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ROUTLEDGE

# Turkish Metal

Music, Meaning, and Morality in a Muslim Society



An Ashgate Book

Pierre Hecker

# TURKISH METAL

*“They’re scared, man.”*

*“They’re not scared of you. They are scared of what you represent to them.”*

*—Easy Rider, 1969*

# Turkish Metal

Music, Meaning, and Morality in a Muslim Society

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# A Few Words by Way of Introduction

In late summer of 1999, only one month after a devastating earthquake had struck the region of Izmit and Bodrum, Turkish police recovered the naked, half-buried body of a young woman from a cemetery in the Istanbul neighborhood of Ortaköy. The girl's head had reportedly been smashed in with a stone and her body showed signs of rape. By the time the newspapers published the story, the police had already arrested two young men and a young woman who unanimously confessed to murdering 21-year-old Şehriban Çoşkunfırat on the night of 13 September. When pictures turned up showing the long-haired perpetrators dressed in black and holding the remains of a dismembered cat, rumors of necrophilia and satanic rituals dominated the news. In the days and weeks that followed, media coverage snowballed into a major moral panic with rock and heavy metal music at the forefront of public concern. The public discourse surrounding these events forms the backdrop for my investigations into cultural change, the production of new social spaces and identities, and the individual meaning of metal music and culture in young people's lives.

## Rationale of the Book

Relying on more than 70 in-depth interviews, longstanding direct observations in Istanbul, and documentary analysis, including the use of daily papers, lyrics, flyers, booklets, and comic strips, *Turkish Metal* journeys deep into the heart of the Turkish heavy metal scene, uncovering the emergence, evolution, and especially the social implications of this controversial musical genre in a Muslim society. In doing so, the book provides information on almost every aspect of this genre—its history and development, along with the people, places and events involved, as well as its dissemination within Turkish society. The overall aim, however, is not to create an encyclopedia of metal in Turkey, as has been done in comparable studies on local music scenes. Rather, the book applies the approach of “thick description” in order to study social and cultural change in a Muslim society that is stricken with conflict over the religious versus secular nature of the state.

Taking an ethnographic approach, the study is situated within the field of cultural studies: it provides proof of how modern media and communications systems—especially through the advent of the Internet and evolution of technological means to convert sounds and images into digital data files, which can then easily be sent along on a worldwide data highway—facilitate the global availability of cultural resources and their appropriation at a local level. *Turkish*

*Metal* examines how these cultural resources assume meaning, generate conflict, and initiate transformation in an urban Muslim context.

Throughout this process, the book seeks to let the “subalterns” speak for themselves. It places emphasis on individual narratives, enabling the reader to come as close as possible to the protagonists of Turkish metal. It digs deep into young people’s everyday lives, revealing that metal matters: metal functions as a metaphor for what is individually considered meaningful in life—whether it be freedom, rebellion, excess, or emancipation.

As has been the case in other parts of the world, the sonic, visual, and verbal representations of heavy metal culture were seen as an offense to an array of national, religious, and cultural sensibilities in Turkish society. Beyond the above-mentioned, highly imaginative media reports—including accounts on Satanism, suicide pacts, and perverted sexual practices—Turkish metalheads do indeed violate traditional concepts of morality. Their love for violent music, long hair, beer, and blasphemy has led to widespread conflict and resentment amongst the Turkish public.

*Turkish Metal* explores how Turkish metalheads, against certain odds, manage to successfully claim public spaces of their own, thereby transforming the public face of the city; the book raises the question of how and why youth dare to rebel against the prevalent social and moral restrictions in Turkish society, and it examines whether they succeed in asserting their individual freedom in a society that is still well-known for sanctioning any kind of behavior deviating from the norm. Above all, the book investigates the Turkish metal scene’s potential for contesting Islamic concepts of morality, its relevance within the field of female emancipation, and its capacity to foster social relations that transcend national, religious, and ethnic boundaries.

## Structure of the Book

The book comprises seven sections. Chapter 1 outlines the study’s empirical approach, provides an initial insight into the field, and refers to the sociopolitical settings that have been crucial for the emergence of Turkish metal. It, moreover, provides a brief introduction into metal music and culture and into the newly evolving field of metal studies. In addition, Chapter 1 contains descriptions of the scene’s urban settings in Istanbul, insights into how the author negotiated access to the field, and—on a related note—conceptual discussions around the notions of “culture” and “boundaries.” All in all, the first chapter aims to provide the necessary background information for understanding the emergence and evolution of heavy metal in Turkey.

Chapter 2 examines the emergence, evolution, and global connectivity of Turkish metal from its beginning in the early 1980s until the late 2000s. Due to financial, economic, and political hardships, the dissemination of heavy metal music and culture had to initially rely on informal practices, such as selling

bootlegs on the streets, connecting with fellow bands and fans abroad via post, trading tapes, spreading flyers, publishing fanzines, and broadcasting metal programs on independent radio stations. Accordingly, the second chapter tells the story of Turkish metal by focusing on these informal mechanisms of cultural dissemination.

Chapter 3 analyzes a series of moral panics over metal and Satanism revolving around the suicides and murder of several Turkish teenagers. The chapter chronologically outlines the events, explores the main narrative behind the news, and illustrates how metal came to be perceived as a moral threat to the very fabric of Turkish society.

Chapter 4 aims at revealing the mechanisms in the invention of moral panics over metal and Satanism. Based upon interviews with Turkish newspaper journalists, it investigates how the Turkish media manipulated the news. On a related note, it portrays the reactions of the Turkish metal press toward allegations of Satanism, suicide pacts, and murder, and tells stories of repression and conflict in the direct aftermath of the moral panics.

Chapter 5 explores the extremes of black metal, and exemplifies how its cultural representations take on meaning in a Turkish context. This includes asking questions such as: why do Turkish black metal artists use anti-Christian symbols in a Muslim context? How does the Turkish public react towards the usage of these symbols? Does Turkish black metal—similar to black metal in Norway, Sweden, or Germany—also refer to an imaginative pagan past? With regard to the above-outlined rationale of the book, Chapter 5 further concentrates on black metal's potential for contesting Islamic concepts of morality. In addition, it analyzes early relationships between the Turkish and Norwegian black metal underground.

Chapter 6 focuses on metal and gender. It explores how metal in Turkey can be perceived from a gender perspective, asking the questions: does metal contest dominant concepts of masculinity and femininity in Turkish society? Can metal possibly provide a means of female emancipation? Associated with this, Chapter 6 investigates and critically addresses the much-cited concepts of honor and shame, which in academia are often assumed to dominate the “Turkish way of thinking.”

Chapter 7 revisits the public discourse over metal by focusing on different realms of conflict in everyday life. This, once more, illustrates how metal assumes meaning in a Turkish context and, at the same time, provides a chance to investigate the biographical effects of being and doing metal. In brief, Chapter 7 ultimately seeks to explore why metal matters—not only as regards people's lives, but also in relation to further academic discussion.

The expression “doing metal” has been directly inspired by Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman's landmark approach “doing gender,” as published in an article of the same title in *Gender and Society* in 1987. Consequently, I assume that metal is the product of social doings. Doing metal, in that sense, means to perform particular sonic, visual, and verbal practices that—as a whole—constitute the fabric of metal culture (see Chapter 1). The ways of doing metal are, however, not immutable. They are dynamic and prone to change, sometimes competing

with each other. Doing metal, therefore, is also closely related to questions of authenticity and difference.

All citations quoted in this volume, unless otherwise indicated, are derived from interviews conducted by the author between 2002 and 2009. A complete list of interviews with detailed information on date, place, and persons involved can be found at the end of this book (see Appendix: List of Interviews). In a very few cases, the names of the interviewees have been deliberately omitted, particularly when revolving around actions punishable under Turkish law. Details on these interviews do not appear in the appendix. One could argue that the list is therefore incomplete and does not fulfill academic standards. However, I wanted to avoid getting anyone into trouble for their speaking frankly about particular actions or events. Furthermore, the author is personally responsible for all translations of interview excerpts or newspaper articles from Turkish and German into English. All translations have been clearly indicated throughout the book—either in the footnotes or in the appendix (see List of Interviews).

Some readers may disagree on particular aspects and findings in this volume, particularly with regard to historic matters on how the scene evolved. The present book can provide only an incomplete study of Turkish metal. Neither does it mention all Turkish metal bands that have ever existed, nor does it treat all musical styles and genres lengthily and equally. As I have already said elsewhere, it is not the purpose of this book to write an encyclopedia of Turkish metal. However, I hope that Turkish metalheads will find something of themselves in this book, and maybe also receive new insight. In the end, this book is for you!

# Chapter 1

## Closing In ...

### The Field

“All of society was against us,” Seyda, a female metalhead from Istanbul explains. “Many of my friends were beaten up for their long hair or earrings,” she continues. As has been the case in so many places around the world, metal in Turkey has been blamed for being subversive by posing an affront to moral and religious sensibilities. Yet against all the odds, metal has attracted a strong and passionate following, and, on an individual level, has become a means of self-empowerment, emancipation, and resistance. These essential if unsurprising findings were certainly not so clear at the beginning of this investigation. The initial phase of research was characterized by very general questions of how to approach metal from an academic perspective: how would it be possible to negotiate access to the field, how to systematically analyze collected data? And, even ahead of data collection, what is metal culture anyway? How can it be defined? How did it evolve? And how does it assume meaning in a Turkish context? In order to cope with these questions, I chose an ethnographic approach.

### *Seeds of Hatred: Initial Encounters with Turkish Metal*

My initial encounter with Turkish metal took place years before I began thinking of metal from an academic perspective. By the time I learned about the existence of a Turkish scene, I had just completed my second semester at university, and felt crushed by the task of studying Arabic while at the same time having to pass courses in geography and politics. In fact, I was much less concerned about my academic “career” than I was about music. I had been busy with my own band, and the weekly rehearsals, gigs, and sometimes studio sessions consumed most of my time away from university. In addition to rehearsing and playing live, we promoted our music by sending demo tapes to clubs, fanzines, distributors, radio stations, and record labels. This, however, was more a rather vague strategy towards musical and, hopefully, commercial success. At a time when the Internet was still in its infancy, spreading as many tapes as possible also meant exchanging music and getting in touch with like-minded people from around the world.

In spring 1996, I came across a flyer from an underground newsletter and distributor from the Turkish city of Bursa called *Seeds of Hatred*. The flyer had been enclosed with one of the many letters I used to receive from other bands and friends. It was still common then to promote each other’s music or publications by enclosing flyers with every letter or package you sent. Like many other distributors,



*Seeds of Hatred* offered reviews and distribution to underground metal bands that were typically happy with any kind of support. I responded to the ad, and soon received an answer from Serkan, who had just commenced in preparing the newsletter's first issue. Although our correspondence was short-lived, I learned from his letters about the existence of a small but deeply committed scene in Turkey that was eager to get more information on bands from abroad.

Over the following years, my priorities and interests gradually shifted away from music to my studies—and although I can hardly remember a single day that I didn't listen to metal music since the time I had been initially infected by the sounds of Accept and Iron Maiden at the age of twelve—I abandoned my band and pulled out of the global metal underground. It would be an exaggeration to claim that this short-lived encounter with Turkish metal in 1996 triggered the present research. In fact, I had just learned about the existence of a Turkish scene, and for years I did not spare much thought about the global metal underground.

The impulse for the present study came from a research initiative on youth and youth cultures in the Muslim world, which had been launched by my supervisor Jörg Gertel at the Institute of Oriental Studies at Leipzig University. Related seminar discussions and the reading of Anthony Giddens's *Consequences of Modernity*, in which the author points to the “lifting out” of social relations from local contexts in modern societies (1990: 21), made me think anew about global metal and its informal networks of social relations cutting across national, ethnic, and religious boundaries. The initial interest in the subject was further added to by thoughts on possible representations of metal in a Muslim context, particularly since American sociologist Deena Weinstein in the 2000 revised edition of her book *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* still assumed that “the pull of Islam seems to be strong enough, even outside the Middle East, to preclude metal from getting a foothold among Moslem youth” (Weinstein 2000 [1991]: 120).

### *Feels Like Home: Negotiating Access to the Field*

When I commenced research in Istanbul, I was no longer participating in the global metal underground and, after more than five years of silence on my part, was unable to revive my previous contacts to Bursa. Hence, I decided to negotiate access to the field directly by searching for public places where Istanbul's metalheads used to meet. From a previous visit, I knew that the city's nightlife concentrated on an area surrounding the İstiklal Caddesi, a long pedestrian road in central Beyoğlu, which leads from Tünel Square and the entrance of Istanbul's historic subway line in the south, to central Taksim Square in the north. While the road itself is packed with expensive boutiques; music, book, and media stores; pastry shops, banks, and local branches of foreign cafés; and fast food chains like Gloria Jean's, McDonalds, and Burger King, the neighboring side streets host hundreds of small restaurants, bars, cafés, and clubs where one can find all kinds of nightlife. Particularly during the weekends, the streets remain crowded until early morning hours. Music plays a crucial role in people's nightlife activities, and

most bars and clubs offer live music, sometimes throughout the whole week. One can find all kinds of bands and music, ranging from Anatolian folk sounds to blues, jazz, reggae, hip-hop, rock, and—of course—metal.

Consequently, it did not take long to find a rock bar where exclusively metal was played. Located on a pedestrian side street between the British Consulate and Beyoğlu's Balık Pazarı ("Fish Market"), and surrounded by local shops selling vegetables, fruits, and fish, the entrance to Istanbul's Caravan rock bar was hard to notice when passing by. The sign over the door hardly caught the eye, and the staircase, visible from the street, looked more like an entrance to one of the old residential buildings typical of that area, rather than leading to a rock bar. Nevertheless, one could recognize the Caravan rock bar from the groups of long-haired guys who were entering or leaving the building from time to time. The bar itself was shabby, windowless, and therefore dark, stretching over two floors. It comprised one single hall equipped with a bar, DJ cabin, wooden chairs, some tables, a small stage, and metal posters on the walls. The second floor partly overlooked the first floor, and visitors could get a view from above at the stage or video screen, which was set up to show video clips when there was no live music.

When I first entered, the bar was packed with people who had come for a concert by several local metal bands. Young men and women were enjoying themselves by banging heads to the music, drinking beer, smoking cigarettes, and shouting at each other in order to communicate over the noise. Poor equipment and terrible acoustics turned the music into an infernal cacophony of sounds, though this did not stop the bands from playing their shows with great enthusiasm. All in all, the place and atmosphere reminded me very much of similar places where I had spent much of my youth. In other words, I felt like I was coming home.

This statement necessarily raises the question of neutrality and the observer's personal position in the field. The danger of "going native" and losing the ability to observe the setting and its actors from a distant and unbiased position is one of the key challenges of ethnographic research. Sociologists and anthropologists alike underscore the importance of establishing a relationship of mutual trust between the researcher and the researched (Giddens 1997: 543, Brewer 2000: 85, Delamont 2004: 224, Rapley 2004: 19–20). Being accepted at the fieldwork site is a necessary precondition to having "a chance of getting close to the multiple realities in the field" (Brewer 2000: 85). Due to my appearance and personal affiliation with metal culture, access and acceptance luckily proved to be easy.

Though I was a stranger, I felt familiar with the field—the music, the settings, the social practices, and even many of the experiences reported to me during the research. Many of the actors were of a similar age to me (or only slightly younger), had been socialized into metal through the same albums, and, in a few cases, had even visited the same festivals in Holland and Germany. Two of my later interviewees, who had been involved in global tape trading,<sup>1</sup> had even been

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<sup>1</sup> For details on "tape trading," see Chapter 2.

in contact with metalheads in France and Israel, whom I knew personally from participating in the global metal underground.<sup>2</sup>

During fieldwork, I never felt treated like an outsider in terms of being openly rejected or having the impression of disrupting people's routines and day-to-day practices. With my long hair, goatee, and style of dress, I was welcomed as a part of the scene. In fact, my appearance, for the first time in my life, proved to win me respect and credibility. To still have long hair at my age—I was aged 28 when I first entered the field—was regarded as a sign of authenticity and commitment to metal. Authenticity, during other occasions, appeared to be an important issue in terms of defining who is metal and who is not. Therefore, it is likely that without my personal background, I would not have been able to conduct in-depth observation and interviewing. Many of my later interviewees turned out to be highly suspicious about outsiders who want to learn about the scene. This was partly due to negative experiences in connection with a series of moral panics over metal and Satanism, and partly due to the general assumption that an outsider would misunderstand, and therefore misinterpret, the meaning of metal. Moreover, several factions of young black metal adherents used to display a rather elitist attitude towards those considered outsiders, drawing a clear line between themselves and their social surroundings.

During conversations and interviews, my personal experience and affiliation with metal further enabled me to draw on particular knowledge concerning bands, events, musical trends, and album releases. This frequently proved helpful in terms of being able to relate given information or statements to a particular context. Album releases, for example, were often used as time markers when reporting about a particular event or incident. Accordingly, a statement like "Metallica came here after they'd released their black album" indicates that Metallica did not play in Turkey until as late as autumn 1991. Similar references were made during biographical narrations. Furthermore, to know about the release of a particular album, or about the features of a particular subgenre and its protagonists, was a matter of credibility and respect. Since quite a number of my interviewees were pretty dogmatic about metal in terms of valuing authenticity, knowledge represented an indicator of personal commitment to the scene. Accordingly, some people openly tested my knowledge by asking specific questions about metal history or by referring to particular albums, bands, and songs. In this sense, my personal affiliation and familiarity with the subject proved to be a great advantage.

The ideal of unbiased neutrality, however, turned out to be much more difficult to fulfill than the requirement to establish a necessary degree of familiarity and mutual trust. On the one hand, I needed to become familiar enough to learn about

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<sup>2</sup> Tanju, vocalist of the Turkish bands UÇK Grind and Asafated, had been in close contact with Philippe de L'Argillère of the French band Misanthrope, who is also founder of the record label Holy Records. The Turkish metal label Hammer Müzik has been cooperating with Yishai Swearts from Israeli metal label Raven Music for years. Back in the mid- and late 1990s, I had been tape trading with both Philippe and Yishai.

how people act, feel, and think, but, on the other hand, I had to avoid going native in order to keep the critical distance necessary to ensure adherence to academic standards. The danger of becoming too much of an insider, thereby losing the perspective of an outside observer, was constantly present throughout my research. Sometimes it proved tough to maintain the ability to observe a setting and its actors from a distanced, and preferably neutral, position. Many of the social practices in the field were so familiar to me—so “normal”—that it was difficult to reach the level of abstraction that would enable me to observe their meaning objectively. Recurrent periods of absence from the field, however, helped me to detach myself from the scene and regain analytical distance. The research process was also accompanied by frequent presentations of my findings at workshops, seminars, and conferences. Subsequent discussions coming out of these presentations, critical remarks by friends and colleagues, and inspiration from a series of other metal and hip-hop studies (Walser 1993, Kaya 2001, Forman 2002, Kahn-Harris 2007) helped me to overcome that sense of “normality” and closeness, which had been immanent to the situation in the field, and to work out an analytical approach that would provide me with a sufficient degree of abstraction and analytical distance.

*Embedded with the Underground: Collecting Data from Within*

From my position within the field, I gained insight into the day-to-day practices and routines of Turkish metalheads. It was further possible to study daily conflicts and experience the transgression of boundaries in various realms of life. Briefly speaking, the process of qualitative data collection, from the very beginning, involved extensive *participant observation*. The area of research concentrated on Beyoğlu and its various locations of nightlife entertainment (bars, cafés, concert halls), but also included public settings like record stores, rehearsal studios, festival venues, and a few places in the open where particular groups of metalheads would meet during the summertime. The bars relevant for my research were Caravan, Katarsiz, DoRock, Gandalf, Bronx, Arka Sokak, and the old and new Kemancı on Siraselviler Street. Some of the places closed during the fieldwork, while new ones opened. Over the last couple of years, the financial situation of bar and café owners had become increasingly volatile, particularly since the conservative government sharply increased alcohol taxes, and real estate prices have been skyrocketing. Nevertheless, the rock bars and cafés in Beyoğlu are still the most important places of gathering for the scene. For local metalheads, they provide a personal space of their own, where they can meet and socialize, especially in the evenings and during weekends, when they are free from work or university. Besides rock bars, Beyoğlu hosts the largest concentration of music stores in all of Istanbul, and probably all of Turkey. Mostly small music stores are situated around Tünel Square at the southern end of the İstiklal Caddesi, as well as alongside the road leading down the slope from Tünel towards the new Galata Bridge and the Golden Horn. Today, musicians can find all kinds of musical equipment in these stores, ranging from traditional instruments like the *saz* or *ney*, which are usually

produced in Turkey, to electric (bass) guitars, amplifiers, synthesizers, or drum kits, which—except for cymbals—are mostly imported from Europe and North America.<sup>3</sup>

Fieldwork also took place in other parts of the city, particularly in Bakırköy, Kadıköy, and Bostancı. Bakırköy, a densely-populated middle-class neighborhood on the western shores of Istanbul, is located approximately 15 kilometers from the city center. Kadıköy, Istanbul's oldest neighborhood, on the Eastern shores of the Bosphorus, is home to numerous cafés, bars, cinemas, and prestigious public and private high schools. Akmar, a shopping arcade, which hosts several record labels and record stores, is also located in central Kadıköy. Both districts separately spawned Istanbul's first local metal scenes. As of today, many musicians and scene members still live (or rehearse) in these areas. Regular visits to both districts were not only helpful, but inevitable. Bostancı, a middle-class neighborhood further east from Kadıköy, was similarly important for my fieldwork, as its waterfront was a popular place to hang out during summer evenings. For young metalheads from that area who could not find time to undertake the nearly one-hour bus ride to Taksim on the other side of the Bosphorus, or—more importantly—did not have the money to buy beer at one of the bars, they would often spent time at the Bostancı waterside promenade, chatting, listening to music, and drinking canned beer.

Moreover, I spent several weeks in other Turkish cities—namely Ankara, Eskişehir, Izmir, and Antalya—in order to gain an at least limited insight into the local metal scenes there. I also conducted a series of interviews with metalheads from other parts of Turkey while they were visiting Istanbul for festivals and concerts. Since the local scenes were interconnected, I frequently had the occasion to meet and talk to people from outside Istanbul. The process of participant observation, in addition to closely observing local settings and social practices, watching, and talking to people, also involved constantly keeping record of what had been observed. Therefore, detailed field notes were made throughout the process. Moreover, I was busy collecting documents like fanzines, flyers, photos, concert posters, tapes, CDs, and booklets, which were analyzed at a later stage of research.

A second method of qualitative data collection was *documentary analysis*. The documents principally derived from two sources: Turkish daily newspapers, and the metal scene itself (fanzines, webzines, flyers, lyrics, booklets, comic strips). Newspapers were particularly important in terms of studying the public perception of metal within Turkish society (see Chapter 3). Access was rather easy, since the newspaper archives were either available online or accessible through libraries and archives in Istanbul. As far as scene-related documents were concerned,

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<sup>3</sup> Istanbul is famous for the production of cymbals, even outside Turkey. The original company, which used to produce cymbals under the brand name Istanbul, dissolved after the death of one of its founders, Agop Tomurcuk, and has since been succeeded by two separate companies: Istanbul Agop and Istanbul Mehmet (named after the original company's founders Agop Tomurcuk and Mehmet Tamdeğer).

access was more complicated. No library or public archive collects or keeps a record of these mostly unofficial publications, wherefore I had to rely on small private archives. As a consequence, it was impossible to define and analyze the complete body of scene-related publications. Especially with regard to the early phase of metal in the 1980s, when the number of publications was still small, it turned out to be very difficult to find articles, flyers, posters, or other documents. Nevertheless, I was able to collect a variety of material granting insight into the emergence and development of Turkish metal.

The largest body of qualitative data, however, is derived neither from participant observation nor from documentary analysis, but from *in-depth interviewing*. Between November 2002 and September 2009, I conducted 72 narrative (thematic and biographic) interviews, as well as several dozen conversational interviews. This was done to gain insight into how individuals ascribe meaning to metal and to reconstruct the emergence and development of the Turkish metal scene through individual memories and experiences. My interview partners were between 17 and 43 years old, and mostly male.<sup>4</sup> All of them had an affiliation with metal and actively participated in the scene, either by editing a fanzine, playing in a band, running a record label, or regularly visiting concerts and rock bars. Thematically focused narrative interviews, on several occasions, were conducted as group interviews. This was particularly the case when questioning musicians from the same band.

Except for a few email interviews, the questioning took place in face-to-face situations, mostly in the evening or at night, for most interviewees had regular jobs or were studying at the university. Turkish employees usually work a six-day week from Monday to Saturday, wherefore in a few cases it was difficult to arrange a date for conducting or continuing the interview. Depending on the particular situation and needs of the interviewees, meetings were arranged in a variety of public and private spaces: in cafés, at concert venues, in parks, at private homes, or in offices. The narrative interviews ranged in length from 35 minutes to four hours, and were conducted in three different languages: English (41), Turkish (26), and German (5). All but a few of the thematic and biographical interviews were recorded on minidisc and later transcribed. The remaining ones were recorded through extensive field notes, as was the case with conversational interviews. The transcription phase took several months and, in the end, resulted in hundreds of pages of interview material.

One of the big names shaping biographical research methods in recent years is that of the German sociologist Gabriele Rosenthal. Based upon earlier works by her mentor Fritz Schütze, she has developed a systematic approach towards biographical interviewing, which, first and foremost, promises two things: an insight into the biographical meaning of social phenomena (Rosenthal 2004: 49), and an insight into the social meaning of particular events, incidents, and actions by drawing from the biographical experiences of individuals who had

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<sup>4</sup> For a complete list of interviews, see Appendix.

been witnessing them. To deploy Rosenthal's approach implies the assumption that metal has a biographical meaning to those who identify with its music and culture, as well as a social meaning with regard to how metal is perceived by the surrounding society. Following this line of argument, socialization into metal is further assumed to have an impact on how people's lives are shaped.

In accordance with Rosenthal's approach, biographical interviews either aimed at covering a person's life story—in the form of conducting thematically open biographical interviews—or concentrated on a particular phase or moment in a person's life—in this case, applying thematically focused biographical interviews. While the full life stories gave information about the wider context of individual socialization, the focus on particular periods or moments in life provided information on specific events, incidents, and (re)actions. It is a typical feature of biographical interviews to commence with an opening question that prompts an initial narrative in which the interviewee tells about his or her experiences. While the initial question of thematically open biographical interviews is supposed to be free from thematic restrictions, the initial question of thematically focused biographical interviews needs to be more precise in order to address a particular phase or moment in the life of the interviewee. Consequently, I prepared a set of initial questions corresponding to the particular interview context. Concerning thematically open biographical interviews, the initial question sounded as follows:

As you already know, I am interested in the life stories and personal experiences of Turkish metalheads. Would you please tell me about your life and the experiences you have had? You may start from wherever you want, and proceed up to now. Please take your time and feel free to talk about everything you consider relevant to mention.

Thematically focused biographical interviews, however, addressed the biographical experiences of individuals in connection with particular events, incidents, or social actions, and were addressed by more specific questions. With the intention of learning more about the impact of the moral panics on the lives of Istanbul's metalheads, I then asked:

I am interested in your personal experiences during the satanic panic of 1999, when Ömer and his friends killed that girl at the Ortaköy cemetery. Could you tell me (more) about the situation following the incident? As I said, I am interested in your personal experiences during that period.

Questions needed to be as precise as possible in order to avoid misunderstanding and confusion. The question outlined above aimed at studying personal experiences during the moral panic of 1999. In fact, there had been a series of moral panics within a relatively short period of time, and when I commenced interviewing metalheads in Istanbul, I had only learned about one particular incident. During interview sessions, I consequently questioned my interlocutors about the "Satanism



case” (*Satanizm olayı*) without adding any further precision. And though they were ready to share their thoughts and experiences without hesitation, I was left in confusion. It took me several weeks and a series of interviews to realize that they were referring to separate incidents and different persons.

In addition to biographical interviews, also playing an important role were thematic interviews with musicians, record company owners, fanzine editors, journalists, and radio hosts. Interviews in those cases were directed at particular aspects of Turkish metal culture and history (tape trading, the privatization of public radio, and so on). Accordingly, initial questions addressed particular developments, events, trends, or social and cultural phenomena. The following question, for instance, focused on the early years of Turkish metal:

I am interested in the emergence of the Turkish metal scene. Based upon your own experiences, could you tell me about the early years of Turkish metal? I am interested in whatever comes to your mind, so please take your time and feel free to talk about everything you consider relevant to mention.

In many respects, particularly concerning the history of Turkish metal, I had to start from scratch, for which exploratory questions, as the one outlined here, provided me with the necessary information to structure and rethink the process of further research. In addition to these rather practical considerations on empirical research, conceptual considerations on the study’s key terms, “culture” and “boundaries,” were also of importance.

### *Getting Started: Making Meaning in Everyday Life*

The term “culture” or “cultural resources” appears on many occasions throughout this study, for example in connection with phrases like “cultural representations” or “metal music and culture.” It seems then imperative to clarify what is meant by talking about culture in the present context. As a variety of studies dealing with the conceptualization of culture have shown (Sewell 1999, Mitchell 2000, Reckwitz 2000, Edles 2002, Spillman 2002), culture turns out to be an ambiguous, diffuse, and volatile category full of analytic confusion. Scholars across multiple disciplines relate culture to different meanings, sometimes without even giving an explanation on its context-specific usage. This, however, contributes to the vagueness of culture as an analytical category.

In view of the myriad meanings of “culture” in contemporary academic discourse, a number of works in cultural sociology aim to bring analytical clarity into what American historian and sociologist William H. Sewell, Jr., has described as the “cacophony of contemporary discourse about culture” (1999: 35). Authors like Laura Desfor Edles, Lyn Spillman, and Andreas Reckwitz make culture an analytically tangible category by tracing the prevalent lines of thought that have shaped discourse over the past decades. In doing so, they make distinctions along similar lines.



Lyn Spillman, in the introduction to her book *Cultural Sociology* (2002: 2–4), identifies three main theoretical options concerning the usage of the term: culture as a feature of entire groups and societies, culture as a separate realm of human expression, and culture as processes of meaning-making. In the first case, culture stands for an entire way of life of a particular group, society, or people—Spillman describes this as the “anthropological sense of the term” (ibid. 2). The second theoretical option, which she identifies as “the core of several forms of scholarship now considered ‘humanities’” (ibid. 3), describes culture as a purely aesthetic realm of art, music, and literature, which is separated from other, mundane realms of social life. The third option refers to culture as processes of meaning-making.

Laura Desfor Edles’s notion of culture broadly coincides with that of Spillman. In her study, *Cultural Sociology in Practice* (2002), she similarly differentiates between three concepts: an ethnographic, an aesthetic, and a symbolic one (ibid. 2–6). The ethnographic definition refers to culture as an entire way of life. That is to say, culture includes all elements of social life, as a result of which it is no longer possible “to distinguish the cultural realm from other dimensions of society. There is a complete fusion of the *social* and the *cultural realms*” (ibid. 4). Culture is everything but nature, and therefore lacks analytical precision. The second, aesthetic, definition refers to culture as “high culture.” This elitist conceptualization presupposes a dichotomy of a superior high culture and an inferior low culture. Herein Edles’s notion of culture slightly differs from that of Spillman, who takes a more neutral position. For Spillman, in contrast to Edles, the question of aesthetics does not necessarily relate to an elitist notion of culture, but also comprises the realms of popular culture, folk culture, or even mass culture (Spillman 2002: 3). The third, symbolic, notion of culture, according to Edles, regards culture as systems or patterns of shared meanings.

Andreas Reckwitz in his lengthy investigation into the emergence and transformation of cultural theory in modern academic thought, *Die Transformation der Kulturtheorien: zur Entwicklung eines Theorieprogramms* (2000), identifies four major concepts of culture (ibid. 61 et seq.). Unlike Spillman and Edles, he further differentiates between a normative notion of culture (“*normativer Kulturbegriff*”) and a totality-oriented notion of culture (“*totalitätsorientierter Kulturbegriff*”). Together, both concepts comply with what Spillman and Edles describe as the “entire way of life” of a particular group or society. The normative notion of culture, however, implies the existence of a universally desirable, ideal way of life. This contrasts with the totality-oriented, holistic notion of culture, which implies a neutral, context-specific study of people’s lives and societies. With reference to differentiation theory, Reckwitz outlines a third concept of culture (“*differenzierungstheoretischer Kulturbegriff*”), which widely corresponds to the aesthetic notion of culture as depicted by Spillman and Edles. Culture, in this sense, relates to the production, dissemination, and administration of intellectual and artistic activities (ibid. 79–84). The fourth and final concept he describes as the meaning and knowledge oriented notion of culture (“*bedeutungs- und wissensorientierter Kulturbegriff*”). Herein, culture is neither normative,