

Metal Music Studies
Volume 8 Number 2

© 2022 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. https://doi.org/10.1386/mms_00077_1

Received 14 August 2020; Accepted 4 May 2022

MIROSLAV VRZAL
Masaryk University

Against the devil's metal: Christian public discursive strategies against metal concerts and festivals in Czechia and Slovakia

ABSTRACT

In the context of a process of return of religion to the public sphere, this article deals with Christian discursive strategies in public struggles against selected metal concerts and festivals since 2013 in highly secularized Czechia and in Slovakia with a close connection of religion (especially the Catholic Church) to the state. Membership categorization analysis identified three main categories used in the construction of metal as an enemy: 'religious struggle', 'danger for society/state' and 'danger for morality and health of individuals'. Christian opponents of metal use in their discourse sets of rhetorical tactics with both religious (i.e. fight against Satan) and secular pieces (i.e. supposed extremism of some bands) to mobilize Christian community and also to attract politics and the public. In Czechia it was targeted mainly to the Christian minority and local politics, while in Slovakia religious actors were able to mobilize broader networks against metal concerts/festivals, including nation-wide politics.

KEYWORDS

metal
religion
Christian opponents of
metal
public struggles and
debates
creation of enemy
Czechia
Slovakia

INTRODUCTION

Metal has been controversial since it was established in western Europe and the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s (see Hjelm et al. 2011). As one of the most extreme parts of popular culture, metal intentionally explores humanity's darker side and has always been characterized by its fascination for dark imagery and themes such as evil, war, death, violence, alienation, suffering and the occult (Hjelm et al. 2011: 14; Moberg 2009: 110). Its 'driving engine' is transgression, especially in extreme metal, which means testing different boundaries and limits associated with vocals and musical procedures as well as discursive transgression, sometimes on the edges (or beyond) of social norms and breaking various taboos (Kahn-Harris 2007: 29–49). It is possible to encounter, for example, 'non-traditional' sexual practices such as necrophilia and many types of brutal violence. Both in lyrical and visual forms, there are also quite common images of violence linked to anti-religious/anti-Christian and blasphemous elements set within a Satanic discourse (most often in black metal).

As Keith Kahn-Harris describes in connection with the concept of anti-reflexive reflexivity, this is often not a quite serious discursive 'game' with extreme expression (Kahn-Harris 2007: 145–56). It is also linked to the creation of a bricolage of 'fanciful' images taken from popular horror culture and other cultural sources, as Robert Walser describes with regard to heavy metal (1993: 151–65). For this reason, many metal bands claim to be 'just' a horror show when they use different Satanic features and images. On the other hand, some bands (especially black metal) identify directly with different variations of Satanism (both non-theistic and theistic forms) based on ideology/religion. Metal also often expresses the criticism of churches and organized religion; in the Euro-American cultural area, it is specifically towards Christianity and its institutions. It is embedded in wider social criticism by metal bands, often based on the concept of emancipation of the modern individual from organized religion, which from this perspective represents oppression, falsehood and hypocrisy. This is also true for other cultural areas where, for example, Islam is the dominant religion, as shown by Otterbeck et al. (2018) in the example of black metal bands from Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Some metal bands express an explicit anti-religious ideological approach, and there have also been several cases of extreme acts such as church burnings based on anti-Christian ideology (see Phillipov 2011; Vrzal 2017a). Thus, in the social field of metal, especially extreme metal, there is a mix of horror show and ideology concerning these violent, anti-religious and Satanic images (see also Mercer-Taylor 2014).

The transgressive orientation of metal also creates a social response, sometimes formed within broader public debates including both the opponents of metal (or only specific bands) and metal supporters. Religious actors, mainly from fundamentalist or conservative religious spectrum (such as the Christian right in the United States), have traditionally played an important role as opponents in public struggles against metal. These public struggles and debates on metal are heavily influenced by the local religious situation, the role of religion in the public sphere and within state institutions. Due to the global spread of metal since the 1980s, public debates on metal have been raised around the world – for example, in the Middle East or North Africa – during the last two decades. In general, metal and religion (including individualized spirituality) are very closely intertwined areas (see Vrzal 2015, 2017b),

and religion is still a relevant source of controversy for metal. Therefore, the area of 'metal and religion' is an important field of study for metal studies (see Vrzal 2017b). In this text, I will specifically highlight public struggles and debates concerning metal, where religious actors play the roles of opponents of metal, as one of the significant areas in that field (see also Vrzal 2017b).

The article focuses primarily on a public argumentation of Christian opponents of selected metal concerts/festivals (or only selected metal bands that played at these events)¹ in Czechia and Slovakia since 2013. Cases in Czechia include the cancellation of a concert featuring the bands Törr and Root in Valašské Klobouky (2016) and in Vizovice (2020) and Christian initiatives against the festival Hell Fast Attack in Brno (2015). Slovakian cases comprise the efforts to cancel or limit the Gothoom Festival in 2014 in Nová Baňa, initiatives against the Iron Maiden concert in Žilina in 2016 and previously against its headlining performance at TopFest 2013 in Piešťany, in addition to the initiative against Arch Enemy and Amorphis's performance at Rock pod Kameňom festival in Snina in 2017 and the cancellation of Root's performance at Dobrý Festival in Prešov (2017).

Inspired by Gérôme Guibert and Jedediah Sklower's study (2011) of the public debate about Hellfest in France, the text is specifically interested in discursive strategy including sets of rhetoric and arguments of Christian opponents that they used in the public sphere to influence different actors (e.g. politicians) and achieve their goals in a social field. According to Pierre Bourdieu, I will understand the social field as a segmented field where individual and collective actors (such as churches) have different amounts of economic, social, cultural capital² (but also subcultural capital; see Thornton 1997; Kahn-Harris 2007), which determines their position but also the influence in the social field (Bourdieu 1984). Since public struggles are fought on the basis of the discourse used (see Nekvapil and Leudar 2006), the article attempts to decipher how the public discourse of the Christian opponents is constructed and used in Czech and Slovak cases, with a particular focus on how metal is constructed as the enemy in this rhetoric and argumentation. Through membership categorization analysis, which main categories and subcategories describing 'enemy' are used for those constructions will be specifically identified (see also Nekvapil and Leudar 2006). Subsequently, an attempt will be made to compare whether this discourse differs in Czechia and Slovakia.

At the same time, the article inquiries into how these public struggles and debates involving representatives of Christian churches and Christian activists reflect the religious situation in Czechia and Slovakia and the respective position, role and influence of Christian churches (mainly Roman Catholic Church) within these countries. By addressing these questions, the text aims to contribute in part to the understanding of the current role of religion in the public sphere of central and eastern Europe. The problem, however, also touches on the wider (global) processes, such as deprivatization of religion (see Casanova 1994), that also have an impact on metal music culture. In public struggles and debates about metal in different local contexts, we can study the form, status and role of religion in the contemporary world and, by analysing it, contribute to the understanding of global transformation the present world is going through, including the transformation of religion and its influence in politics, culture and other social areas (see Vrzal 2017b: 28). In this regard, the text focuses on selected cases in Czechia and Slovakia where it is possible to observe how public discussion about metal works both in a

1. In the following text I will use the shortened term 'Christian opponents' only.
2. Simplified: cultural capital is based on education and knowledge; social capital is a set of relationships and ties that can be mobilized; and economic capital is based on material goods and money (Bourdieu 1986).

more secularized country (Czechia) and in a country where (Christian) religion plays a strong role (Slovakia).

RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN CZECHIA AND SLOVAKIA

Over several decades, it has been possible to observe the resurgence of religion (see Gorski et al. 2012: 2–3) and its return into the public sphere. As José Casanova (1994) describes, since the 1980s, religions around the globe have rejected to play only a marginal role according to the secularization of individual spheres of societies. Religious actors from different traditions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism) enter the public sphere and political struggles to gain influence not only in the sphere of religion but also in politics, law, economy, education and in forming values and morality of societies.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, post-communist Europe began a transformation, which was also related to a question over the role of religion in the new organization of the state (Zachar-Podolinská 2008: 58). It is possible to observe deprivatization of traditional Christian religions in central and eastern European countries. In all of these countries, with one exception which is Czechia, we can recognize, especially during recent years, the return of the biggest traditional Christian churches into the public sphere, the rise of their connections to the political sphere and state apparatus and also the intersection between Christian church and national identity (Nešpor 2020: 108; see also Vido 2017: 46). The close connection of the Christian (in this case Catholic) church is well observable also in the case of Slovakia (Nešpor 2020; Tížik 2011, 2017).

Czechia and Slovakia were one state (Czechoslovakia), which was divided into two states on 1 January 1993. Despite the common past, we can observe very different trajectories regarding religious situation (see Nešpor 2020), and the current situation is well illustrated in the numbers of believers of the Roman Catholic Church, which is the biggest church in both states. In Czechia, according to the latest census in 2021, approximately 7 per cent of the population actively identified with it (Český statistický úřad 2022). In Slovakia, a census of the same year recorded 56 per cent of the population identified with the Roman Catholic Church (Štatistický úrad SR 2022).

In both countries, in contrast to the communist era, when communist regime officially fought against religion and its manifestations, which ended with Czechoslovakia's 1989 Velvet Revolution, we can talk about deprivatization of religion (see Nešpor 2004: 287). Christian churches and their believers were again able to participate more in political and public life. In both Czechia and Slovakia, we have witnessed, for example, the return of Christian democratic parties to top politics (Tížik 2011; Fiala 2007).

Although the churches of Czechia were in good moral standing in the eyes of the public for a short time following the Velvet Revolution, as they were perceived to be a force that contributed to the fall of communism (Václavík 2010: 130–31), they have not been able to use this potential to reach out to the wider public or overcome ancient anti-clerical stereotypes generalized into all traditional Christian churches and rooted in the Czech population (Nešpor 2010: 154, 162). This is manifested in the Czech population's lack of confidence in and desire for traditional Christian churches (Václavík 2010: 214–15; Nešpor 2010: 158–64; Hamplová 2013: 49–51), which are also seen as a surviving relic of the past (see Nešpor 2010: 155–57), and in establishing a specific Czech discourse about religion, including scepticism regarding organized religion

(Václavík 2010: 213). In the long term, churches are the least trusted public institution (Vido 2017: 48). The Roman Catholic Church (shortly Catholic Church in the following text) itself, as well as the other large Christian churches in Czechia, has thus closed in on itself and functions as if in its own ghetto (Nešpor 2010: 162), and it can be said that their social capital is small – despite relatively high economic capital (especially of Catholic Church) after the recent generous church restitutions (see Nešpor 2020: 155). The distance of the majority of the population from traditional Christian churches does not mean, however, that the Czechs are a nation of atheists (see, e.g., Nešpor 2010; Václavík 2010; Hamplová 2013). Instead of Christian religiosity, however, they prefer to ‘consume’ what is offered within the field of alternative spirituality (Hamplová 2013: 58–81; Václavík 2010: 204–12; Nešpor 2004: 258–87; Nešpor 2010: 118–32).

The situation in Slovakia is almost diametrically different, although here, too, there is a boom in alternative spirituality, especially among the younger generation and in the urban environment (Zachar-Podolinská 2008: 73–76). Across the whole religious field of Slovakia, however, Christianity, especially that which is connected with the Catholic Church, plays a dominant role. During the 1990s, the national identity was reconnected with Christianity – the Catholic Church in particular – gaining a privileged position and strengthened influence in state institutions (in education, for example), over state symbols and, overall, in public affairs (Tížik 2011, 2017; Nešpor 2020), despite the fact that the number of those who want a separation of church and state has increased (Tížik 2011, 2017). Miroslav Tížik even speaks of the secularization of public life in Slovakia, but also at the same time the partial Christianization and thus desecularization of the Slovak state and its institutions, which occurred especially after the turn of the century when the position of the Catholic Church was also formalized in a concordat with the Vatican (Tížik 2011, 2017). Unlike Czechia, Christianity, and especially Catholicism, has thus become an important part of public and political events in Slovakia, and the Catholic Church has been naturalized as a positive and democratizing actor in civil society (Tížik 2011). Representatives of the Catholic Church have become important actors in public discourse and politics, and permanent strengthening of economic position and symbolic favouring of traditional churches allow for the reproduction of Christian religion and its power in Slovakia (Tížik 2017: 166).

RELIGION, ESTABLISHMENT AND ANTI-METAL STRUGGLES

Religious actors (individual or collective: churches, religious organizations, various religious networks) are an integral part of public debates on metal across the world. The classical example of broad public debates of metal is the 1980s and 1990s moral panic created in the United States (Hjelm et al. 2011; Walser 1993: 137–74; Kahn-Harris 2007: 27–29). Approached by various organizations (especially religious, educational and parental), some political leaders became involved in the censorship of some metal bands and their records, for example, the Senate hearing initiated by Parents’ Music Resource Center in 1985. There were also several trials with Judas Priest or Ozzy Osbourne in which it was argued that metal was the cause of various murders, and that listening to metal increased the likelihood of suicide among young people, and that secret Satanic messages were recorded in albums, which are decipherable when the record is played backwards (Walser 1993: 145–51; Partridge 2005: 247).

These anti-metal processes and campaigns in the United States are necessary to be understood in the context of Satanic panic of that time. Metal was by some actors, especially conservative Christians, seen as part of the Satanic conspiracy and as a form of Satanic evangelization that leads young people to 'dangerous' Satanism (see Partridge 2005: 247). Protestant conservative Christians, evangelical and fundamentalist groups shared and actively promoted a view on metal associated with the promotion of violence, self-destructive behaviour, suicide, sexual promiscuity and perversion, extreme rebellion, juvenile delinquency and the occult (Moberg 2015: 17). As Marcus Moberg describes, through their engagement in these wider debates, the issue of Satanism also started figuring ever more frequently in critical debates on metal. As a consequence, metal became accused of being anti-Christian, and of actively promoting Satanism and outright devil worship (Moberg 2015: 17). Although the broader Satanic panic in American society declined and several previous 'public enemies' people such as Ozzy Osbourne are currently respected 'rock fathers' (see Hjelm et al. 2011: 6), such perception of metal by conservative Christians is still persistent.

With the global spread of metal in recent decades, such public debates have also begun to emerge in other parts of the world where metal has also been perceived (even by the establishment) as subversive, destructive and potentially dangerous (see Moberg 2012: 114). For example, in Malaysia in 2001, the government excluded metal from television and radio as an action against alleged 'black metal sects' that sacrificed animals and burned the Koran during secret rituals in the woods (Christe 2005: 313). Titus Hjelm et al. (2011: 10) describe, since the beginning of the new millennium, it was mainly the Muslim world where heavy metal faces the most persistent censorship, political repression and societal stigmatization. As the regional metal scenes in the Middle East and North Africa became more popular, they also began to attract the attention of governments and conservative religious forces. They 'saw them as vehicles for the penetration of foreign, Western and even Satanic cultures' that threatened their societies (Hjelm et al. 2011: 10). Mark LeVine points out public discussions in Egypt and Morocco about the connection between metal and devil worship, which has led to the arrests of metalheads and their persecution (LeVine 2008). As a more current example, the case about Iranian death metal band Confess in 2015 can be mentioned. As Chris Krovatin (2019) describes, members of the band were arrested and accused of blasphemy and playing music against the Islamic Republic of Iran and the nation's Supreme Leader. Upon the arrest, they also faced execution for their crimes. According to Joelle Fiss (2016: 5–6), 47 per cent of the countries and territories in the world have laws or policies penalizing blasphemy, apostasy (abandoning one's faith) or defamation of religions, and 22 per cent have anti-blasphemy laws or policies in place. The Middle East and North Africa as a region has the highest proportion of countries criminalizing blasphemy (65 per cent).

Many metal bands, especially those with a Satanic discourse, are nowadays struggling with public performance, including bands in some European countries, especially central and eastern Europe. An example is the well-known Polish death-black metal band Behemoth. It has traditionally had a problem domestically in strongly Catholic Poland, but also recently in Russia. For example, their 2014 tour 'Russian Satanist' caused mass protests of Orthodox Christian believers and failures of concerts in different regions (Anon. 2016a). In recent years, the concerts of bands such as Belphegor, Marilyn Manson, Rotting Christ, Cradle of Filth, Batushka and others have been cancelled in Russia, also due to threats from Orthodox Christian activists (Anastazia 2014).

For example, the Polish black metal band Batushka, regarding two cancelled concerts in Moscow in 2016, stated:

Unfortunately we received threats from extremists affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church stating that they will beat up and even kill people attending to both shows. Since it's beyond our control and we are not able to assure that the concerts will be 100% safe for both the audience and us we are forced to cancel both of them immediately.

(Anastasiya 2016: n.pag.)

Orthodox Christian activists perceived the band Batushka as Satanic and blasphemous. For example, on the website of the Centre for Monitoring the Rights and Freedoms of Orthodox Christians, it is possible to find the statement of Roman Plyuta, the chairman of the non-governmental organization Orthodox Union (Krasnodar), considering the album *Lyturgia (Liturgy)*:

That is, eight supposedly Christian litanies – prayer petitions. But in the tracks of those 'prayers' feature songs of a pseudo-church choir with distorted words of the Church Slavonic language, interrupted with typical of the 'black metal' music sounds, growl and hysterical shrieking. The lyrics of the first song are a Psalm by Prophet David which is turned inside out. The words are changed and they turn out to be spoken on behalf of Satan.

(Anon. 2016a: n.pag.)

Plyuta addressed to Alexander Bastrykin, the chairman of Russian Investigative Committee, 'demanding to prosecute the organizers of concerts [...] to be held in Moscow and St. Petersburg in April' (Anon. 2016a: n.pag.). Plyuta, for the news agency Interfax, stated about this case that Batushka is, from his point of view, in contradiction with Russian laws:

[The] band have all the signs of incitement to religious hatred in full conformity with Articles 148 and 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. And the purpose of their attacks is Christians. We demand from the law enforcement agencies to pay close attention at this fact in order to avoid possible provocations, both before and during and after the concerts.

(Anon. 2016a: n.pag.)

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The struggles within the social field largely take place in the domain of the public sphere, which is, according to Jürgen Habermas, an arena where the social conversations (with an important role of the media) of various actors take place (Habermas 1991: 398–99). Power struggles in the public sphere take place through the discourse used by actors (Nekvapil 2006: 265) against 'enemies' in the 'battlefield' of public conversations.

Michel Foucault shows that power is also an integral part of discourse (see, e.g., Foucault 2002). As James Gee describes, using discourse (meaning language-in-use) in these interactions is also a matter of promoting a certain perspective on 'what is "normal" and not; what is "acceptable" and not; what is "right" and not', through discourse (Gee 2001: 2).

Based on the assumption that discourse has certain rules that determine possible forms of statements (Foucault 2002; for more about Foucault's conceptions of discourse, see, e.g., Moberg 2022), it is possible to observe how the 'enemy' is formed verbally in this argumentation and what attributes are assigned to it (see Nekvapil and Leudar 2006: 356). This also applies to struggles against metal by its Christian opponents who also establish a discourse they enter the arena of the public sphere with. Using specific discourse in order to achieve a certain state of affairs in the social field (e.g. attempts to cancel/restrict a metal concert/festival) will be seen as a discursive strategy in this text.

Consider the example of Hellfest, the biggest metal festival in France. Guibert and Sklower show that the discursive strategy of Christian opponents can be flexible within the context and mobilizes a whole set of eclectic rhetorical tactics, which aims at producing a representation of the metal world that could hook up within the French Catholic milieu and also state authorities (Guibert and Sklower 2011: 105). It can be said that the 'metal enemy' is constructed through this discursive strategy that is, like Frankenstein's monster, composed from many pieces. Fear of the 'metal monster' is, on the one hand, used in order to unite the Christian community, but, on the other hand, argumentation also attempts to convince the public and political representatives that metal (or only some bands) is something dangerous (see Guibert and Sklower 2011: 105). In connection to this, there can also be pressure on other influential actors (companies, etc.) in the field, which in the case of Hellfest manifested in the resignation of Coca-Cola as a sponsor of the festival for some time (Guibert and Sklower 2011: 109).

The analysis focuses on which categories ('pieces of Frankenstein's monster') are used in the construction of metal or only selected bands as 'enemies'. The method used in this study is membership categorization analysis, which focuses on studying how people – in interaction – categorize each other (Martikainen 2020). As described by Jiří Nekvapil and Ivan Leudar, categorization is part of defining moral, social or religious characteristics, both one's own and the enemy's (2006: 355). Membership categorization is also linked to consequences – it also provides a moral basis for certain ways of speaking and acting (Nekvapil and Leudar 2006: 356), for example, trying to prevent certain metal bands from performing. Specification of others, including the members of different social groups (e.g. 'members' of metal subculture), by means of certain categories, is an integral part of interactions that are tied to specific events (Nekvapil and Leudar 2006: 355–56) – in our case, a concert/festival.

The corpus of analysed data includes Czech and Slovak media reports on selected cases, with a specific focus on statements from Christian opponents of the mentioned metal events, official public statements of parishes and religious organizations on their webpages, statements in municipal councils that are available online as well as petitions and open letters that are also publicly available. Information from metal fans' websites and public statements of festival/concert organizers and statements of musicians related to these events in media were also included. In one case, in our Facebook chat conversation, I also asked one long-term member of the band Root, Igor Hubík (who has played/plays also in black and death metal bands Hypnos, Solfernus and Ravenoir), for a statement – which is also included within the text.

CASES IN CZECHIA

In 2016, a concert by the well-known and old Czech black metal bands Törr and Root was to be held in Valašské Klobouky (approximately 4800 people,

eastern-most part of Czechia). It can also be mentioned here that, according to the percentage of Christian believers, it is one of the most religious (and religiously homogenous) regions in Czechia (Havlíček 2020: 20). Christian believers together with the local Catholic parish were against this concert and put pressure on the city council and mayor. Subsequently, the council took action against the concert, being staged in the town community centre, by putting pressure on the organizers. The mayor's official statement was: 'I consider as legitimate that the Catholic public commented on expressions of the band Root, whose lyrics spread violence, fear, and hate, and which openly claims allegiance to Satanism' (Kainová 2016: n.pag.).

Although Root and Törr are not the most radical Czech black metal bands, their repertoire also includes significantly anti-Christian and Satanic lyrics. In one of the media reports after the cancellation of the concert, the members of Törr (Ota Hereš and Radek Sladký) commented on the situation by saying that they are aware that some of their lyrics may cause controversy, but they distance themselves from Satanism as such: 'That's just theater, where symbols are used, right? Some pentagrams, three sixes, horns, and things like that. That's what it takes' ('Zrušení koncertů kapel Törr a Root' 2016: n.pag.).

On the other hand, the leader of the band Root, Jiří 'Big Boss' Valter, who often publicly expresses negativity towards Christianity, especially the Catholic Church, openly proclaims his identification with Satanism. Valter, in accordance with his Church of Satan-based Satanism, focused as it is on the material world, and success within it – labelled by some scholars as rationalistic Satanism (see Petersen 2005) – denies the true existence of Satan and emphasizes that it is a symbol (see Škarda 2008). Specifically older lyrics of the band are openly Satanic. The band has, for example, a hymn song called 'Song for Satan' glorifying Satan and declaring love to him in their repertoire.

The fear of Satanism was behind the arguments against the concert by chaplain František Ponížil of the Valašské Klobouky parish, who spoke in one of the most influential Czech TV Prima in its report dedicated to this event ('Zrušení koncertů kapel Törr a Root' 2016). He was primarily concerned with the band Root and its leader Jiří 'Big Boss' Valter as the founder of the Church of Satan Czech branch and the translator of the Satanic Bible. Ponížil associated Root and its performances with the promotion of Satanism (described by him as a philosophy of 'absolute selfishness') and expressed concern about its negative influence, especially on young people: 'I checked some of the lyrics and, considering those fans – especially the young ones – taking it as an inspiration for their lives, for their actions, I do not think it's good' ('Zrušení koncertů kapel Törr a Root' 2016: n.pag.). He tried to contribute to the concert cancellation, worrying that the production could spread from the community centre to the public square (Kainová 2016). He interpreted the whole event as a part of the ancient struggle with Satan, where it was needed '[t]o pray. And we know that God won over Satan. We can be confident here' ('Zrušení koncertů kapel Törr a Root' 2016: n.pag.).

The joint concert of Törr and Root was cancelled once more in 2020 in Vizovice (approximately 4800 people), which is located in the same region as Valašské Klobouky, near the border with Slovakia. The committee of the organization TJ Sokol Vizovice, which owns the building where the event was to take place, cancelled the planned concert. The chairman of the organization, Jaromír Slezák, made the following statement: 'We received complaints about the band Root and [...] the committee decided [...] we do not want a concert of this extremist band at Sokolovna building' (Skácel 2020: n.pag.).

3. In the 1980s, during the communist regime, these bands faced bans, and some of their members were interrogated by state security apparatus.

The metal music website *Orbis Metallum* reported (unfortunately without much detail) that the complaint itself was supposed to come from one of the religiously active residents (Lata 2020). However, the local parish said that they were not behind it and had not taken any initiative, and if anyone had taken any initiative, it was a private initiative only; nevertheless, local parish priest Vít Hlavica added: 'I understand that some Christians may not like the promotion of Satanism' (Skácel 2020: n.pag.).

The paradox of the whole situation is that Vizovice has been hosting a big rock-metal festival *Masters of Rock* annually for many years, which was also reflected by the vice-mayor of Vizovice, Alena Hanáková, in her comments on the cancellation of the concert: 'concerts like this normally take place at Sokolovna, but we have never had any problems with them. The metal community in the city is strong, and there is also a *Masters of Rock festival*' (Skácel 2020: n.pag.). For example, the organizer (Tomáš Ševčík) of the gathering of metal fans in Vizovice commented on the situation by saying that cancelling concerts for religious reasons should not happen nowadays:

I see the biggest problem in the very reason why this decision was made. Probably few people would have expected that in 2020 concerts would be cancelled for religious reasons. I don't know if it's more communist or medieval practice, but it's wrong and it shouldn't happen.

(Skácel 2020: n.pag.)

It should be said that the cancellations of this kind of concert based on religious actors' protests are rare cases in the Czech context, which was reflected also in the media. Both bands also confirmed that they did not experience similar cancellation since the end of communist regime in 1989 (Lukášová 2016).³

Nevertheless, it is possible to observe the local mobilization of Christian believers towards metal concerts/festivals in other places in Czechia, which were not visible in national level media and broader public debates. For example, in 2015 in the parishes of Brno Bystrc and Šitbořice u Brna, when the international extreme metal festival *Hell Fast Attack* featured the performances of especially Pagan and black metal bands (such as *Nokturnal Mortum*, *Acherontas* or *Obtest*), local believers organized various prayer chains and posts directed at the festival, hoping to disrupt the festival by, for example, invoking bad weather (Oliver 2015). The official website of the Šitbořice u Brna parish warned that 'a lot of young people going there don't even know the danger they are in' (Oliver 2015: n.pag.). Based on an e-mail from one of the believers, the website declared:

Productions of this kind, which directly celebrate Satan, are in fact ceremonies and rituals through which its domination over this world comes. Brno is known as a center and a powerful Satanist base, but it has gained at least a Euro-regional level with this festival. Evil wants to triumph openly and arrogantly not only over souls but also over the territory which it wants to demand and claim for itself. I would not be surprised if under the guise of this satanic festival its organizers wanted to proclaim Satan's rule over our homeland. [...] Let's consider it a challenge to fight. Jesus teaches us that such powers of evil cannot be expelled except by prayer and fasting. It is necessary to join forces with the Holy Spirit and with respect for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the

Immaculate Heart of Mary. This struggle is not only ours, but also the whole heavens. Do not be afraid if there are not many of us (1 Mos. 18,32). Jesus has already won over Satan, let's declare this victory and offer ourselves as mediators of His grace and power.

(Oliver 2015: n.pag.)

The announcement was shared also by other parishes calling for a spiritual fight against the festival, including masses for that purpose (Společenství nadačního fondu Creda 2015) and Christian websites (e.g. <http://www.7den.cz/>). There was a warning on this website about a 'dangerous festival' and about bands that come to the festival 'to infest our country and especially human souls with their deadly poison' (Spravce 2015: n.pag.). The web post also included a reference to a similar Slovakia festival (probably the Gothoom Festival in 2014) and mentioned that petitions were not successful there, but prayers for bad weather were: '[B]efore it started, a storm came up, blew the equipment' (Spravce 2015: n.pag.) – a big storm really happened in the beginning of Gothoom Festival in 2014 (Anon. 2014b). Despite this, there was no bad weather in the case of the 2015 Hell Fast Attack. Alongside this, another warning e-mail from a Christian activist was featured in an online post linking the Hell Fast Attack, a Judas Priest concert in Prague and Satanic conspiracy of the organizers to 'let the Antichrist be publicly known' (Spravce 2015: n.pag.).

These initiatives, and their activities towards Hell Fast Attack 2015, were directed mainly towards inner Catholic circles, which it sought to mobilize, given its rhetoric. It uses an explicitly religious interpretation embedded in the age-old 'cosmic war' of good against evil (for more about the concept of cosmic war, see Juergensmeyer 2001). That kind of argument the surrounding society and state agencies of Czechia find difficult to accept. It is hardly accessible for the secular audience, even in the case of other possible threats to the society that are apparent in the Slovak Gothoom Festival in 2014.

CASES IN SLOVAKIA

In 2014, there were initiatives against the fifth annual Gothoom Festival organized in the town of Nová Baňa (approximately 7400 inhabitants, central Slovakia) by the lake Tajch. These activities brought about wide public debates around the festival, with various Christian activists and church representatives playing an important role. In 2014, extreme metal bands such as Hypocrisy, Belphegor and Fleshgod Apocalypse were announced as headliners. That year saw the highest number of visitors to that time (between 1500 and 1600; Anon. 2014b), probably due to the public controversy and media attention before the festival.

It should be mentioned that after the fourth edition of Gothoom Festival in 2013, festival organizer Peter Beťko announced that the festival would move to another location. However, he did not find another suitable location and the festival was held again in the same place, which was also partly the impetus for the initiatives against the festival in 2014 (Rapčanová 2017: 45).

As described by Slavomíra Rapčanová (2017), the festival's opponents consist of several groups. The first was a group of residents (including Christian activists) of Nová Baňa and the surrounding villages who were behind a petition against the festival (more than 650 local residents signed it). These opponents objected both to the noise and to some of the problematic lyrics (mainly anti-Christian) of the bands, an objection also supported by

European parliament member Anna Záborská from the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) party (TASR 2014). The petition was initiated by local councillor Tomáš Palaj, who was outraged by some of the bands, proclaiming in the municipal council in Nová Baňa before the festival: 'The bands that will come here are what we Christians will stand and fight against' (Nová Baňa 2014: 19). In the municipal council was also Marián Kvasnička, a member of the national council for the KDH. He commented on bands at the festival that they 'encourage intolerance of religion and extremist positions that incite to violence, a return to the occult, and the songs often have Satanic content' and subsequently referred to the key role of Christianity in Slovakia and the need to defend it from undesirable influences (Nová Baňa 2014: 2–4). Based on the incentives of the voters, the local KDH branch highlighted the topic of Satanism among the bands and the alleged promotion of orgies, violence and anti-Christianity, according to which the festival contradicts the moral conviction of the population and encourages violence and defamation of religious symbols – supposedly contrary to the laws of Slovakia (Motyka 2014). They then requested the organizer to reconsider the festival (Rapčanová 2017: 41). The debate was given a nationwide dimension, and Christian groups and individuals (including official representatives of various Christian churches and organizations; see Forgáč et al. 2014: n.pag.) mobilized in other parts of Slovakia and wrote an open letter to the minister of culture and the president of the Slovak Police Force. It was signed by more than 16,000 Slovak citizens. An excerpt from the letter follows:

[I]t is clear that this year's program will feature music bands that profoundly insult our God, Jesus Christ, in their songs and they invite others to kill Christians as well as to kill priests. We are convinced that while the Constitution of the Slovak Republic ensures freedom of expression and religious belief to everyone, it is not permissible for anyone to abuse this freedom and use it for humiliation, ridicule, and insults of a religion.

(Forgáč et al. 2014: n.pag., original emphasis)

At the end of the open letter, the authors ask to take a detailed look at the Gothoom Festival and 'not to permit a state in which they incite violence and defamation of the right of the belief of the majority population' (Forgáč et al. 2014: n.pag.). The open letter also presents excerpts from the lyrics of the bands Fleshgod Apocalypse, Centurian, Inquisition, Azarath, Hypocrisy and Belphegor in which the authors try to substantiate their claims (Forgáč et al. 2014).

Organizer Beťko took several measures to prevent problems regarding Gothoom 2014. He tried to reduce noise problems by moving the stage further away from the town and by turning the stage with its back to the city (Anon. 2014a; Rapčanová 2017: 35). He also shortened the concert end time from 3 a.m. to 0.30 a.m. (Nová Baňa 2014: 11; Rapčanová 2017: 39). After the pressure, he approached bands with 'problematic' lyrics and asked them not to play them at the festival and was told they were not on the playlist (Rapčanová 2017: 39). At the same time, Beťko said at the council meeting that he sees the upcoming municipal elections and the targeted politicization of the whole event as the reason for the escalation of the situation, when the problem of noise gradually became the problem of a Satanic festival (Nová Baňa 2014: 18). Beťko expressed that the organizers distanced themselves

from 'any manifestations of violence, racism, xenophobia, neo-Nazism, anti-Semitism, or any other form of discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs' (Nová Baňa 2014: 12). At the same time, he defended the freedom of artistic expression in the context of metal, including offensive, shocking or upsetting statements in reference to the case law of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *Oberschlick vs. Austria* and the freedom of speech enshrined in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (Nová Baňa 2014: 12).

The Gothoom 2014 festival eventually took place, even though there were attempts to cancel and censor it. The prosecutor's office postponed the initiative, which came before the festival, as unfounded (Rapčanová 2017: 36), stating that the town of Nová Baňa had not issued any decision to be reviewed by the prosecutor's office (Rapčanová 2017: 36). The mayor ultimately decided not to ban the Gothoom 2014 festival, which he said was not even possible given that it was held on private land (Rapčanová 2017: 46).

In 2016, voicing their opposition to the upcoming concert of Iron Maiden at the airport near the city of Žilina (approximately 82,700 people, north-western Slovakia), the Catholic monks of the Society of Saint Basil the Great (Spoločnosť svätého Bazila Veľkého) wrote an open letter to the minister of culture, the chairman of the Žilina region, the mayor of the city and the Žilina Airport. They blamed Iron Maiden for 'promoting Satanism, violence, and immorality' and then wrote: 'Rock music, including the band's genre, heavy metal, is based on shamanic voodoo rituals and spreads occultism, aggressiveness, drug use, and in many cases leads to suicide' and wanted to warn 'Catholics of the dangers of rock music behind which God's enemy stands – the Devil' (Jarabica et al. 2016: n.pag.). They continued by claiming 'we are deeply outraged by this concert, which is against our cultural and Christian roots because it demoralizes youth and destroys all moral and Christian values' (Jarabica et al. 2016: n.pag.). They also challenged the mayor of the nearby village of Dolný Hričov to stand against the concert, which 'brings a curse to Slovakia', and prevent 'the satanization of the nation' (Jarabica et al. 2016).

However, the town of Žilina, through a spokesman, stated that '[t]he town sees no reason why this band should not play the concert', and Airlines Žilina pointed out that it only rents out spaces (Anon. 2016b: n.pag.). Tomáš Holetz from the organizing agency commented on the open letter: 'We respect free expression of opinions. The Community Appeal needs no comment. However, we are convinced that rock music brings people together and brings joy' (Anon. 2016b: n.pag.).

The Community of St Joseph – Christian Initiative from Považie (Spoločenstvo svätého Jozefa – Kresťanská iniciatíva z Považia) also created a petition against Iron Maiden (signed by 458 people; Spoločenstvo svätého Jozefa – Kresťanská iniciatíva z Považia 2016) – which describes specific objections to Iron Maiden regarding the promotion of darkness in demonic images in relation to the promotion of Satanism (including connection to Crowley and coming of Antichrist) and occultism perceived as a service for the devil, which was applied to rock music too – and declared that Iron Maiden 'worships the devil with their occult music which is rooted in pagan voodoo'; blasphemy against Jesus Christ; 'a curse on Slovakia'; destroying the sensitivity of conscience, especially in children, who 'loses their natural fear of evil and demonic darkness'; 'mass manipulation of people's minds' by the occult power 'breaking through people's natural resistance to the darkness of the occult, Pagan world and thereby and manipulation of traditional Christian

thought in connection to damaging the foundations of traditional European society'; 'glorifying of the Egyptian pagan cult' (Spoločenstvo svätého Jozefa – Kresťanská iniciatíva z Považia 2016: n.pag.).

There were protests against Iron Maiden's concert already in 2013, when Iron Maiden performed at the TopFest rock festival in Piešťany (approximately 27,100 people, western Slovakia). At that time, local priests urged young people to protect their beliefs and not to attend the concert (Vilček 2013). Catholic dean František Babčík from Piešťany said: 'Of course we are against such music. We protect and value our faith. We teach this to young people as well' (Vilček 2013: n.pag.). According to Babčík, Iron Maiden's lyrics call for violence and Satan worship, adding: 'It is necessary to avoid such music, it can have a very negative psychological effect on young people' (Vilček 2013: n.pag.). The Society of St Joseph – Christian Initiative from Považie created a petition (signed by 1332 people; Spoločenstvo svätého Jozefa 2013) against Iron Maiden's performance at the festival to 'express our opposition to the public promotion of Satanism and hatred of God in Slovakia' (Spoločenstvo svätého Jozefa 2013: n.pag.). Nevertheless, organizer Dušan Drobňý ruled out the possibility of Iron Maiden's cancellation based on the petition and also said that the band members have repeatedly denied worshipping symbols of occultism with Satan (Vilček 2013: n.pag.).

Similar rhetoric appears regarding the criticism of some bands (specifically Arch Enemy and Amorphis) at the fifteenth annual festival Rock pod Kameňom in 2017, an event that took place near the town of Snina (approximately 18,700 inhabitants) located in eastern Slovakia. This case also attracted wider media attention in Slovakia. Two city councillors, Ján Čop and Peter Vološin from the KDH party, submitted a proposal at a council meeting to distance the city from the festival, including that the city be removed as a partner from all promotional materials for the festival (Slezáková 2017). They then refer to their Christian identity, which they perceive as connected also to their political role and claimed: 'When someone mocks God and Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross in their lyrics and calls for a union with evil, we should resolutely reject it and not support such things' (Čop et al. 2017: 2).

In support of this endeavour, they submitted a solicited statement by theologian and exorcist Imrich Degro. He stated that 'metal lyrical content promotes evil and immorality, anti-Christian declarations, occultism and Satanism', and the music itself is full of 'despair, anxiety, a mixture of scattered sounds, cacophonies'; listeners can thus take over this depressing musical mood (Zoznam 2017: n.pag.). These bands can even, according to exorcist Degro, cause demonic 'contamination', while opening up to demons through this music can cause the devil to act in the lives of performers and listeners (Čop et al. 2017: 4).

Christian priests from parishes in Snina also commented on the upcoming performance of Arch Enemy and Amorphis. They did not agree with the performance of the mentioned bands and argued these bands have elements of Satanism. They met with the mayor and deputies of the KDH party and created a document where they (similarly) declared: 'We are Christians not only at church, but also in public life, which obliges us, of course, to protect Christian values and beliefs' (Zoznam 2017: n.pag.). They also discouraged believers from attending the festival and declared that they will 'do penance, prayer and fasting in order to prevent the spread of evil in this way' and also called on the festival organizers to 'carefully analyze the invited groups in the forthcoming years' (Zoznam 2017: n.pag.).

The organizer of the festival, Marián Križánek, then tried to refute that these were Satanic bands (see, e.g., Otriová 2017) and commented on the matter to rock and metal magazine *Spark* as follows: 'This is not an inquisition and we do not live in the Middle Ages to invite exorcists to examine music festivals. They are of course entitled to their own opinion, but this is a wrong signal' (Anon. 2017: n.pag.).

Arch Enemy singer Alissa White-Gluz later commented on the incident in an interview. She described herself as an atheist, and at the same time she declared sympathy to LaVeyean (Church of Satan) Satanism (Havlena 2017: 18). Regarding mentioned Snina councillors, she said in the interview:

These are people who don't understand at all what metal music is about. They think metal is evil, and that its protagonists worship the devil and demons. [...] I understand that I might irritate the believers with my dark appearance, and they are also pretty pissed off with our anthem 'No Gods, No Master', but our whole concept is based on positive vibes. Plus we also condemn wars and mass murder and try to bring people together to stick together as much as possible.

(Havlena 2017: 19)

The proposal by the aforementioned city councillors to distance the town from the festival was not ultimately adopted by the town council. The mayor of the town, Štefan Milovčík, also supported the festival and pointed out that it also contributes to the development of tourism (Novy Cas, ee 2017).

In 2017, the aforementioned band Root, which was supposed to perform as one of the metal bands at the summer multi-genre Dobrý Festival in Prešov (approximately 88,700 people) located in eastern Slovakia, was also cancelled. According to metal fan website Obscuro, the cancellation of the concert happened after pressure from local activists and church communities on the city's leadership (Miklaras 2017; see also ROOT Official 2017). Igor Hubík from Root described the situation in our conversation as follows:

[S]hortly after the Valašské Klobouky case, ROOT were confirmed for a pretty big summer festival with a cool name Dobrý Festival, which takes place in Prešov. It's a multi-genre event where ROOT was invited together with several metal bands from abroad and the main star was to be Brazilian Sepultura. Several months before the festival we received information from one of the organizers, who was in charge of the bands of rough character, that he was personally invited to the Mayor of the city [...] saying that he had to cancel ROOT's participation in the festival at the request of an activist group. Since the city of Prešov financially supports the festival, the organizer had no choice but to comply in order to (in his own words) save the participation of other metal bands. From his words it was clear at the time that ROOT was not the first or the last metal band in Eastern Slovakia that the activists mentioned.

(Facebook chat conversation with Igor Hubík, 2 March 2022, original emphasis)

As the evidence, the band Root also posted on its Facebook page an original e-mail from the Christian activist Marian Bednar that was intended to mobilize the Christian community against Root's performance. In the email, Bednar

called for Christian and civic activism, including pressure on the mayor and other politicians to express dissatisfaction and disapproval (ROOT Official 2017: n.pag.). Satanism was again mentioned as a key problem in connection with Jiří 'Big Boss' Valter as a 'priest of the Church of Satan in the Czech Republic' (ROOT Official 2017: n.pag.).

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Guibert and Sklower (2011) in their study focusing on public debates about Hellfest in France (2008–10) regarding Christian opponents' discourse (e.g. statements of father Benoît Domergue, a Catholic priest with a Ph.D. in theology, who studied gothic and metal culture) found that: (1) on the one hand, this discourse stems from the context of Christian faith and identity where the music of some metal bands is perceived in a negative sense as the promotion of Satanism. Christian opponents show themselves as victims when they fight against the anti-Christian and Satanic lyrics of some metal bands. (2) At the same time, their argumentation works with a broader concept whereby metal endangers the morale and mental health of listeners (e.g. through depressing lyrics and morbid topics). (3) Metal culture is interpreted monosemantically within the Christian opponents' discourse and the bands' lyrics are taken literally.

Very similar discursive strategies are possible to find in analysed cases in Czechia and Slovakia, too. Membership categorization analysis identified the three main categories used in the discursive strategies of Christian opponents to construct the 'metal enemy': 'religious struggle', 'danger for state/society', 'danger for morality and health of individuals'. These main categories are partially overlapping, and, for example, the subcategory 'Satanism', which plays a very important role in that construction, can be found in the context of all main categories. In both countries, traditional Christian churches and their believers perceive these struggles as defending Christians' faith and identity. The category of 'religious struggle' is primarily linked to arguments directed at the Christian community itself and is based on the content of the Christian faith. It also includes engagement in a metaphysical cosmic war of good and evil, where metal is connected to the action of the arch enemy Satan and his followers on Earth. Against this, the Christian community defends itself with religious practices such as mass, prayer and fasting.

Nevertheless, religious arguments about the anti-Christian dangers of metal can work only in an already religious context. To become powerful and to have an agency to spread fear within the Christian community but at the same time in the broader society, 'metal enemy' constructed by Christian opponents' discursive strategy needs to have both religious and secular pieces. In Czechia and Slovakia, it is included in 'more secular' arguments in the form of a potential threat to youth (demoralization, suicides, violence, drugs – classical arguments used before in the broad public debate about metal in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, being still reiterated till today) and the whole society. Secular arguments within the main category of 'danger for state/society' – including subcategories such as 'extremism' and, based on the literal interpretation of lyrics, supposed contradiction with laws for the protection of religion; anti-hatred; and promotion of violence – seem to be a currently powerful piece of the Christian opponents' discursive strategy in terms of stimulating broader public attention and pushing politics. It was well observable especially in the example of Gothoom 2014 in Slovakia. These arguments

are also used to victimize Christians, and violent and blasphemous anti-Christian texts are seen as overcoming freedom of speech. Freedom of speech, on the other hand, is the key argument of metal bands and their supporters (see also Rapčanová 2017).

It seems to be also an important element of discursive strategies in public struggles against metal enemy in other central and eastern European countries. For example, in Poland, it was manifested in the case of the frontman of the band Behemoth, nicknamed Nergal, in his 2010 trial for publicly denouncing religion by tearing up the Bible while performing on stage, and in a criminal charge for blasphemy after posting a photo of him trampling on the image of the Virgin Mary on his social media (Instagram) in 2019. In both cases, Nergal was acquitted, but as Michael Hann describes, this is part of a growing wave of blasphemy prosecutions in Poland, which are often targeted at artists, and the number of blasphemy prosecutions almost tripled between 2016 and 2020: 29 indictments were filed in 2020, compared to ten in 2016 (Hann 2021).

On the other hand, extreme metal bands such as Behemoth have purposefully used within their discourse elements as violence, Satanism and anti-Christian declarations (including, e.g., controversial images such as burning churches; see also Vrzal 2017a) which is also related to aimed controversy and provocativeness as part of subcultural capital (including a subcultural knowledge about metal discourse; for more about subcultural capital, see Thornton 1997: 202–04; see also Kahn-Harris 2007: 123–24, 141) and identity of metal. Although extreme metal bands often escape wider moral panics due to the marginality of extreme metal (Kahn-Harris 2007: 28), unless they are already part of mainstream media attention such as Behemoth. However, this may change when bands are due to play at a major festival that attracts public attention, or when a band is heavily media-hyped such as the band Root in the case of the cancelled concert in Valašské Klobouky in Czechia. This can lead to further controversy and even possible problems with the bands' concerts. Nevertheless, as Igor Hubík from Root told me with exaggeration in our Facebook chat (2 March 2022), even a concert cancellation like the one in Valašské Klobouky in 2016, with great media response, is a good advertisement for the band, which is also completely free. That at the same time well illustrates the incorporation of controversy into subcultural capital.

If we compare Czech and Slovak Christian public discursive strategies against the mentioned metal bands and festivals/concerts, we find that they do not differ radically in their basis. Nevertheless, Czech Christian opponents targeted more into Christian ghetto, or to local politics, but they did not want to stimulate broader public discussion. It started after media reports, especially in case of Valašské Klobouky. They also did not explicitly highlight the theme of borders of freedom of speech and supposed contradiction with laws, as it was in Slovakia. In contrast, Slovak Christian opponents aimed (in most cases) to attract the attention of broader Slovak public and politics, not only on local but also on national level. In their self-confident statements, they also perceived themselves, and especially the Catholic Church in general, as an important social force and as actors watching over the morality and security of Slovak society and state portrayed as Christian land.

In both countries, it is clear that the activities against some metal bands and their concerts are not only about the reaction of the church representatives themselves. The stimuli for counterreaction comes also from Christian

believers. Subsequently, local parishes and Christian networks are mobilized. When we look at the society as a Bourdieusian social field (Bourdieu 1984, 1986), the influence on the public sphere depends also on the social capital, including the mobilization potential religious actors have in the field. It seems, in the highly secularized Czechia today, due to the small social capital of churches, the Christian fight against ‘problematic’ metal bands has only limited the mobilization potential, can be realized only within the framework of that ghetto and has only local impact. While in more religious-based countries such as Slovakia, religious actors are more able to use their social capital in the social field and mobilize broader networks against ‘problematic’ bands/concerts/festivals and are better able to construct ‘metal enemy’ as the public enemy.

It is evident that public struggles and debates about metal stimulated by religious actors are not a matter of the past. Public debates about metal involving religious actors have even increased in the last two decades, especially in countries with a strong religious base and possible close interconnections between the state and religion, such as Poland and Russia in central and eastern Europe or in countries with a Muslim majority in the Middle East and North Africa. This can also be seen as a manifestation of a trend of deprivatization of religion returned into the public sphere. As religion is playing an important public role in many societies again, we expect public debates about metal stimulated by religious actors to continue, including in countries in central and eastern Europe.

As mentioned in the introduction, metal and religion are very closely linked fields. Moberg (2012) describes that there are two important research orientations in the study of metal and religion: the study of religion in metal, and the study of metal as religion. I would add here that another important pillar should be the study of public debates and controversies about metal, where various religious actors are present (Vrzal 2017b). It seems that this scholarly orientation in the field of metal and religion is going to continue to be relevant.

FUNDING

This article is funded by the grant ‘GA17-02917S’, ‘Return of Religion to the Public Space: Czecho-Slovak Comparison’, provided by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic. The grant was provided for the project conducted at the author’s former institution, Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic.

REFERENCES

- Anastasiya (2016), ‘BATUSHKA interview: “Everything that I wanted to tell is in the music, in the lyrics and in the cover art”’, HitKiller, 12 April, <http://www.hitkiller.com/batushka-interview-everything-that-i-wanted-to-tell-is-in-the-music-in-the-lyrics-and-in-the-cover-art.html>. Accessed 22 June 2020.
- Anastezia (2014), ‘Power of veto: Forbidden bands in Russia’, Noizr, 17 December, <https://noizr.com/articles/power-of-veto-forbidden-bands-in-russia/:128/>. Accessed 22 June 2020.
- Anon. (2014a), ‘Extrémna hudba’, *Týždeň*, 16 August, <https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/16118/extr-mna-hudba/>. Accessed 20 March 2022.

- Anon. (2014b), 'Organizátor metalového festivalu v Novej Bani: Toto už naozaj nepotrebujem', *Život*, 20 August, <https://zivot.pluska.sk/reportaze/organizator-metaloveho-festivalu-novej-bani-toto-naozaj-nepotrebujem>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Anon. (2016a), 'Orthodox Christian activists demanded to ban the concerts of a Polish band Batushka', *Orthodox Christians*, 10 February, <http://orthodoxrights.org/orthodox-christian-activists-demanded-to-ban-the-concerts-of-a-polish-band-batushka.html>. Accessed 22 June 2020.
- Anon. (2016b), 'Reholníci broja proti koncertu Iron Maiden: Zakážte ich, velebja satana!', *Plus jeden deň*, 8 June, <https://www1.pluska.sk/regiony/stredne-slovensko/reholnici-broja-proti-koncertu-iron-maiden-zakazte-ich-velebja-satana>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Anon. (2017), 'Satanisti ve Snině: Festival Rock pod Kameňom bojuje s cirkví', *Spark*, 27 June, <https://www.spark-rockmagazine.cz/satanisti-ve-snine-festival-rock-pod-kamenom-bojuje-s-cirkvi>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1986), 'The forms of capital', in J. G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, pp. 241–58.
- Casanova, José (1994), *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Český statistický úřad (2022), 'Náboženská víra', 31 March, <https://www.czso.cz/csu/scitani2021/nabozenska-vira>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Christe, Ian (2005), *Ďáblův hlas: Heavy Metal – Kompletní historie pro znalce*, Prague: BB/art.
- Čop, Ján, Vološin, Peter and poslanci MsZ (2017), 'Dištancovanie sa od festivalu, Rock pod Kameňom', Snina, 29 June, https://www.snina.sk/e_download.php?file=data%2Furedni_deska%2Fobsah372_50.pdf&original=57. Accessed 22 June 2020.
- Fiala, Petr (2007), *Laboratoř sekularizace: Náboženství a politika v ne-náboženské společnosti: český případ*, Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury.
- Fiss, Joelle (2016), *Anti-Blasphemy Offensives in the Digital Age: When Hardliners Take Over*, Washington, DC: The Brookings.
- Forgáč, Peter, Gáborík, Pavol, Kožuch, Branislav, Beňa, Vlastimil, Poloha, Slavomír, Slovák, Július, Strežo, Pavol, Strojný, Peter, Šefranko, Martin and Filo, Eduard (2014), 'Otvorený list ministrovi kultúry Slovenskej republiky a prezidentovi Policajného zboru Slovenskej republiky ohľadne plánovaného festivalu Gothoom Open Air Fest 2014 v Novej Bani', *Peticie*, 22 July, https://www.peticie.com/gothoom_2014_otvoreny_list_ministrovi_kultury_prezidentovi_pz. Accessed 22 June 2020.
- Foucault, Michel (2002), *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Gee, James P. (2001), *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Gorski, Philip S., Kim, David K., Torpey, John and VanAntwerpen, Jonathan (2012), 'The post-secular in question', in P. S. Gorski, D. K. Kim, J. Torpey and J. VanAntwerpen (eds), *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*, London and New York: Social Science Research Council and New York University, pp. 1–22.

- Guibert, G r me and Sklower, Jedediah (2011), 'Hellfest: The thing that should not be? Local perceptions and Catholic discourses on metal culture in France', *Popular Music History*, 6:1&2, pp. 100–15.
- Habermas, J rgen (1991), 'The public sphere', in C. Mukerji and M. Schudson (eds), *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, pp. 398–404.
- Hamplov, Dana (2013), *Nboenstv v esk spolenosti na prahu 3. tiscilet*, Prague: Karolinum.
- Hann, Miachael (2021), 'Nergal: The extreme metal musician fighting Poland's blasphemy laws', *The Guardian*, 18 March, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/mar/18/nergal-the-extreme-metal-musician-fighting-poland-blasphemy-laws>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Havlena, David (2017), 'Arch Enemy: S dblem se nepřtelme', *Fakker*, 4:4, pp. 16–20.
- Havlcek, Tomš (2020), 'Obecn rmce postsekularismu', in T. Havlcek, K. Klingorov, A. Belřnov, P. Dostl, Z. R. Nešpor and Z. Vojtšek, *Postsekularismus v esku: Trendy a regionln souvislosti*, Prague: P3K, pp. 15–27.
- Hjelm, Titus, Kahn-Harris, Keith and LeVine, Mark (2011), 'Heavy metal as controversy and counterculture', *Popular Music History*, 6:1&2, pp. 5–18.
- Jarabica, Matej R., Jarabica, Bernard M., Chlebek, Michal M. and Mazr, Charbel P. (2016), 'Listy proti satanskmu koncertu Iron Maiden v iline', Spolonosť svtho Bazila Velkho, 8 April, <http://www.spolocnostsbm.com/clanky/listy/listy-proti-satanskemu-koncertu-iron-maiden-v-ziline.html>. Accessed 31 March 2019.
- Juergensmeyer, Mark (2001), *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press.
- Kahn-Harris, Keith (2007), *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Kainov, Marcela (2016), 'Za zrušenm koncertu stoj tak farři. Klobouky pln internet', *Zlnsk denk*, 17 November, https://zlinsky.denik.cz/zpravy_region/za-zrusenim-koncertu-stoji-take-farari-klobouky-plni-internet-20161117.html. Accessed 15 June 2019.
- Krovatin, Chris (2019), '74 lashes: What it's like to be a metal band In Iran', *Kerrang*, 5 September, <https://www.kerrang.com/features/74-lashes-what-its-like-to-be-a-metal-band-in-iran/>. Accessed 19 June 2020.
- Lata, Vlastimil (2020), 'Co stoj za zrušenm koncertu root ve vizovicch?', *Orbis Metallum*, 16 September, <https://www.metallum.cz/novinky/co-stoji-za-zrusenim-koncertu-root-ve-vizovicich/>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- LeVine, Mark (2008), *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam*, New York: Broadway Books.
- Lukřov, Eva (2016), 'Fanoušci sepisuj petici, chtj zrušit koncert křesťansk kapely', *Zlnsk denk*, 21 November, https://zlinsky.denik.cz/kultura_region/fanousci-sepisuji-petici-chteji-zrusit-koncert-krestanske-kapely-20161121.html. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Martikainen, Jari (2020), 'Membership categorization analysis as means of studying person perception', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 19:3, pp. 703–21, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14780887.2020.1794089>. Accessed 31 March 2022.

- Mercer-Taylor, Peter (2014), 'Between hymn and horror film: How do we listen to Cradle of Filth?', in C. H. Partridge and E. S. Christianson (eds), *The Lure of the Dark Side: Satan and Western Demonology in Popular Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 39–59.
- Miklaras (2017), 'Zakázaná účast Root v Prešově', *Obscuro*, 25 March, <https://obscuro.cz/zakazana-ucast-root-v-presove/>. Accessed 30 March 2022.
- Moberg, Marcus (2009), 'Popular culture and the "darker side" of alternative spirituality: The case of metal music', *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*, 21, pp. 110–28.
- Moberg, Marcus (2012), 'Religion in popular music or popular music as religion? A critical review of scholarly writing on the place of religion in metal music and culture', *Popular Music and Society*, 35:1, pp. 113–30.
- Moberg, Marcus (2015), *Christian Metal: History, Ideology, Scene*, London, New Delhi, New York and Sydney: Bloomsbury.
- Moberg, Marcus (2022), *Religion, Discourse, and Society: Towards a Discursive Sociology of Religion*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Motyka, Michal (2014), 'KDH: Kresťansko demokratické hnutie', TinyPic, 6 June, <http://i62.tinypic.com/263eww1.jpg>. Accessed 15 June 2019.
- Nekvapil, Jiří (2006), 'Úvodem k monotematickému číslu "Analýza promluv a textů, analýza diskurzu"', *Sociologický časopis: Czech Sociological Review*, 42:2, pp. 263–67.
- Nekvapil, Jiří and Leudar, Ivan (2006), 'Prezentace událostí 21. 9. 2001: Bush, bin Ládín a jiní v interakci', *Sociologický časopis: Czech Sociological Review*, 42:2, pp. 353–77.
- Nešpor, Zdeněk R. (2004), 'Religious processes in contemporary Czech society', *Sociologický časopis: Czech Sociological Review*, 40:3, pp. 277–95.
- Nešpor, Zdeněk R. (2010), *Přiliš slábi ve víře: Česká ne/religiozita v evropském kontextu*, Prague: Kalich.
- Nešpor, Zdeněk R. (2020), *Česká a slovenská religiozita po rozpadu společného státu: Náboženství Dioskúřů*, Prague: Karolinum.
- Nová Baňa (2014), 'Zápisnica zo zasadnutia Mestského zastupiteľstva v Novej Bani', 6 August, https://www.novabana.sk/files/filelist/159/nbdoku_2014_20069-1.pdf. Accessed 20 June 2020.
- Nový Cas, ee (2017), 'Organizátor festivalu v Snine reaguje na varovanie pred démonickým zamorením: Krok, ktorý od neho nik nečakal!', *Nový čas*, 30 June, <https://www.cas.sk/clanok/566915/organizator-festivalu-v-snine-reaguje-na-varovanie-pred-demonickym-zamorenim-krok-ktory-od-neho-nik-necakal/>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Oliver (2015), 'Prosba o zapojení se do duchovního boje proti uskutečnění festivalu "HELL FAST ATTACK" v Brně', Farnost Šitbořice – Internetové Stránky římskokatolické farnosti Šitbořice, 25 June, <https://www.farnostsitborice.cz/2015/06/25/prosba-o-zapojeni-se-do-ducho-vniho-boje-proti-uskutecneni-festivalu-hell-fast-attack-v-brne/>. Accessed 31 March 2019.
- Otrivá, Jana (2017), 'Dvaja sninskí poslanci varujú pred satanizmom na rockovom festivale', *Korzár Horný Zemplín*, 26 June, <https://hornyzemplin.korzar.sme.sk/c/20568704/dvaja-sninski-poslanci-varuju-pred-satanizmom-na-rockovom-festivale.html#axzz4IE1rtv7D>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Otterbeck, Jonas, Mattsson, Douglas and Pastene, Orlando (2018), '"I am Satan!" Black metal, Islam and blasphemy in Turkey and Saudi Arabia', *Contemporary Islam*, 12:3, pp. 267–86.

- Partridge, Christopher H. (2005), *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Volume 2: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, London and New York: T&T Clark International.
- Petersen, Jesper A. (2005), 'Modern Satanism: Dark doctrines and black flames', in J. R. Lewis and J. A. Petersen (eds), *Controversial New Religions*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 423–57.
- Phillipov, Michelle (2011), 'Extreme music for extreme people? Norwegian black metal and transcendent violence', *Popular Music History*, 6:1&2, pp. 150–63.
- Rapčanová, Slavomíra (2017), 'Kontroverzia a verejná diskusia okolo slovenského metalového festivalu Gothoom', *Sacra*, 15:2, pp. 33–49.
- ROOT Official (2017), 'Zakázané vystoupení ROOT v Prešově!', 24 March, <https://www.facebook.com/396971113678944/posts/1444583342251044/>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Skácel, Petr (2020), 'Metalové kapele zrušili na Zlínsku další koncert, prý je extremistická', *Idnes*, 25 September, https://www.idnes.cz/zlin/zpravy/root-torr-metal-satanismus-koncert-vizovice-zruseni.A200925_572976_zlin-zpravy_ras. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Škarda, Petr (2008), 'BigBoss: Kdo je úspěšný, je satanista', *Brněnský deník*, 28 April, <https://brnensky.denik.cz/serialy/bigboss-kdo-je-uspesny-je-satanista20080428.html>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Slezáková, Magdalena (2017), "'Démonické zamoření", bijí slovenští radní na poplach kvůli metalovému festivalu. Povolali exorcistu', *Irozhlás*, 29 June, https://www.irozhlas.cz/kultura/hudba/slovensko-rock-pod-kamenom-metal-festival-exorcista_1706292115_mls. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Společenství nadačního fondu Creda (2015), 'Prosba o zapojení se do duchovního boje proti uskutečnění festivalu s názvem "HELL FAST ATTACK" v Brně', *Fatym*, 18 June, <https://www.fatym.com/view.php?cislocianku=2015060121>. Accessed 30 March 2022.
- Spoločenstvo svätého Jozefa (2013), 'Iron Maiden, nie ste tu vítaní!', *Peticie*, 4 June, https://www.peticie.com/iron_maiden_nie_ste_tu_vitani. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- Spoločenstvo svätého Jozefa – Kresťanská iniciatíva z Považia (2016), 'Za slovensko bez Iron Maiden 2016', <https://ssvj.webnode.sk/za-slovensko-bez-iron-maiden-2016/>. Accessed 30 March 2022.
- Spravce (2015), 'Akce: Nebezpečný festival – modlete se za zrušení – "HELL FASTATTACK" = Peklo útočí rychle', 7den, 25 June, <http://www.7den.cz/akce-nebezpecny-festival-modlete-se-za-zruseni-hell-fastattack-peklo-utoci-rychle/>. Accessed 30 March 2022.
- Štatistický úrad SR (2022), 'Náboženské vyznanie', *Sčítanie obyvateľov, domov a bytov 2021*, <https://www.scitanie.sk/k-rimskokatolicickemu-vyznaniu-sa-prihlasil-56-obyvateov>. Accessed 30 March 2022.
- TASR (2014), 'Europoslankyňa KDĽH podporila petíciu kresťanský orientovaných obyvateľov Novej Bane, ktorí žiadajú zákaz augustového festivalu Gothoom Fest 2014', *Teraz*, 25 July, <http://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/zaborska-gothoom-metal-nova-bana/92618-clanok.html>. Accessed 29 March 2022.
- Thornton, Sarah (1997), 'The social logic of subcultural capital', in K. Gelder and S. Thornton (eds), *The Subcultures Reader*, London: Routledge, pp. 200–09.
- Tížik, Miroslav (2011), *Náboženstvo vo verejnom živote na Slovensku: Zápas o ideový charakter štátu a spoločnosti*, Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV.

- Tížik, Miroslav (2017), 'Slovakia: Secularization of public life and desecularization of the state', in J. Nelis, C. Sägeser and J. Schreiber (eds), *Religion and Secularism in the European Union: State of Affairs and Current Debates*, Brussels, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford and Vienna: P.I.E Peter Lang, pp. 161–67.
- Václavík, David (2010), *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, Prague: Grada.
- Vido, Roman (2017), 'The Czech Republic: New challenges for churches in highly secularized society', in J. Nelis, C. Sägeser and J. Schreiber (eds), *Religion and Secularism in the European Union: State of Affairs and Current Debates*, Brussels, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford and Vienna: P.I.E Peter Lang, pp. 45–50.
- Vilček, Ivan (2013), 'Slovenští kněží brojí proti Iron Maiden', *Novinky*, 15 June, <https://www.novinky.cz/kultura/clanek/slovensti-knezi-broji-proti-iron-maiden-194120>. Accessed 30 March 2022.
- Vrzal, Miroslav (2015), 'Okultní aspekty v metalové hudbě: Od hororového stylu k temné spiritualitě', *Sacra*, 13:2, pp. 7–29.
- Vrzal, Miroslav (2017a), 'Pagan terror: The role of Pagan ideology in church burnings and the 1990s Norwegian black metal subculture', *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, 19:2, pp. 173–204.
- Vrzal, Miroslav (2017b), 'Metal a akademické studium náboženství aneb proč by se religionistika měla o metal zajímat, se zaměřením na téma metal a satanismus', *Sacra*, 15:2, pp. 7–32.
- Walser, Robert (1993), *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.
- Zachar-Podolinská, Tatiana (2008), 'Religiozita v dobe neskorej modernity: Prípád Slovensko', *Sociální studia*, 5:3&4, pp. 53–86.
- Zoznam (2017), 'Exorcista varuje pred démonickým zamorením v Snine: Slovákov bude pokúšať satan', *Topky*, 27 June, <https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/1638959/Exorcista-varuje-pred-demonickým-zamorením-v-Snine--Slovakov-bude-pokusat-satan>. Accessed 31 March 2022.
- 'Zrušení koncertů kapel Törr a Root' (2016), *Očima Josefa Klímy*, TV Prima, 13 December, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFJzbPZWR28>. Accessed 31 March 2019.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Vrzal, Miroslav (2022), 'Against the devil's metal: Christian public discursive strategies against metal concerts and festivals in Czechia and Slovakia', *Metal Music Studies*, 8:2, pp. 245–68, https://doi.org/10.1386/mms_00077_1

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Miroslav Vrzal is currently affiliated with the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University in Brno (Czechia). He also worked as a researcher at the Department of Sociology at the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague in 2019. His main field of interest is sociology of religion with specific focus on religious situation in Czechia and new religious movements, especially Satanism and Paganism. Next to that, he is involved in the study of popular culture and music subcultures/scenes, mainly metal. His main interest in that field is the area of 'metal and religion'. Vrzal is also founder of an association of scholars interested in metal studies in Czechia, named Czech Metal Studies. He also founded an international network of scholars, Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe.

Contact: Department for the Study of Religions, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Jáselská 201/18, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic.
E-mail: miroslav.vrzal@mail.muni.cz

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1176-4447>

Miroslav Vrzal has asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.
