frontul Comun pentru Dreptul la Locuire*,<sup>63</sup> who had managed to obtain social homes for a group of Roma evicted from *Vulturilor* Street in Bucharest after 2 years of advocacy. So, unlike the *Queer Night*, organized on the same day in Bucharest, in which we can more easily identify a post-subculturalist formula where 'the understanding of subculture is stylistically and individualistically motivated, replacing the "romantic" nature of subculture as a means of subversion, contradiction, interruption expressed in traditional cultural studies' (Kelsey 2012: 119), *Vulturii Sărbătoresc* in fact represents an appropriation of manele in the classic Marxist formula of understanding subculture as a product of the dominant class and thus having an implicit political dimension (Otovescu 2010: 144-145). This formula of giving new meaning and politicizing manele is clearly observable in the answers our interviewees gave, who said that manele is invariably controversial given the racist atmosphere in the Romanian space. In consequence, listening to manele has great potential to become an anti-racist, anti-classist, political statement.

New dimensions are therefore associated with the manele genre, such as gender, which brings up new issues and questions: Are there any women playing manele? Are they as famous as their male counterparts? Do they have similar earnings? How are men and

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63 *Frontul Comun pentru Dreptul la Locuire* (FCDL - the Common Front for the Right to Housing) is an organization for those whose right to housing is endangered. It was initiated by a group of evicted persons (or were at the point of being so) from Bucharest, with relatives, friends, activists, artists, and NGO activists. FCDL sees itself as a platform for local activism at a national level. [fcdl.ro](http://fcdl.ro).

women represented in manele's lyrics? As a result, new hierarchies are slowly developing within the genre, such as feminist manele, seen as acceptable from the perspective of the gender roles they depict. Moreover, more and more parties and events feature female DJs, who select some manele songs regarding women or played by women singers in their playlists in order to illustrate a feminist position (which is not actually present in the lyrics); for example, 'Azi femeia este boss' (Today the Woman is Chief), or 'Joacă boierește doamna mea' (Dance Like the Noblemen Do, My Lady) (Tollea 2017). These dimensions appear also in the responses given by our female subjects:

There aren't many manele women, that's why I tried searching for and listening to them. (Ioana, feminist activist)

I tried finding women artists with emancipatory messages in their songs. I only found the song sang by Mirela and Mr Juve 'Cine te crezi' [Who Do You Think You Are], although it doesn't really have a feminist message. (Tudorina, feminist activist)

Messages are really diverse, from stupid to serious. In fact, manele can't be enclosed in simple patterns, the songs and the themes are very diverse—from prison to work, from love to antifeminism. (Florin, politician)

As a consequence, it can be seen fairly clearly that it is difficult to understand manele as a subculture so long as it approaches a variety of issues—from feminism to misogyny, from the cult of the family to adulterous behaviour, from honesty, honour, and God to jail, imprisonment, and delinquency. A possible explanation could reside in the confusion between subculture and subsociety: 'Subculture has often been equated with an aggregate of persons or a collectivity. Subculture is then treated as membership category in which the criterion for belonging is structural or network based, rather than dependent on a system of beliefs and practices. In short, subculture is treated as a subsociety' (Fine, Kleinman 1979: 2).

Nevertheless, an issue seems to be constant in this musical genre, and it is one with considerable political potential when considering that Romanian social reality is depicted by statistics such as these: 44% of Romanian employees have a monthly income of under 1 000 lei (around 200 euros), and 28% have a monthly income of 1 000 to 1 700 lei (between 200 and 370 euros). And this potential was explored by our interviewed subjects, who stressed over and over again the power-related aspects of the manele phenomenon.

Manele is the sole Romanian musical genre that is programmatically approaching the drama of dislocation/migration, a fundamental chapter of Romanian social history after 1989. (David, film director)

Manele has a tendency to produce a range of very powerful stimuli, very *raw*, for which the urban middle class (of which I am a part of) developed a number of defensive mechanisms in order to get by on a daily basis. Perhaps I'm overanalysing this, but pure emotion is perceived as unproductive for the middle class. Such a direct expression of issues and emotions produces rejection. It is too visible, too 'vulgar'. There is need for some irony, for some mocking in order to be acceptable. This is going on in spite of the fact that middle class aspirations are not very different than those of the poor: a house, a job, perhaps a car, and a happy family. (Marius, PhD student, emphasis in original)

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have tried to investigate the current politicization process of the manele musical genre in Romania. We first looked at the socio-historical roots of manele in order to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon and of its audience and social function. In the second part of our paper, we tried to uncover the dynamics of the manele genre's politicization process, which started in approximately in 2009. In doing that, we focused on two main intertwined dimensions of this process: the hipsterization and the politicization itself. The fact must be stressed that we cannot make a clear-cut distinction between the two different types of

audiences for the two typologies derived from the social events discussed above. Moreover, from personal participative observation, we could say that there is a single type of audience which comprises both hipsters and activists (the two not being mutually exclusive but rather to the contrary). The fundamental distinction is in relation to how this type of music is perceived and approached: Hipsters are usually drawn to its exoticism, activists to its political potential. In relation to the second dimension mentioned above, we conducted qualitative research amongst participants of politicized manele events in order to explore their own understandings and subjective positions relative to the politicization process.

Therefore, we can talk about the manele genre as a cultural product of the marginal and marginalized which, due to its high capacity to concentrate and transmit emotions, is consumed by a wide audience, a public that is then used, in terms of social representations, by the right-wing conservative intellectual elite as an argument in legitimating a racist and classist discourse. In this context, the young and feeble Romanian radical left is trying to turn this around so as to counter the dominant, hegemonic discourse of the right and to raise awareness within Romanian society to some of the most pressing social and economic issues affecting the disenfranchised, the marginalized, and the underprivileged.

However, the politicization of manele has also an unexpected consequence: Its growing popularity amongst middle class youth has resulted in a revival of *lăutari* party music (and more traditional Roma bands, usually playing in Bucharest restaurants and pubs). *Lăutari* had been virtually extinct in the city centre for the last 10 to 12 years, although before that period almost every restaurant would have had a small *lăutari* band performing several times a week for its clientele. After manele grew in popularity, several clubs in town started to organize events featuring traditional *lăutari* bands (the Manasia Club, Londophone, Macaz, and so on). One of the main agents of the *lăutari* revival is a young American PhD candidate from Indiana University who studies traditional Romani music. He took upon himself the management of several artists, organizing events for them. *Lăutari* bands were well

received in both hipster and activist communities, their shows increasing in frequency throughout the city. But this revival of lăutari poses a more intriguing question regarding the perceived emancipatory role of politicized Roma music. Roma artists themselves don't seem to be aware of the political turn that their artistic creations have taken, and they are not themselves a part of the politicizing movement. This phenomenon is visible in both manele and lăutari music—even if they are performing at one of the biggest cultural events in Romania (such was the case for Dan Bursuc at the Transylvania International Film Festival in 2017) or in small clubs in Bucharest's centre, the Roma artists don't seem to be aware of the political statement associated with their music and performance. Ironically, this seems to be present only in the case of the hipster-activist consumers. This, in our opinion, raises an important issue regarding the manele's political turn: It appears that without real involvement from the artist community, the political potential of manele and lăutari music will remain marginal, confined to small islands of (predominantly) Romanian middle class youth who, at best, are only emancipating themselves from the racist prejudice of the dominant anti-manele discourse and are doing little in relation to the wider issues the political turn is supposed to cover, thus initiating a new and fascinating process of *manele gentrification*, both as a genre and as a subculture as for the Roma artists in this context, it is obvious that their apparent lack of interest in the political turn experienced by their music means only that they are continuing to perform their historical symbiotic role as musicians playing for the Romanian community.



# Out of Step

*Jan Charvát*

## SUMMARY

In her chapter, Marta Kolářová summarized basic approaches to the study of subcultures. At the same time, she drew attention to some rather post-socialist elements that determine Czech subcultures. In particular, she argued that there is a strong ethos of individualism, which de facto is in accord with the concept of neo-liberalism that became dominant in the 1990s Czech environment. This, to no small extent, consequently causes a reluctance to classify subcultures through class (which differs from Western European subcultural patterns) and the greater emphasis on consumption and overall detachment from politics as such, although there are segments within the subculture that can be considered political. At the same time, however, she pointed out that the emphasis on self-expression, individual autonomy, and cultural diversity is in fact entirely consistent with the findings of post-subcultural authors who claim that these values also appear in Western European subcultures. Therefore, this is not unique to post-socialism, it only means post-socialist reality can reinforce it.

Similarly, in Grzegorz Piotrowski's chapter, we saw the theoretical grasp of social movements that Grzegorz examined from the point of their collaboration with the 'scene', the area of youth subcultures that merges with the political activity of the social movements. Grzegorz highlighted their tendency to defend the boundaries of the scene, leading to a particular closure and a tendency to maintain exclusivity based on adherence to (unwritten) rules of the scene. At the same time, he pointed out that the social movements in Central Europe are relatively weak. And again, there is that same motif seen in Marta Kolářová's chapter—the clash between subcultural hedonism and political activism.

These two more theoretical chapters were followed by four studies focusing on specific subcultures. Giuseppe Maiello and Martina Cichá introduced a personal account of a Western European punk who came to the East to encounter a different world of East European punk before the fall of the Iron Curtain. The authors drew attention to the different experiences of punk on both sides of the Iron Curtain, especially on the apologetics of Western European regimes by Czech punks, which was incomprehensible to the protagonist. It also underlined the inherently natural anti-communism of East European punk. It pointed out the specific link between the punk and neo-Nazi skinhead subculture before 1989 and added that this connection (essentially forced by circumstances thanks to the existence of an oppressive regime in which marginalized groups naturally found their way together) disappeared in the 1990s. At the same time, however, the authors drew attention to the fact that, unlike in Italy, where radicalization was based on debates about various directions of Marxism, out of which Italian Marxist autonomism gradually emerged, in the Czech environment, this debate was influenced more by anarchism.

While Giuseppe Maiello and Martina Cichá spoke about the experience of Czech punk at the turn of the eighties and nineties, Ondřej Daniel's chapter, focusing on the Czech metal scene, only partly shifted the content of the book forward, to the nineties. Daniel noticed the strong anti-communism of the metal scene, though not always leading to specific forms of politicization. At the same time, he drew attention to the whole Eastern European trend of a return to some form of violence in the public space of the 1990s, which influenced the visual form of Czech (mainly) black metal on the one hand, and the tradition of La Vey Satanism, representing the most vulgar form of neo-liberal rhetoric in the nineties. Misanthropy, anti-communism, and violence have brought black metal to a neo-Nazi formation, and Ondřej Daniel showed how their interaction took place.

Jan Charvát's chapter naturally built on the previous chapter, both thematically and chronologically, as it focused on the sub-

culture of racist skinheads from the nineties to the present. Charvát recalled that for the 1990s, this subculture became virtually synonymous with the extreme right. The author focused on the basics that define this subculture and looked for them through the lyrics of music groups associated with so-called White power music. It postulated five fundamental characteristics that define the essence of (racist) skinheads: subcultural attributes (in other words appearance and activity), social status, political attitudes (racism, anti-communism, anti-Semitism, and Nazism), emotional characteristics (pride and honour and, at the same time, anger and hatred), and religion (old German myths). The chapter also showed how this subculture developed during the formative period of 1990–92, through the ‘golden age’ of Czech White power music between 1993–2005, until its decay after 2005. Similar to other authors in the book, we can see here the strong element of community (embedded in the motto of unity). However, we also see widespread anti-communism and, at the same time, a very cautious relationship with the notion of a ‘working class’, which anxiously avoids any class view in order not to be accused of association with communism.

After punk, metal, and skinhead subcultures, the youngest of the ‘classical’ musical subcultures represented is hip-hop. Anna Oravcová focuses on the roots of hip-hop subculture in the USA and on how hip-hop has developed in Bohemia. She points out that unlike the US, the hip-hop subculture in the Czech environment is primarily a matter of White, middle class males, which is reflected in the basic narrative that most of Czech hip-hop poses. While the original hip-hop was the voice of a marginalized ethnic minority, it became the voice of the social mainstream in the Czech environment. And even in a moment of apparent politicization, the artists tend to frame the protests against xenophobia and anti-immigrant moods with the neo-liberal mantra of ‘lazybones’ (as in the case of the Big Boss label or hip-hop group PSH and their song ‘Fuck Off’).

If chronological succession was one of the axes of our book, it made sense to close that part of the book with a chapter devoted to

time itself, or the perception of subcultural history and the formation of subcultural memory. Ondřej Slačálek and Michaela Pixová talk about the 'golden age' that subcultures construct and tie to a mythologized history that helps them to create their authenticity. There is also commentary on the fight against communism in the case of a subculture before 1989, and it is partly related to the depoliticization of the punk subculture after 1989. Albeit somewhat differently, this was also the case for rave, which originated only in the 1990s and has no direct experience with the communist regime. In both cases, however, the early 1990s are seen as a golden age when, on the one hand, it was possible to freely declare oneself part of the punk subculture (unlike in the earlier communist period), and, at the same time, the emerging structures (of both punk and rave) were built entirely anew, enabling them, in principle, to develop according to their own will. Subculture members perceive the next development, towards the present, as a process of fragmentation of their scenes, at least partial commodification, and, consequently, a loss of authenticity.

The entire book concludes with a chapter devoted to another subcultural phenomenon, one that is rarely written about. Romanian manele represents a step outside the traditional subcultural structures, although they are similar in many aspects. Manele is another form of simple, repetitive music with straightforward lyrics that is reminiscent of punk. Similarly, the emphasis on successful artists of this genre to show off their assets and to publicly offend their enemies may resemble hip-hop subculture. Another aspect similar to hip-hop is its association with the marginalized Roma ethnic group (see Anna Oravcová). Public rejection by the official media then recalls the early form of rock, or reactions to the rise of most musical subcultures (punk, metal). Valentin Nicolescu and Elena D. Neaga showed how, on one hand, the rejection of manele led to the reinforcement of anti-Roma sentiment and, on the other hand, a backlash consisting of the 'hipsterization' of left-wing manele after 2009. The authors then showed how the manele struggle led somewhat paradoxically to the interest of the Romanian middle class in the traditional form of Romani party music (*lăutari*). As it can be

seen, music subculture (although perhaps not always necessarily youth subculture) can carry a political charge even in the present, although it does not have to look the way we are usually used to.

## IN CONCLUSION

Is it possible to abstract the experience of the subcultures described in our book? It seems that anti-communism has become an essential element in shaping political scenes connected with subcultures. On the one hand, anti-communism grew from the experience of pre-revolutionary subcultures (punk, the underground, partly metal, skinheads). If punk was, at the moment of its creation, a subculture that was set against the ruling system, then in the pre-1989 Czech environment, punk logically became anti-communist. The harsh response of the communist regime at that time only fixed this attitude in the nascent punk subculture. After 1989, when a new form of subcultures began to form, mingling with political scenes, this form was influenced by the ideology of anarchism, and anarchism became an ideology that was much more attractive to mesmerized subcultural individuals than 40 years of compromised communism and Marxism. Czech anarchism then linked this subcultural anti-communism with its own mythological history (see, for example, the repeated reminders of the Kronstadt uprising by the Czech anarchist movement and its crushing by the Red Army as a legitimization of the rejectionist attitude towards communism) and created one of its fundamental postulates, thereby 'strengthening' it. However, an explicit rejection of communism also served as a general legitimization tool of Czech anarchism in a situation where anti-communism became the unwritten rule in the ideological direction of Czech society after 1989. Similarly, in the case of metal, anti-communism became a widely shared attitude. The fact that anti-communism has become an essential element for racist skinheads is not surprising; in fact, we can encounter it even in the case of non-political skinheads as well as anti-racist skinheads. Pronounced leftist directions, like Red Skins or RASH, have always been largely marginal in Bohemia. Even these skinheads follow the

social trajectory in this direction and, if they feel the need to define themselves politically in the sense of the political left, once again they choose anarchism (Charvát 2018) for their self-expression.

The emphasis on anti-communism was influenced by two other moments seen in Czech subcultures. First, there is an emphasis on individualism, linked in particular to the neo-liberal ethos of the nineties. The call for a transition from state socialism to a free-market society and liberal capitalism resonated across society, and it was also reflected in its subcultures. This is precisely what Anna Oravcová describes in her chapter on Czech hip-hop, but it is also mentioned by Marta Kolářová in her chapter, and partly by Ondřej Daniel. In an unexpected way, individualization was combined with the subcultural ethics associated with DIY (do-it-yourself) as pointed out by Kumová (2018).

The second moment, influenced by widely accepted anti-communism, was associated with the absence of a class dimension. While in the UK music subcultures were associated with the working class environment to which the subcultures were related, this moment did not appear in the Czech environment. The problematic relationship to the working class can be understood in the post-socialist space in two possible ways. First, it is a negative relationship caused by the defamation of the term 'working class' by the communist regime. The regime had built its legitimacy on the support of the working class, and it played an essential role in its rhetoric. Since most subcultures in Eastern Europe were still under the rule of so-called real socialism, distrust of the concepts associated with the rhetoric of these oppressive regimes is entirely understandable. Second, there is a trend that Marta Kolářová pointed to in her chapter, which reflects the fact that a significant portion of subculture members are not associated with the working class. This trend is also described by Anna Oravcová in her chapter on Czech hip-hop.

Therefore, embeddedness in class and self-awareness are not found in Czech subcultures. However, anti-racism and anti-fascism are often present and are frequently the central political dimension of some subcultures, but it can also serve as a trigger for

broader politicization. There may be more reasons for this, but we cannot overlook the fact that a large number of subculture members have themselves experienced racist skinhead violence, which has contributed significantly to the fixation on anti-racism in the subcultural environment. Even though this violence has declined sharply over the last ten years, memories of it still remain a part of the subcultural history. In this context, however, one thing cannot be omitted: the symmetrization of fascism and communism. Typical of Czech subculture, declarative anti-fascism is usually automatically supplemented by the same declarative anti-communism. Certain tensions, however, arise between anti-fascism and anti-communism, especially where anti-fascism is perceived as part of the general left-wing agenda (which is typical for non-political skinheads, or part of the punk subculture). This is closely related to the fact that the very notion of politics is usually perceived negatively in the context of subculture, camouflaging real political positions or interpreting them as moral attitudes. Other moments are not significant enough, yet they make up the distinctiveness of the post-socialist form of subcultures.

It has been shown that although the dimension of authenticity is perceived ambivalently by the subcultures themselves, there is still a constant struggle to maintain the subculture's boundaries. This approach plays a significant role in subcultural politics, whether in the form of ostentatious rejection (as in the case of non-political skinheads or part of the hip-hop subculture) or, on the contrary, incorporation of policy components into the basic subcultural formula itself (as was the case for racist and anti-racist skinheads alike and, for example, anarcho-punk).

Although it was not the primary intention, based on the texts presented in this volume, there is one dimension that is interwoven into the entire subcultural scene: the building of a sense of community and solidarity. Moreover, there is, importantly, a mutual blending of the subcultures featured that also ties the chapters together. Starting with Marta Kolářová's chapter, which highlights the theories of the post-subcultural and their attention to the 'style fair' of subcultures, it continues in the chapter dedicated to black

metal, where we see the emergence of a ‘unholy alliance’ between the racist black metal community and the openly neo-Nazi skinheads, combining the fascination of misanthropy and anti-human ideologies.

In the post-socialist space of the Czech Republic, subcultures could mean that the painless socialization of youth has the possibility of moving towards more extensive social relations, leading to political engagement. Whereas traditional forms of political participation, such as membership in political parties, may have often been rejected in the post-socialist reality because communist parties were associated with strangleholds, subcultures were not similarly burdened. They were new, sufficiently radical, and at the same time ‘colourful’ enough, so unlike traditional political parties, they attracted the attention of youth. As a result, for example, the term ‘skinhead’ has been used in the Czech Republic for most of the nineties as a synonym for the far right. However, it is also true that the skinheads were significant and, after 1998 (after early elections, the Republican Party was dissolved, the only successful far right party at the time), even the dominant part of the Czech far right. This situation began to change after 2005 with the onset of autonomous nationalism, which was again rooted in the skinhead subculture. On the other hand, the emerging anarchist movement, linked to the punk and hardcore subculture (although this connection was not as firm as the skinhead and far right connection), became the lead actor in the fight against racism, or, conversely, brought the issue of ecology to the forefront in public space. As a result, media coverage of the subculture often represented a shortcut that postulated a political movement in place of a youth subculture. Indeed, the term skinhead movement was a concept that skinheads of all denominations despised.

Therefore, we suggest that three factors play a crucial role in the politicization of youth music subculture in the Czech space: the highly schematic anti-communism (as a legacy of the pre-revolutionary birth of the majority of subcultures that brought subcultures to the political mainstream), the absence of a class dimension (which is apparently distinct, compared to subcultures in Western

Europe), and a strained relationship to racism and fascism, both positive (in the case of racist skinhead subculture) and negative (for most other subcultures).



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## Summary

After the fall of communism in 1989, Czechoslovakia experienced a boom in new trends, which had until then been prevented by the communist regime. One of them was the rapid development of subcultures and their interconnection with (often) radical political agendas. Concurrently, there was a certain counterflow within the subcultures that rejected political activism and focused more on forms of entertainment. Over time, the original, strongly political ethos has partially disappeared, and we have seen depoliticization; however, in some cases we have also seen a subsequent re-politicization of the subcultures.

What is the role of the post-socialist experience in the process of politicizing and depoliticizing subcultures? Moreover, what forms can subcultural politics have in the post-socialist world? These are the questions we focus on while offering possible answers.

It seems that anti-communism has become an essential element in shaping political scenes connected with subcultures. The emphasis on anti-communism was influenced by two other moments seen in Czech subcultures. First, there is an emphasis on individualism, linked in particular to the neo-liberal ethos of the nineties. The call for a transition from state socialism to a free-market society and liberal capitalism resonated across society, and it was also reflected in its subcultures. The second moment, influenced by widely accepted anti-communism, was associated with the absence of a class dimension. While in the UK music subcultures were associated with the working class environment to which the subcultures were related, this moment did not appear in the Czech environment. The problematic relationship to the working class can be understood in the post-socialist space in two possible ways. First, it is a negative relationship caused by the defamation of the term 'working class' by the communist regime. Second, there is a trend, which reflects the fact that a significant portion of subculture members are not associated with the working class.

However, anti-racism and anti-fascism are often present and are frequently the central political dimension of some subcultures, but it can also serve as a trigger for broader politicization. There may be more reasons for this, but we cannot overlook the fact that a large number of subculture members have themselves experienced racist skinhead violence, which has contributed significantly to the fixation on anti-racism in the subcultural environment.

In this context, however, one thing cannot be omitted: the symmetrisation of fascism and communism. Typical of Czech subculture, declarative anti-fascism is usually automatically supplemented by the same declarative anti-communism. Certain tensions, however, arise between anti-fascism and anti-communism, especially where anti-fascism is perceived as part of the general leftwing agenda (which is typical for non-political skinheads, or part of the punk subculture). This is closely related to the fact that the very notion of politics is usually perceived negatively in the context of subculture, camouflaging real political positions or interpreting them as moral attitudes.

Therefore, we suggest that three factors play a crucial role in the politicization of youth music subcultures in the Czech space: the highly schematic anti-communism (as a legacy of the pre-revolutionary birth of the majority of subcultures that brought subcultures to the political mainstream), the absence of a class dimension (which is apparently distinct, compared to subcultures in Western Europe), and a strained relationship to racism and fascism, both positive (in the case of racist skinhead subculture) and negative (for most other subcultures).

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