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Estonian Pagan Metal Subculture: Community and Authenticity
Master's thesis

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Introduction

Metal subcultures around the world are known and recognised due to their remarkable style and their banding together around heavy music. Metal music is diverse and includes different subgenres, around which separate subcultures form. The focus of this Master's thesis lies on the extreme metal subculture in Estonia, particularly the pagan metal subculture.

The reasons behind my choice of the topic are both academic and personal. I started listening to metal music when I was 9 years old and have become a devoted metalhead¹ since then. I was never a consistent part of the scene in my home country Ukraine due to a variety of circumstances, yet I have acquired a lot of subcultural knowledge from the emic standpoint over the years of experience. After I moved to Estonia for my studies, my personal interest in the local extreme metal subculture transformed into a research endeavour.

However, while the vague research ideas had led me to the community of interest, I formed the main research interest while already being part of it. Through my fieldwork in Estonia, I have become a part of the community of my research interest. My prior subcultural knowledge assisted me in joining the community as I could understand the “details”: symbolism, meanings, merchandise, memes, jokes etc. The subculturists accepted me as a fellow subculturist and allowed me to join not only the public events but also more informal ones, which granted me access to better observation and analysis of subcultural forms of expression. My reflection on the extreme metal subcultural practices and values often made me question my own perception of authenticity and subcultural boundary protection. This way, I became striving to understand how authenticity is constructed and reproduced within this subculture and what were the possible external discourses that influenced the formation of the subculture in the way it exists nowadays.

Even though the subgenre categories are important for the thematic orientation and defining the community, it is important to note that this thesis focuses primarily on the social and cultural practices that define the community rather than on the musical

¹ “A fan or performer of metal music” (Merriam-Webster).

characteristics of the genre. Hence, the musicological analysis of pagan metal would require a separate direction of research.

Moreover, the part “pagan” in pagan metal does not necessarily refer to neo-pagan religious practices. While some pagan metal musicians might be neo-pagan practitioners, I use “pagan metal” for thematically uniting the bands that lean towards topics of history, mythology and nature in their creative expressions and do not focus on my research participants’ religious views. This way, the analysis of neo-paganism in modern pagan metal would require a different direction of research.

The bands I united under the “pagan metal subculture” have a significant feature they share in common in their thematic orientation, which is drawing inspiration from history and local natural landscapes. The band members draw on historical narratives and cultural traditions to shape and express their subcultural identity, which is very common among pagan and black metal bands in different European countries (e.g. see Manea 2016, Deeks 2016, Petrusėvičiūtė 2010). The lyrical analysis assisted me with a thematic selection of the bands for my research analysis, however, the research analysis of lyrics is a different direction of studies and would require choosing a different analytical approach to the thesis (see Valijärvi 2022 for an example of lyrical analysis).

Considering the surprising spread and visibility of the metal fans here, research on the Estonian metal communities appears to be generally scarce. I highly rely on Lii Araste’s (Araste 2010, Araste & Ventsel 2015) and Toni-Matti Karjalainen (Karjalainen 2022) subcultural analysis in this research, however, this research is the first attempt to offer a comprehensive perspective on the Estonian pagan metal subculture and subcultural authenticity. The thesis offers insights into the values, beliefs and practices of a particular group in the wider metal scene in Estonia and how these intersect with broader cultural, social and political contexts. In addition, the research seeks to contribute to the development of a more nuanced understanding of metal music scenes in Estonia, which is a vibrant aspect of the country’s popular culture. The study can contribute to the ongoing discussion of subcultural theory, particularly with regard to the social constitution of subcultures and hierarchy, subcultural boundaries and the notion of authenticity.

The aims of this thesis are:

1) To provide a new perspective on pagan metal within the field of metal music studies by incorporating ethnological fieldwork-based research analysis.

2) To investigate the social constitution of the Estonian pagan metal subculture through the analysis of the subcultural network and social units.

3) To track the influence of historical and political factors on the formation of the pagan metal subculture in Estonia and its subcultural morals.

4) To examine the concept of reflexive anti-reflexivity and its role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of members within the Estonian pagan metal subculture, and to explore how this relates to historical reflections and subcultural values and morals.

5) To investigate the notion of subcultural authenticity and its reproduction within the Estonian pagan metal subculture from both individual and collective perspectives through etic analysis of the emic perception of subcultural authenticity.

Based on these aims, the thesis will answer the research questions of what are the historical, social and cultural factors that contributed to the formation of the pagan metal subculture as well as its values, morals and attitudes and its social constitution? Furthermore, how is the subcultural authenticity of Estonian pagan metal perceived, negotiated and reproduced by the members of the subculture from both individual and collective perspectives?

The research methodology is fieldwork-based and data was collected through participant observation, interviews and online questionnaires (November 2021 – until April 2023). The major part of the data I gathered during participant observation was collected in formal, semi-formal and informal social settings, where I observed, conversed and subsequently took both digital and mental notes. The research participants are musicians related to such Estonian bands as Ulguränd, Langenu, Loits, Bestia, Wolfskrone, Tapper and Kaev.

The thesis is divided into four chapters and ten subchapters, each exploring a different aspect of the pagan metal subculture in Estonia, and the thesis structure is planned according to the aims of the thesis.

To begin with, Chapter 1 offers a literature review on subculture and metal music studies. The chapter provides a general overview of metal music studies, including the history and development of the discipline, and then focuses on research specifically related to pagan metal. Then, Chapter 2 outlines the terminology and

methodology used in the study. The chapter explains the concepts and terms used in the thesis and describes the research methods employed in the study, including participant observation, interviews and questionnaires. Ethical concerns are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the pagan metal subculture in Estonia. The chapter explores the formation and development of extreme metal in Estonia and provides an analysis of the subcultural social constitution. The theoretical framework of the community analysis is based on the concept of network developed by Dorothy Noyes (Noyes 1995) and J. Patrick Williams' "communication-interlocks" (Williams 2011).

Finally, Chapter 4 examines the analysis of the emic perspective of subcultural authenticity and the factors that have influenced subcultural worldviews and behaviours. The chapter explores the meaning of the historical context in forming subcultural values and worldviews as interest in performing and listening to the pagan metal subgenre can be seen as a response to the certain intertwining of historical events. The chapter discusses "reflexive anti-reflexivity" (Kahn-Harris 2004, Kahn-Harris 2007) as a way to analyse subculturists' responses to historical and political circumstances. Finally, the chapter explores subcultural authenticity based on the "reproducing authenticity" concept developed by Susanna Larsson (Larsson 2013).

The conclusion summarises the findings of the study and provides a reflection on the significance of the research. Additionally, I offer a scheme that pulls together all the themes discussed in the thesis. The appendices include the tables with interview dates and fieldwork-related events as well as their dates and a brief description, an example of fieldwork note-taking, interview questions and questionnaire questions.

By exploring these topics in depth, my thesis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the subculture and its significance within the field of metal music studies.

CHAPTER 1. Literature overview

As my research lies in metal music studies, this chapter is aimed at providing an overview of the history of research in the field and the works I used for my theoretical basis. The overview will include a brief look at the metal music studies history and the metal music research of immediate relevance to my thesis.

1.1 Subculture and metal music studies

Subculture studies arose in the 1920s with the Chicago School of sociologists developing subcultural theory in order to understand the deviant behaviours of certain groups of people. Their focus on delinquency was used to explain “social pathologies” of some peripheral cultural groups such as criminals, closed ethnic groups, different youth groups etc. without distinguishing subcultures as actual cultural units (see Williams 2007, Williams 2011, Gelder 2007). For the purpose of exploring these groups, American sociologists located them in an urban ecosystem and used so-called sociological ethnography to explore the social units, meticulously noting the everyday activities of the research participants. This approach can be seen, for example, in the works of William Isaac Thomas (e.g. see Thomas 1937), who contributed significantly to the sociology of migration by studying Polish peasants in America.

One of the noticeable concepts developed in the Chicago School was symbolic interaction (see Blumer 1969). Herbert Blumer coined the term in 1937 with the purpose of explaining how the transmitted meanings are decoded during the process of interpretive communication as well as to emphasise that meaning itself is derived out of social interaction (Gelder 2007: 43, see Blumer 1969). According to Ken Gelder, symbolic interaction helped sociologists to move away from the deviance model and focus on subcultural distinctiveness (Gelder 2007: 43). The first work that used this viewpoint was *Subcultures* (see Arnold 1970), a collection edited by David O. Arnold that focused on deviancy in the criminological sense. Hence, in the frame of Chicago School approaches, the studies of the subcultures had shifted the focus onto criminal studies, where the concept of deviance kept playing the leading role.

One of David O. Arnold's followers was John Irwin, who contributed significantly to the development of the subculture concept. His theorising on deviancy was intertwined with the criminological aspects of it as he did not see delinquency as a defining matter for one's subcultural involvement. Namely, Irwin responded to subcultures and deviancy correlation without positioning subcultures as deviant by default but rather seeing subcultural belongingness as a certain lifestyle (see Irwin 1977). His focus on delinquency and shift to criminal sociology resulted in the prominent study *The Felon* (see Irwin 1987), which is based on extensive fieldwork and demonstrates the life paths of different criminal types of felons.

This way, the Chicago School fostered scholars who eventually gave birth to criminal sociology as a field of study. Modern criminologists also apply cultural analysis as an analytical tool for criminal sociology cases. Yet, the criminological perspective in subcultural studies is not without its problems. As J. Patrick Williams notes, the biggest problem of the criminological perspective in subcultural studies is the way scholars link subcultures and crime, representing the youth groups as social problems (Williams 2007: 575).

In the UK, the Birmingham School of subcultural studies emerged in the 1970s, giving way to an entirely new perspective, which combined multiple disciplines from social sciences and humanities. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies or CCCS at the University of Birmingham focused on investigating the subcultures of post-war Britain that were quite distinct social units already in the early 1950s. They saw subcultural behaviours as class-based and provoked as a response to bourgeoisie cultural hegemony. As a result, the main focus of the CCCS research was working-class youth, which can be tracked in the fundamental texts for British Cultural Studies: Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (see Hoggart 1957) and the literary scholar Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (Williams 1983). These two studies, together with E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (Thompson 2013), laid the groundwork for the establishment of the CCCS and for its scholars' focus on class as a matter of organisation and action rather than a thing (Gelder 2007: 84). As Gelder indicates, Thompson, in particular, offered an understanding of class as an organised, articulate phenomenon and defined the English working class culturally, meaning their rituals and traditions (ibid: 84).

Orientation on the cultural analysis resulted in the CCCS scholars not perceiving subcultures as necessarily linked to deviance, in contradistinction to the Chicago School. British cultural theorist Phil Cohen emphasised the importance of distinguishing between subculture and delinquency (Cohen 1997). Thus, instead of relying on psychological and criminological analysis, the CCCS decoded subcultures in terms of social and cultural aspects, specifically looking at the correlation between subcultures and social class changes.

What is more, the CCCS scholars leaned highly on the continental theories of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser and Roland Barthes (Williams 2011: 26). For instance, the above-mentioned Phil Cohen applied an Althusserian reading of Jacques Lacan's concept of the "imaginary" and Claude Levi-Strauss's concept of "myth" to explore "magical solutions" in subcultures (Cohen 1997: 48-50). In doing so, he reconstructed the theory of "myth" as an account of how subcultures magically resolve social contradictions through diverse narratives of bricolage in the form of styles, symbols and rituals (Blackman 2005: 5). Cohen's theory introduced a possibility to interpret subcultures as a language and so the CCCS were first to introduce semiotical notions in the subcultural analysis.

The British subcultural studies scholars brought a lot more context to the growth of subcultures study by applying ideas of hegemony and resistance, at the same time, however, overemphasising the role of the etic observer and his interpretation of visual symbols and subcultural style. This point of view seems elitist in the sense that one could only be considered a good subcultural studies scholar in case he was a trained semiotician, who, by reading symbols and codes, could understand the ideological ideas in subcultural visual ways of representation (Williams 2011: 29). As J. Patrick Williams noted, in the CCCS scholars' perspective "all meaning was ideology-laden and subcultural youths themselves did not always understand what their objects and practices "really" meant" (ibid: 29).

One of the prominent works for the CCCS I would like to highlight is Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Hebdige was among the first scholars who provided elaborate descriptions of subcultures that were united by different aspects of a certain music style and his book served as an important introductory reading for my own research. The literature scholar Ken Gelder sees

Hebdige's impact on the postmodern subcultural theories as huge and, because of this, problematic. Gelder states that postmodern scholars obsessively return to Hebdige's book "as if it constitutes a kind of ur-text that has cast its shadow over everything that follows" (Gelder 2007: 100). Indeed, the book demonstrates Hebdige's lack of ethnographic aspects of work as he did not draw on in-depth fieldwork in his theorising. His focus on class segregation I recognise as a limited understanding of subcultural variability as well as seeing subcultures as static and purely homogenous rather than fluid. However, he provided a wider understanding of the youth communities. For example, he saw punks as more than simply rebellious problematic youth groups but discussed the encoded values behind their vivid style (Hebdige 1979: 62-73).

Although Dick Hebdige did not delve deep into collective practices analysis as he was focusing on the meaning of subcultural style, his thoughts served as an enormous inspiration to the following subculture studies scholars, who further developed or completely reconstructed some of his ideas. Thus, the postmodern, post-Hebdige, pool of subcultural theories is extremely diverse.

I would like to particularly highlight J. Patrick Williams as this thesis draws heavily on his subcultural theory. In his *Subcultural Theory*, Williams explores not just separate subcultural groups but methods and tools for subcultural analysis. He presents an overview of the history of subcultural studies and delves into reconstructing the old concepts or introducing new ones. The concept I find fascinating and especially useful for this thesis is "communication-interlocks". This concept emphasises the possibility of subcultural knowledge to spread through different kinds of societal channels, which Williams distinguishes as four types of linkages: multiple group cultures, weak ties, structural roles and media diffusion (Williams 2011: 41). I will use this concept as well as other Williams' ideas later in Chapter 3 in order to investigate the way subcultural network functions and how the ideas are being transmitted within the different zones of the subcultural network.

Metal music studies, the field where my research lies, originated from subcultural studies. Consequently, I am going to offer an overview of subcultural studies research related to metal music studies in the following section.

1.2 Metal music studies

Metal music studies are often referred to academically as “Heavy metal music studies” (for instance, see Wallach & Hickam 2011 or Rowe 2018). In my view, the phrasing “metal music studies” is more appropriate when referencing the academic field in which scholars investigate metal music and subculture. This is useful for the purposes of my research as it helps to disassociate heavy metal as a specific metal music subgenre from the broader field of studies. In addition, even though my research participants did not reference metal music studies in our communication, they did mention “heavy metal” as a genre and not as an umbrella term. For them, it was “metal” that served as an umbrella term and subgenre indicator, such as thrash, death or others, is added for a specific music reference (from the fieldwork materials). Understanding the difference between heavy metal as a genre and heavy metal music studies is important to avoid confusion when seeing references to heavy metal studies because research in this field does not necessarily refer to the heavy metal genre only but to diverse metal music subgenres, depending on the context of research.

This way, heavy metal music studies usually indicate the direction in the subcultural studies that involves all known metal music subgenres, including heavy metal as a music genre. For more clarity, I want to provide a brief overview of the genre itself. Heavy metal music as a genre emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s from the rock subgenres such as blues rock and acid rock. Its most famous pioneers are such bands as Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Judas Priest and Deep Purple. It developed further in the mid-70s with the popularity of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) movement, from which originated bands that had a major influence on the emergence of the extreme metal subgenres of the late 1980s and 1990s. Some of the prominent NWOBHM bands are Motörhead, Def Leppard, Diamond Head, Venom and Iron Maiden. This way, heavy metal is a music genre, from which many of the currently existing metal music subgenres developed, without, though, substituting heavy metal as a peculiar music genre itself.

At first, heavy metal as a genre was mostly looked at in the context of rock music studies (e.g. see Weinstein 2009: 1-7), so I explain the use of heavy metal with the fact that the first scholarly texts on metal music operated with heavy metal as an

umbrella term for all existing metal music subgenres by the beginning of the 1990s (see Weinstein 1991, Gaines 1991, Walser 1993).

In the 1990s, the dramatic growth of metal music bands in the new, more extreme, branches of heavy metal music occurred. Thus, the first fundamental studies on metal music appeared already at the beginning of the 1990s. These studies, however, mostly referred to heavy metal in general terms and did not provide clear genre stratification. For example, Deena Weinstein, a scholar who I will cite a lot throughout this thesis, was among the pioneers of metal research with her monograph *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* (1991), where she not only tried to explain and describe heavy metal music and subculture but also to defend them from misconceptions generated among the public. Weinstein reflected on her motivation to start writing the book this way: “My first reaction to the anti-metal propaganda was incredulity. I had no problem with politicians spouting nonsense, but I had been too naïve not to appreciate the way that the news media were pleased enough to be their stenographers” (Brown et al 2016: 25). The revised and more elaborate version of this work, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture* (2000), is essential for metal music studies and served as a theoretical background for me at the beginning of this research.

Among the other pioneers, I want to highlight Robert Walser, the subcultural studies researcher and musicologist affiliated with Case Western Reserve University. His *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993) was a revelation for the field of metal music studies that had just started developing as it was a vision of diverse subcultural aspects in the metal music scene, such as identity, power or community.

Interest in metal music studies grew exponentially after Weinstein’s and Walser’s work. Their books were followed by essential studies that explored different aspects of metal music and subculture. As an example, I can offer the reader the selection provided by Robert McParland: Harris M. Berger (1999), Steve Waksman (2009), Susan Fast (2001), Natalie Purcell (2003), Glenn Pillsbury (2006), Chris McDonald (2007) and Keith Kahn-Harris (2007) (McParland 2018: 3).

Among the recent studies, an edited collection *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies* offers a reflection on the modern state of metal music research history and essential aspects of metal music and subculture: scenes,

identity, gender, commerciality and future of metal (see Brown et al 2016). One such reflection was provided by Brian Hickam, a researcher at the Indiana Institute of Technology. He indicates that Keith Kahn-Harris' book *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (2007), which I referred to above, was revolutionary and it was, indeed, in terms of providing new perspectives on metal music research as it distinguished between the diversity of extreme metal music subgenres and tackled them as separate units (Hickam 2014). However, it still did not push scholars, interested in metal music research, into uniting their efforts around making metal music studies recognisable as a separate field. Hickam states that even after the book was published the general tendency of the scholars, who had conducted research related to metal, was to stay within the frames of their academic subject areas and publish in journals defined by those areas (Brown et al 2016: 9). Researchers saw it as a way of securing their academic career; some of Hickam respondents mentioned concerns about "academic respectability of studying metal" (Hickam 2014: 11). A lot has changed since then thanks to some of the most proactive researchers who were the first to step out of the comfort zone.

The formation of metal music studies into a distinct branch of research arose from occasions when all the interested scholars could meet for a discussion. The first event of this kind was the heavy metal conference in Salzburg in 2008 (Shepherd 2008) organised by the UK scholar Niall Scott. After the conference's success, other conferences on metal music studies started taking place regularly.

As another crucial component in the metal studies development Brown et al see the establishment of the metal studies bibliography (Brown et al 2016: 10). Indeed, with the establishment of the International Society for Metal Music Studies (ISMMS) metal studies scholars united around the discussion of metal music and facilitation of academic research in the field. The ISMMS aims at promoting interdisciplinary approaches, making metal music studies recognisable as an academic discipline and overall contributing to the academic and, notably, music communities (ISMMS). The ISMMS has been maintaining the literature database of papers related to metal music studies, which, in my opinion, is a significant assistant to young researchers like me in seeking relevant materials and data (Metal Studies Bibliography).

A strong wave of interest in metal and, as a result, metal-related publications has been connected to the black metal music genre. Black metal is a subgenre of metal music that originated in the early 1980s, primarily in Norway. Being one of the extreme metal subgenres, black metal is known to the public mostly by its radical elements: extensive use of occult symbols, references to Satan and Satanism and association of some of the musicians to church arsons in Norway. Keith Kahn-Harris, a sociologist and music critic, has studied the black metal subculture extensively. Kahn-Harris does not see the black metal community as one that strives to shock the public or provoke moral panic (Kahn-Harris 2007). In fact, he was the first to describe the black metal subculture as transgressive, meaning its positioning in between the spectacular and the mundane. He discusses the tendency of the subculturists to make their practices mundane and uncontroversial as a way of disengaging from the extremity of texts produced within the scene (Kahn-Harris 2004: 105). Giving the black metal subculture a chance to be seen in the light of academic research rather than public criticism and judgement I see, firstly, as a huge step forward in the research of extreme metal subculturists, their practices and style and, secondly, as a great attempt to discuss the diversity of metal genres and highlight the distinctiveness of their features.

There is research related to some aspects of metal music in Estonia. Lii Araste researched the role of communication in the Estonian heavy metal subculture (Araste 2010, Araste & Ventsel 2015). Toni-Matti Karjalainen presented an overview of the history of the Estonian metal subculture and the subculture's social constitution in an article and a conference paper (2019, 2022).

The folk metal band Metsatöll has received special attention in scholarly research. For example, Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi analysed the response to cultural trauma in the band's lyrics (2022) and Emilia Pawłusz discussed the band in the context of nation-building and identity in Estonia (2017). Overall, however, research analysis of the different metal subgenres is still lacking and many subjects related to social, economic and cultural aspects of the scene require further attention.

Finally, one of the key papers I draw on to support my analysis in this thesis is Susanna Larsson's work on constructing individual and social authenticity in the metal subculture (Larsson 2013). She explores the interplays of individual and collective perceptions of authenticity in the metal community in Sweden and proposes a new

concept of subcultural authenticity – “reproducing authenticity”. I will discuss and incorporate her ideas in my analysis later in Chapter 4.

Academic interest in specific genres rather than in the general pool of heavy metal bands has led to discussions of the extreme metal subgenres that constitute the core interest for this research. Throughout the last decade, researchers have been discussing separate subgenres of metal music more and more, focusing on the specific features of the scenes, symbolism, common morals, gender discussions and other subcultural aspects (e.g. see Purcell 2003, Mudrian & Peel 2004 or Phillipov 2012 on death metal; Maspero & Ribaric 2012 or Wilson 2014 on black metal). As the pagan metal music subgenre is essential for this research, I want to provide an overview of the scholarly interest in it and discuss the way researchers have approached it.

1.3 Research on pagan metal

With the growing research interest in metal music studies, subcultural studies scholars turned to investigate the diversity of metal music subgenres, including those of extreme metal. Such genres of metal music as thrash, death, black and doom metal typically constitute the meaning behind the *extreme metal* umbrella term (the more elaborate genre definitions are presented in the first part of Chapter 2).

The ground-breaking work of Keith Kahn-Harris contributed significantly to extreme metal scenes gradually becoming a centre of attention for some scholars over recent years. In his above-mentioned *Extreme Metal Music and Culture on the Edge* (2007) and other valuable papers (e.g. see Kahn-Harris 2004, Kahn-Harris 2015), he discusses extreme metal scenes in great detail. Of leading interest for me are his reflections on the *black metal* scene as he talks about lyrical and symbolical aspects as well as the communal ideology of resistance to Christianity, elitism and the concept of reflexive anti-reflexivity, which I use for the subcultural analysis in this research.

The black metal subculture seems to be the most investigated one among the rest of the extreme metal scenes. Researchers have touched upon its symbolism, ideology, aesthetics and history from a diversity of angles (to explore these aspects in-depth, see e.g. Hoffin 2018, Hoffin 2023, Patterson 2013, Steinken 2018, Tyft 2021, Wilson 2014). Special attention has been given to the most scandalous occurrence related to black

metal, namely the relation between church arsons and the Early Norwegian black metal scene, which made black metal known publicly (e.g. see in Steinken 2018, Wilson 2014, Shadrack 2021, Vrzal 2017).

When compared to black metal, *pagan metal* is a rather problematic area in the larger field of metal music studies. If the reader tried to understand the essence of the pagan metal subgenre through scholarly papers only, she would be confused by the absence of defined approaches to the studies of the subgenre and, moreover, by the mere lack of a clear definition.

This problem arises for two reasons. Firstly, pagan metal is not considered a separate subgenre at all by some scholars. For instance, Imke von Helden claims that “it does not really make sense to differentiate too much” (von Helden 2012: 156). Secondly, because of the ambiguity of the definition, it seems like scholars have not come to a common ground in explaining what pagan metal essentially is.

The work that stands out for me and some other researchers is Deena Weinstein’s chapter titled specifically “Pagan metal” in *Pop Pagans: Paganism and Popular Music* (Weston & Bennett 2013). She sought to structuralise the genre, yet questioned its actual relevancy and underlined its ambiguity. She split the genre into three branches: Neo-Paganism, roots Paganism and chauvinistic Paganism (Weinstein 2014: 58). Weinstein, however, does not provide the reader with a clear explanation of these categories and neither does she tell her readers how to distinguish the bands in the given categorisation. Moreover, she does not give examples of what, for instance, “chauvinistic Paganism” metal bands are and what this expression can even mean: is it about the religious beliefs of the members, about their ideology or somehow about their music after all?

Furthermore, though Weinstein indicates that “[w]hat Pagan metal bands mean by the term “pagan” varies wildly”, she eventually talks about it in the context of sound as if she was describing folk metal, and then she elaborates on Viking metal when discussing the lyrics (Weinstein 2014: 58). This altogether makes me think that Deena Weinstein merged folk, pagan, Viking and even black metal into one construct, talking about different features of all of them yet not defining what is actual pagan metal. She simplified the genre by deconstructing it into the two discourses of paganism and metal,

stating that the specific meanings of various themes listed by pagan metal bands need to be understood within these two discourses (Weinstein 2014: 70).

Jumping off Weinstein's ideas, some scholars locate the pieces of their research following her classification, however, rather partially, without expanding it and providing more examples to the categories. Namely, Irina-Maria Manea mentions Weinstein's categorisation and states that "pagan metal is not a well-defined genre, a reflection of the fragmentation occurring both in the extreme metal scene and in Neopagan movements" (Manea 2016: 118). However, even though Manea often cites Weinstein, she does not elaborate on her understanding of Weinstein's classification, offering it as just one of the possible "solutions". She offers her own in-depth analysis of the construction of cultural identity through Norse myth in Scandinavian and German pagan metal and understands the genre as space for the subculturists' expression of authenticity and collective truth, infused in using the past as a metaphor for the primordial and mythologised heritage (Manea 2016: 116).

In the newest works on pagan metal, extreme metal studies scholars try to rethink Deena Weinstein's attempts to discuss the genre and the ways to define it. Alexander Hofmann underlines the confusion, which Weinstein may have potentially caused by her summarising all three metal subgenres of pagan metal, Viking metal and folk metal under one category of pagan metal (Hofmann 2020: 75). He emphasises the importance of having a good metal music knowledge and experience in order to avoid the presentation of misleading facts and confusing results. In addition, he highlights the importance of analysing the music along with the lyrics to categorise the bands. Significantly, Hofmann seems to be the first scholar to clearly distinguish pagan metal, Viking metal and folk metal by providing an instrumentation analysis and musical analysis to prove his hypothesis.

PhD dissertations published during the last 10 years constitute a significant addition to existing research, including Anna-Maria Manea's work (Manea 2016). Some other substantial examples are works of Mark David Deeks and Agnė Petrusėvičiūtė. Deeks' dissertation was published in 2016, at the University of Leeds, under the name *National Identity in Northern and Eastern European Heavy Metal*. One of the main ideas of Mark Deeks' work lies in a theory that pagan metal was constructed around the Nordic identity, to such a great extent that he even prefers the term Viking metal when

talking about both Scandinavian bands and Finnish, Latvian, Ukrainian or Russian bands. Even though I consider it a limiting terminological choice (see more in Chapter 2.1), his discussion of National Romanticism and its impact on pagan metal is highly relevant to my research. He analyses how National Romanticism ideas can be interpreted through metal music and how they could contribute to subcultural identities. In turn, Petrusėvičiūtė's work *The Construction of Pagan Identity in Lithuanian "Pagan Metal" Culture* serves as a good example of in-depth research devoted to one subgenre (Petrusėvičiūtė 2010).

Some of the most recent works directly linked to pagan metal are articles related to the subgenre in different countries (e.g. in the Czech Republic – Puchovský 2022 or Spain (Basque) – Weston 2011) or the diverse aspects of the subgenre (e.g. aesthetics of heathenism – Manea 2020). In Estonia, a Bachelor's thesis on pagan metal and its religious component was written by Kristiin Hanimägi in 2015 (Hanimägi 2015).

Overall, to sum up this chapter, the subculture studies scholars provided a fertile ground for metal music studies. In metal music studies, different directions developed as metal music itself progressed and new subgenres grew out of it. Studies on black metal are the most relevant to my research as pagan metal is closely related to black metal. Some concepts developed in the frame of black metal studies are relevant to my research on the Estonian pagan metal subculture (such as Kahn-Harris' reflexive anti-reflexivity, for example). Concerning pagan metal studies, this branch of metal music studies is still in the process of developing, mainly because it is hard to group up the possibly related studies due to the ambiguity of pagan metal definitions.

CHAPTER 2. Terminology and methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss the metal music-related terminology relevant for this research. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, I want to provide an understanding of the features and differences between selected metal music subgenres, which constitute the context surrounding pagan metal. Secondly, I will explain what pagan metal is in the context of this research and discuss my vision of the pagan metal definition, based on participant observation, personal experience and previous scholarly work.

In the second subchapter, I will discuss the methods applied in conducting this work, my fieldwork reflections as well as give the reader an overview of the bands, which I observed or interviewed. I will also mention some of the ethical thoughts and concerns that are relevant in the context of this research.

2.1. Terminology

In this subchapter, I will explore the terminology used in metal subcultures and the challenges involved in defining and differentiating between various subgenres. Thus, this section is devoted to theorising about definitions of the key terms for this work: heavy metal, old-school heavy metal, extreme metal, extreme metal subculture, folk metal, Viking metal, black metal, paganism and, most importantly, pagan metal.

By leaning on personal and communal experiences, I can claim that being a metalhead (i.e. a fan or performer of metal music) does not make one constantly underline the relevancy or limits of the metal music genres and subgenres. However, it is crucial to distinguish between them and to understand what differentiates one genre from another in order to position one's research as clearly as possible and provide context for the reader who is not experienced in metal music. As this research is based on both emic (the in-subcultural point of view) and etic (an observer's viewpoint) perspectives, my being a subcultural member allows me to distinguish between the genres according to the accumulated knowledge: for me, the best way to learn about genre distinctions was hours of listening to the music alongside participation in

community practices. As a result, the following definitions are based on my own anthropological experience to a great extent.

Before defining pagan metal, the most important category in this research, it is necessary to understand the broader spectrum of where it lies. As I discussed in subchapter 1.2, scholars often use the term heavy metal in metal music studies as an umbrella term for all metal music genres (e.g. see Spracklen 2020, Weinstein 2009, Rowe 2018). From the in-subcultural point of view, based on my own experience and my fieldwork data, heavy metal is separate from other metal genres, referring as it does to classic metal bands that emerged in the late 1960s and early-mid 1970s (such as Iron Maiden, Judas Priest or Saxon). In scholarly papers though, *heavy metal* refers to metal music in general, including the variety of genres from the 1980s glam metal to blackgaze that originated in the early 2000s, while old-school heavy metal refers to a specific genre that subculturists refer to as simply heavy metal. *Old-school heavy metal* developed musical ideas from the cultural unit of rock music, which, in turn, had grown out from 50s rock'n'roll and encapsulated the most vivid and daring ideas of predecessors.

As heavy metal musicians had been progressing in the direction of heavier sounds, motives and meanings, extreme metal branches emerged. *Extreme metal* is an umbrella term for the group of metal subgenres that can be characterised as harsh and aggressive, most usually technical, fast and hugely transgressive in terms of violating the social order morality and sense of aesthetics (Kahn-Harris 2007). Its main subgenres are black metal, death metal and thrash metal, and they all include their own diverse subgenres (e.g. melodic death metal or atmospheric black metal) that oftentimes are on the edge of other musical styles and have adopted and combined their elements such as melodiousness or “clean” vocals. Keith Kahn-Harris aptly noted that death, thrash and black metal have radicalised certain features of heavy metal and have abstained from its melodic and blues-originated features, yet they share enough musically and institutionally so that we are able to talk of them as quasi-autonomous parts of a wider global extreme metal scene (Kahn-Harris 2004: 99). This means that despite the once common pool of “noisy” music, they have developed significant distinctions in the soundscape, lyrical orientation and even ideology, which is crucial for understanding individual subcultural identity: a black metal fan is not the same as a death metal fan

and they do not necessarily get along just because they belong to a wider extreme metal subculture.

Thereby, I define the *extreme metal subculture* as a community that shares mostly musical, cultural and ideological interests; expresses its collective meanings in performative practises and regular social interactions; is united primarily around black/death/thrash metal substyles in a “classical” understanding of the genre, meaning typical fast tempos, heavy riffs and distorted vocals; share common signs and codes through the own distinctive style. “The differences between extreme metal and most other forms of popular music are so pronounced that those who are not fans may not perceive its considerable internal differences. Extreme metal music frequently teeters on the edge of formless noise” (Kahn-Harris 2007: 5).

In subchapter 1.3, I discussed the ongoing thread in existing research about *pagan metal* being too vague a term that creates boundaries and limits researchers’ ability to conduct a coherent structuralised investigation or that it is not exactly different from Viking or folk metal (Deeks 2016: 8). I believe that the confusion evolved due to the absence of unity between researchers regarding the definitions and because of the “pagan” part in pagan metal, which, for some, might seem to hint at bands focusing solely on paganism and pagan gods (and maybe even at band members being neo-pagan practitioners). This presumption germinates from the decontextualisation of the term from the subcultural and musical context and entextualisation of it into the realisation of pagan metal as something overtly involved in producing or representing the ideas of neo-paganism (Bauman & Briggs 1990). Yet, even if we were to excerpt the part “pagan”, there is no precise understanding of it in modern scholarship, meaning that without context, “pagan” cannot support a researcher with details of whether we are talking about religion, music, art or a way of living. Weston and Bennett eloquently phrased this idea: “Depending on the interpretation, Paganism is a religion, a worldview, a way of life and even a human trait. This multiplicity varies according to modes of perception, reception and dissemination” (Weston and Bennett 2014: 1).

This uncertainty in the genre is also supported by the idea that the term is constructed to represent the textual rather than the musical orientation of the bands. For example, Mark David Deeks claims that the name “pagan metal” is an unreliable identifier for a musical genre “given that it has been applied to bands as musically

diverse such as the Finnish band Amorphis, Sweden's Bathory, and Forefather from England, none of whom have referenced a pagan belief system" (Deeks 2016: 49).

This ambiguity in understanding might also lie in the definition issue. The issue with definitions is that they often assume that genres are clearly and discretely distinct from each other, whereas in reality there may be a continuum of transitions between them. This is particularly relevant in the case of metal subgenres, where the boundaries between them are often blurry and subject to debate. Hence, it is complicated to research one subgenre as a distinct unit without touching upon the others. Moreover, the definitions are dependent on the specific context in which they are used. This is because personal identity and scholarly views may not always align and individuals may identify and define themselves in ways that do not fit neatly into existing categories or definitions. In addition, the categories are often operational and emerge from the needs of a scholar, which is the case for this research.

This way, in the context of my research, I only want to indicate the difference in order to explain why I chose pagan metal over other definitions. *Folk metal* does not lie on the "extreme side", meaning that musically it is not characterised by fast tempos or extra distortion and typically does not involve growling and screaming as vocal techniques. On the contrary, it is highly melodic, the motifs are oftentimes based on folk melodies with performances involving a variety of traditional instruments. Sometimes folk metal bands also use traditional folk singing in the form of inviting a folk choir group or single folk singers to the music recording or live concerts. Even though details might differentiate from band to band, the key feature of folk metal is an explicit engagement of folk instruments together with the incorporation of folk tunes using those very instruments, singing or more rarely guitars and keyboards. The bands also use visual elements such as costumes, jewellery and battle face paint to support their perception as "folk". As Peter A. Marjenin concluded, "[c]oncisely, folk metal is defined by the presence of folk elements in heavy metal, establishing an affiliation with a particular culture or area of the world" (Marjenin 2014: 58).

As for *Viking metal*, some academics prefer to use this genre label and many use it interchangeably with pagan metal (e.g. Spracklen 2020 or Von Helden 2010). Viking metal, however, has a fixed context of positioning a band as one interested exclusively in themes of the Medieval Viking era and Norse mythology. Moreover, this positioning

seems to be purely lyrics-related, which is problematic in my view: many pagan metal bands may have a few songs related to these topics, but very few of them have Viking references in all songs and albums. Among metal music scholars, Mark Deeks admits this notion: “In the case of Viking metal, we are often seeing a musical genre constructed purely on the basis of lyrical content” (Deeks 2016: 45). In addition, this term does not tell the reader about the musical aspects as much, considering that both Manowar and Ensiferum are mentioned in the context of Viking metal (e.g. see McParland 2018).² Karl Spracklen, for instance, uses the term “Viking/pagan/black metal” as if they were one concept, which can lead to confusion and misunderstanding of the ideological perception of the bands he is talking about (see Spracklen 2020). Thus, since in many cases when Viking metal was mentioned in scholarly research it was mentioned either interchangeably with pagan metal or in the context of the same meaning, it is safe to refer to research on Viking metal as to the research on pagan metal.

In my understanding, *pagan metal* is a subgenre of extreme metal music that musically derives from black metal and may or may not collide with some elements of folk metal (like the incorporation of folk instruments or traditional singing elements in music). Lyrically, its main interest lies in the, often poeticised, representation of pre-Christian historical times, oftentimes with an emphasis on praising pre-Christian religions or gods; diverse historical events mostly related to national history; nature and native landscapes. Pagan metal is a subgenre that functions around a certain idea, or rather a set of closely interrelated ideas. Musicians in the subgenre find their inspiration in folklore, mythology, traditions and historical events.

The interest and participation of both musicians and audiences in the pagan metal subgenre can be seen as a response to the intertwining of historical events, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. The opposition to Christianity is one of the key features of pagan metal music in general. Anti-Christian themes can be traced in other extreme metal subgenres too, especially *black metal*, which uses the form of imaginary Satanism and the figure of Satan as something antagonistic to the hegemony of the Christian (be it Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant) church. The black metal scene

² Manowar is an old-school heavy metal/power metal band, while Ensiferum is an extreme metal band (though Encyclopedia Metallum offers us a definition of “epic folk metal”).

constructed mythology in which Satanism embodied the resistance to the conquest of Christianity and Satan to many black metal subculturists has served as a symbol of resistance rather than an actual idol (see Kahn-Harris 2004, Kahn-Harris 2007). In pagan metal anti-Christianity serves as a response to a forcibly imposed alien religion through returning to “pagan roots”. Furthermore, the reflection on more recent historical events (20th century) may serve as an opposition to occupation and imposed ideologies.

In scholarly research, there are definitions intersecting with my own definition of pagan metal. Hagen, talking about Viking metal, defines it as a subgenre of black metal without Satanic imagery, which is a quite laconic, but well-put definition (Ross Hagen in McFarland 2018: 121). Von Helden, theorising about differences between Viking metal and pagan metal, offers this definition: “Pagan metal mainly deals with Pagan religions and lies in a broader context where not only Old Norse mythology is dealt with, but also Celtic myths and history, fairy tales and other elements of folklore” (Von Helden 2012: 156).

Maria-Irina Manea also provides the readers with an elaborate description of pagan metal, conceptualising it as “a carnivalesque intertextual play with mythical-historical images that creates an emotional version of the past” (Manea 2016: 116). Her idea interlays with mine as she indicates that pagan metal essentially “resorts to the ancient past for identity offers” (ibid: 113). Throughout her dissertation, she underlines how pagan metal subculturists utilise the features of local contexts to create a feeling of historical continuity and how they use myths, stories and landscapes for doing so.

Alexander Hoffman lists ten categories of pagan metal lyrical orientation taken from Heinen 2016: mythology, historical events, anti-Christian polemics, death, nature, nationalism, rituals, drinking, the search for almighty wisdom, others (Hofmann 2020: 86). What is important, he indicates that this lyrical orientation is not based on a single culture (unlike Viking metal, which limits the bands range to Scandinavian countries) but oftentimes even intentionally avoids naming specific culture or country (ibid: 86).

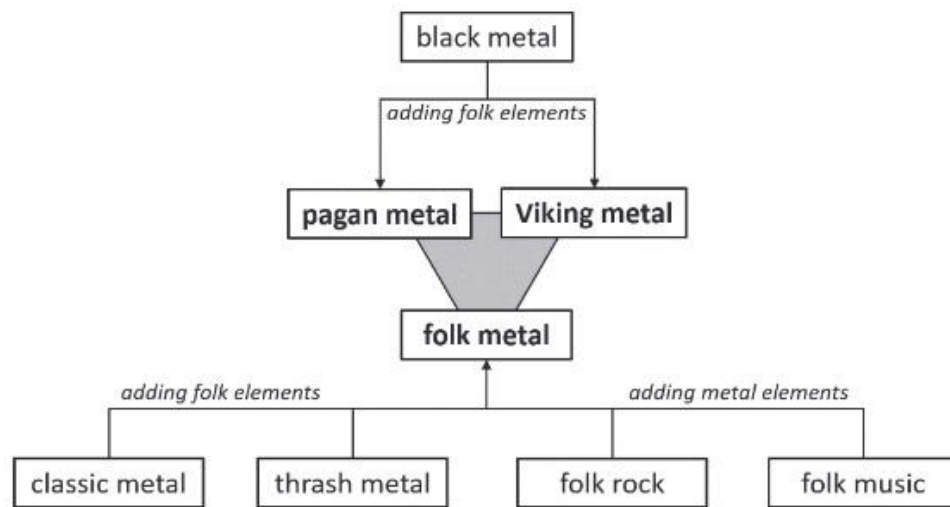


Figure 1. Historical development of Viking, pagan and folk metal. Taken from Hoffman 2020: 77.

In addition, Hoffman offers a great scheme for visualising the distinctions between the subgenres of folk, Viking and pagan metal. This scheme could be useful for the reader's visualisation of where my research interest lies, namely in the upper part of the triangle (black metal > pagan metal + Viking metal).

The importance of using specifically pagan metal in this thesis lies in the idea that there is no other extreme metal music genre that would unite bands who represent a range of topics like historical struggles, pre-Christian heritage, nature and folklore but, unlike folk metal, do it on the heavier side of metal musically, without putting an emphasis on folk instruments, while giving preference to extreme vocals (growling and screaming). Thus, pagan metal is a constructive term because while remaining quite precise about placing the bands in the metal music genres categorisation, it still allows the bands themselves to perform creative variations of it freely.

Defining pagan metal, I would like to note that by talking about the pagan metal subculture in Estonia in terms of this study, I use the expression *pagan metal subculture* more as an analytical tool rather than a distinct standalone subculture. This concept serves as an indicator for the bands and band members that are united by certain ideas and values, but who are also tightly interrelated with the general pool of extreme metal subculture in Estonia. Using this concept in my thesis helps me, as a researcher, to narrow down the focus of the analysis.

Importantly, participants themselves do not refer to the subculture as a “pagan metal subculture” and most often they refer to the extreme metal subculture in general as “the *scene*” – the term widely used by both fans of metal music, musicians and academics. Additionally, some participants disagree with the mere functionality of the term “pagan metal” in their understanding: during the interview, C told me that “there is no such riff or pagan metal riff or something like that. There is nothing like that” (from the interview materials, 13.10.2022).

At the same time, my fieldwork results proved that many research participants agree with my definition and find it reassuring. I talked about my definition during my participant observation and interviews and I also offered it in my questionnaire. For instance, B said to me: “I agree with what you just said, that there is some kind of a certain magnetism towards history, nature, maybe some folklore. Not all pagan metal has to be religiously, so to say, pagan. It doesn’t have to centre on mythological or religious topics. But it’s kind of like a certain way to see the world or certain values that surround the thing” (from the interview materials 11.08.2022). While agreeing with the definition, some participants were not sure whether the term is applicable to the bands they play in, however, they did not decline this possibility either. For instance, in a questionnaire response, H mentioned that even though he agrees with my definition of pagan metal, he is not sure himself whether the bands he plays in “exactly fall into the category of pagan metal”. However, he also added the following: “But there may be some elements of pagan metal in there for sure” (from the questionnaire materials).

Overall, my participants consider themselves members of the extreme metal scene or its specific clusters that may be rather socially or geographically based and they can be involved in multiple, and in terms of subgenres, diverse, music projects. I certainly take this into consideration, as well as the fact that many bands act in frames of more than one genre, so many bands cannot be strictly defined as pagan metal musically. However, in this research, the use of the term pagan metal serves as an analytical tool to identify the bands and band members that share these common themes and values. It helps to narrow down the focus of the analysis and facilitates the exploration of the specific cultural, social and historical contexts that shape the development and reception of this subgenre within the broader extreme metal scene in Estonia.

2.2. Methodology and fieldwork

The aim of this subchapter is to reflect on the methods I used for my fieldwork. My fieldwork experiences served me as a great source of inspiration and helped me to understand the community from both emic and etic perspectives. These experiences also assisted me with understanding the goals of my research and seeing how different my prior ideas were from the fieldwork results.

The main methods for this research were interviews, questionnaires and participant observation. Overall, there are four interviews and three questionnaires. Hours spent on participant observation are impossible to count but the circumstances were mostly specific formal or informal events, where I spent time with the band members and had a chance to talk with them. In addition, I sometimes observed bands without engaging in communication with them, mostly during performances. The overall timing of my fieldwork starts in October 2021 and ends in April 2023.

To support my fieldwork, I also collected data using the netnography method (e.g. see Kozinets 2015), which included exploring the available information about the bands online, the posts bands members published themselves or interviews with the band members taken by journalists.

All the research participants, who gave me interviews and responded to questionnaires, are musicians and members of multiple bands. My research participants play in such bands as Ulguränd, Langenu, Loits, Bestia, Wolfskrone, Tapper and Kaev, however, they also play in punk bands or metal bands of other subgenres. The majority of the participants are Tartu-based, so the data will represent the Tartu cluster of the subculture more. All of them are male Estonians because extreme metal scenes around the world are still highly masculine (on gender in metal see e.g. Kinnunen & Honkanen 2021 or Schaap & Berkers 2014), so the Estonian case is not an exception – female musicians are rather rare.

My choice of band members specifically is based on the idea of getting the perspective of those who are actively involved in creating and shaping the subculture, rather than just observing it from the outside. Band members, in particular, play a crucial role in the subculture as they are the ones who create the music and lyrics that

embody the subcultural values and ideas. As such, they have a deeper understanding of the subculture and its practices, which makes them valuable collaborators for my research. My choice of focusing on musicians rather than fans is further explained in the discussion of the community under research in Chapter 3.

The language of communication in terms of participant observation, interviews and questionnaires was English. My research participants can communicate in English freely, so it was easy to converse and ask questions. However, it must be noted that there might be slight misunderstandings from both sides – my and my research participants – since English was not the native language for either of us. Hence, I realise that the information I received could have had more layers and shades had we communicated in Estonian.

For preserving participants' anonymity, I refer to them as different letters of the Latin alphabet in my research. I also remove personal names, band names or territorial names from the quotes.

2.2.1 Netnography

For the purpose of getting access to the community of my interest, I started by applying the netnographic method. Netnography is a qualitative method designed for studying online communities. It is a faster and more affordable method in comparison to the classical ethnographic method of going to the field. According to Robert V. Kozinets, netnography can be defined as a “written account resulting from fieldwork studying the cultures and communities that emerge from online, computer-mediated, or Internet-based communications, where both the fieldwork and the textual account are methodologically informed by the traditions and techniques of cultural anthropology” (Kozinets 1998: 336).

Researchers, who use netnography as one of their methods, in addition to dealing with words, also deal with images, photos, videos, audio files and other digital units. Hence, the bands' choices of maintaining an online image were especially informative to me as they gave me a lot of insight into the symbolism, common practices and morals as well as practical information like dates of online performances or album releases.

I started actively collecting data using the netnography method in October 2021 and finished in April 2023. I turned to netnography for the purposes of finding biographical information about the research participants and their bands, earlier available interviews with the research participants, their recorded live performances, online platforms for listening to their music and for the search of the visual materials such as photos and artworks.

One of the first and main sources of getting information about metal bands from all over the world is Encyclopedia Metallum: The Metal Archives. This is an online resource that serves as a database for mainly metal bands of different subgenres, which can be searched by name, country and other characteristics (<https://www.metal-archives.com/>). Encyclopedia Metallum is maintained by a team of volunteer moderators who are responsible for updating and coordinating the site. The moderators are all metal fans and enthusiasts who are passionate about the genre and dedicate their time to ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the site's content. The site also relies on contributions from its users, who submit band and album information, reviews and other content to help build and expand the database. The database contains information about the bands that are currently active, inactive or do not exist anymore. Thanks to Encyclopedia Metallum, I managed to find a few Estonian pagan/black metal bands and subsequently find their official pages on Facebook. There I could follow the bands' activities and check the biographical information that mostly was not available on Encyclopedia Metallum (as many local bands are not widely known). This way I found Estonian extreme metal bands like Grom, Tapper, Kaev, Bestia, Pagansarv, Ulguränd, Langenu and many others. Through their Facebook pages, I found a venue where the predominant part of the live metal music performances are held in Tartu – Rock'n'Roll Heaven Klubi (Tiigi 76a).

2.2.2 Participant observation

This way, in November 2021, I decided to attend one of the live performances in Tartu (or “gigs” as the community calls them). This was my first experience of conducting participant observation for this research specifically. Observing the bands during performance seemed like a solid first step as it would give me a better

understanding of the context and the ways to approach the band members. Since my research interests were at the very beginning of the formation process, I also used this and the subsequent events to frame the idea of the research. Among the ethnographic methods, participant observation can be used to help answer descriptive research questions, to build theory or to generate or test hypotheses (Kawulich 2005: 5), so I relied on this method significantly throughout my fieldwork.

The results of participant observations shaped my approach to interviewing and both, subsequently, shaped my approach to questionnaires. Thanks to participant observation, I became more aware of the specific language, symbols and references used within the subculture. I developed a greater appreciation for the diversity of perspectives within the subculture and the nuances of individual experiences, which led me to ask more open-ended questions.

In addition, my participant observation experience gave me a greater sense of empathy and respect for the members of the subculture, which helped me build rapport and establish trust during interviews (see Glesne 2006 on rapport).

Overall, I have attended 11 research-related events in Tartu, Tallinn and the area. I provide the list of them in Appendix 1 with a short description. The selection is based on the relevancy and amount of obtained fieldwork data. I would like to indicate that the fieldwork data was not always obtained from the band members that performed in terms of an event, but also from the band members of my research focus who were present at an event as a part of the audience. In addition, since the extreme metal scene in Estonia is a tight network of people, some of my research participants simultaneously play in extreme metal bands of different subgenres. Hence, even though the listed bands might belong to other extreme metal subgenres like, for example, death metal, my research participants were present as members of those other bands.

I kept the fieldwork diary in the form of digital notes since the first gig I attended (November 2021) and until April 2023. The diary contains notes on my experiences and observations during participant observation, including my interactions with members of the Estonian pagan metal subculture. The diary also includes reflections on my own thoughts and feelings during fieldwork as well as challenges or unexpected events that arose. I also used the diary to jot down ideas for further research

questions or topics to explore in future interviews or observations. An example of note-taking is presented in Appendix 2.

One of the fieldwork experiences I want to highlight in this section is the premiere of the Tartu Under the Horns documentary. Tartu Under the Horns is an amateur documentary made in collaboration between German and Estonian teams and was planned as a sequel to Tallinn Under the Horns (Tartu Under the Horns IMDb). The documentary shed light on some aspects of the extreme metal bands located in Tartu and presented interviews with the musicians and scene members. During the screening and Q&A session, I had a chance to take notes about such topics as the discussion on the differences between the scenes of Tartu and Tallinn, the scene's social network and the opinions of the band members about the scene.

My fieldwork was significantly influenced by the data and experiences I collected during the Hard Rock Laager 2022 festival in Vana-Vigala, which took place from 01.07.2022 until 03.07.2022. For subcultures that are based around specific types of music or artistic expressions, festivals provide a unique opportunity for members of the subculture to come together and celebrate their shared interests. In Hard Rock Laager, participation in communal activities and subcultural practices can lead to the formation of new friendships and social networks, which can be sustained long after the festival has ended (from the fieldwork notes).

The festival provided me with an opportunity of getting to know members of the research focus bands (Tharapita, Kaev, Ulguränd and Loits) as well as people who know my bands of interest very well and could share their opinion on such concepts as pagan metal, black metal, subcultural resistance, festivals as spaces for performances, in-band communication, Estonia's historical circumstances and their impact on black/pagan metal scene in Estonia, genre classification in extreme metal, Estonian extreme metal scene network, significant figures and so on. Through snowball sampling, I have found more connections in the scene, who eventually agreed on being interviewed or responded to a questionnaire.

Hard Rock Laager provided me with amazing opportunities: facilitating rapport with my research participants, introducing myself to the community as a researcher and inspiring them to contribute and finally gathering data in the unique festival space. Through participant observation there and at other events, I could investigate how the

scene members' behaviours were similar or different from their claimed intentions and principles.

2.2.3 Interviews and questionnaires

I have recorded three in-depth interviews with the members of the bands Loits, Ulguränd/Langenu and Wolfskrone. I also interviewed one person who is involved in a multitude of projects in the metal music scene in Estonia. Due to this reason, he is rather not a strictly extreme metal music scene member per se (he also plays in punk and post-punk bands, for example), but the diversity of his experiences generated valuable input during the interview as it helped me to better understand the different aspects of the Estonian metal scene. All of them gave me consent for using the interview data in this thesis (recorded in the interviews).

The dates of interviews with each research participant are presented in the table in Appendix 3. The interviews included the preparatory part, where I looked for information about bands online and read or watched the previously available interviews with them in order to avoid repetition, ask about developments since the previous interviews and enhance the interview questions. I prepared the lists of interview questions in advance – one of such lists the reader can find in Appendix 4. I want to emphasise that the interviews were semi-structured as some responses caused the conversation to flow in a different direction or motivated me to ask more about a certain topic. Moreover, I want to indicate that the interviews were not the only source of data – I communicated with the same research participants in other social settings during my participant observation experiences.

The interviews with A and B were held in person, while with C and D were online (due to geographical reasons and personal requests of the participants). All interviews, on average, lasted for two hours and were recorded either on my fieldwork recorder or my laptop.

The post-interviewing process included transcription and analysis of the interviews. The process of transcription can be discussed in terms of two models: naturalism, in which all possible utterances are included in the transcription, and denaturalism, in which idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses,

nonverbals, involuntary vocalisations) are removed (Oliver et al 2005). I decided to stick to the naturalised approach of transcribing since it is very precise and shows details that allow for an understanding of the interview not only as a verbal story but in its full context: the conditions under which the interview was held (the environment can influence the perception of the interview for both researcher and participant), emotions that a topic can raise, etc. Vocalisations and nonverbal interactions were important for me and I included them in transcription as well because “transcribing these features of speech can add to the context of the conversation/interview, offer clarity or create erroneous assumptions” (Oliver et al 2005: 10).

As for the questionnaires, they included a list of 17 sets of questions that asked for elaborate responses. The questions were related to musicians’ personal experiences in the scene, biographical details, their vision of pagan metal and authenticity. The participants were very enthusiastic about responding to the questionnaires and they engaged in further discussions about the topics deriving from them in real life, which resulted in valuable participant observation data.

For the sake of preserving my participants’ anonymity, I am not going to attach the full list of the questionnaire questions in the Appendices: sections eight and seventeen are removed from the list of questionnaire questions (see Appendix 5). This is due to the scene’s density: the scene’s tight network (which is discussed in the next chapter) presupposes that my research participants know each other very well. This means that public exposure of the thesis with particular questions attached might result in some research participants recognising the responses of others in the text. This is consistent with the ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity, which are central to protecting the rights and welfare of the research participants. The excluded questions concern the themes of pagan metal definition and political aspects of the scene.

2.2.4 Ethical concerns

While doing my fieldwork and participating in communal practices of the subculture, I have become part of interpersonal relationships in the scene. The high level of relationships with participants may lead to certain ethical concerns, especially concerns related to the ethics of social interaction. As anthropologist Bob Simpson

acknowledged, the participants of ethnographic research can represent many roles, such as “informants, interlocutors, consociates, collaborators, consultants, and friends” (Simpson 2011: 384). Having research participants who have become close friends throughout the course of fieldwork results in cases of close emotional involvement, which sometimes may lead to challenging social situations and even conflicts. In communities with tight networks, it is harder to manage disagreements since at times it is merely impossible to avoid participating in them at all. This kind of participation does not always mean open rivalry or strong antagonism between the researcher and some of the participants but rather the unavoidable involvement in the conflicts between friends and acquaintances in terms of taking sides.

As a researcher, I have made every effort in managing challenging social situations and avoided advocacy in the best way possible, yet there still were minor clashes of opinions on the way that made my being around some people slightly uncomfortable. I navigated myself in challenges and oftentimes turned them into a source of knowledge, for example, regarding how bands tackle conflicting situations and their influence on the subcultural network, or how a scene member’s unwillingness to engage with a researcher can reveal possibilities of communicating with other scene members. Such situations shaped my research and gave me experience in managing complicated situations ethically.

CHAPTER 3. The pagan metal subculture in Estonia

Chapter 3 of this research focuses on the pagan metal subculture in Estonia, exploring its formation, development and structure. In the first subchapter, I present an overview of extreme metal in Estonia, following the ways of development chronologically and emphasising the bands in my research focus. In the second subchapter, I talk about the structure of the scene, meaning the social units the subcultural network includes.

3.1 Formation and development of extreme metal in Estonia

Extreme metal in Estonia has roots in the 1980s and 1990s, with the country's first extreme metal bands emerging in the late 1980s. The metal subculture became one of the earliest youth subcultures alongside the punk subculture. During the end of the Soviet era, young people in Estonia adopted music styles that were popular in the West and so, heavy metal music from the early 1980s reached the country and started spreading among youth.

In other parts of the world, metal scenes are often categorised based on the subgenres I discussed earlier. Due to Estonia's small population, the earlier metal music enthusiasts did not seem to form clusters based on the subgenres distinctions and rather formed a single underground music subculture (Araste 2010: 103). However, the subculture has continued to evolve over time, with various subgenres emerging and gaining popularity. Among the first extreme metal bands that appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s were Palat (a thrash metal band founded in 1987), Aggressor (a death metal band founded in 1989), Shower (a speed/thrash Metal band founded in 1989), Postmortem (a death metal band founded in 1991). There were also a lot of school bands, which came out from garage rock sooner or later (Andres Volly in Stevenson 2011).

During this time, the Estonian metal subculture reached its zenith and the scene was known for its strong sense of solidarity. In Estonia, the second wave of black metal and the emergence of pagan metal coincided with the country's transition to independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. This allowed for greater freedom of

expression and the ability to perform and distribute music more freely. The period of perestroika opened up opportunities for the establishment of new clubs, cassette labels and the legal distribution of cassettes and band merchandise. The first festivals that foregrounded “heavy” music were Heavy Suvi (1987), the Rock Summer festival (1988) and Tartu Muusikapäevad (1990) (Karjalainen 2022: 239). The organised events and the emergence of new bands together with a steadily growing fan base were the basis for the first wave of Estonian metal. “During the years 1991-1995, a lot of good local bands started playing and started the scene, which has influenced the bands of today”, concludes the member of Goresoerd Stig Lindeberg (Stevenson 2011).

The mid-1990s were characterised by a significant drop in activities related to the scene; according to Karjalainen’s fieldwork, his research participants explain it with the fact that many members of the first-wave bands had grown older and had to focus on more realistic career opportunities and education, which left no time to invest in bands; “in 95-97, nothing was left” (Anders Melts in Karjalainen 2022: 241). This largely corresponds with my participant observation data: one of my participants mentioned that staying in the scene seemed quite unrewarding back then as there were no resources that would contribute to the emergence of a coherent scene. The economic changes in Estonian society affected the communication of the bands and subcultures infrastructure: the options for people to meet in band practice rooms and concerts had vanished, the cost of living was rising and organising concerts had become more expensive than before, which led to the end of regularly scheduled concerts (Araste 2010: 107).

However, in the late 1990s, the period of revival had begun and the scene flourished again. This was connected greatly to the fact that bands, which were newly created back then, sought opportunities and ways for organising events to perform at. Estonian extreme metal bands such as Tharaphita (founded in 1995), Loits (founded in 1996) and Manatark (founded in 1996) emerged during this time. With these bands, the black metal scene appeared as a more distinct unit in the pool of metal bands. Tharaphita is seemingly the first pagan metal band in Estonia (according to the research participants and online resources) and has a significant position in the modern scene: many subculturists I talked to during my fieldwork suggested the founder of Thrapahita, Ank, as the main informant on the discussion about pagan metal. The goal of the band

was to create a band that would combine paganism, black metal and heavy metal, spiced with a dark atmosphere. It resulted in Tharaphita starting a completely new, genuine and lasting direction in the local metal scene, which is now being followed by many, including Metsatöll (Tõnu 2020, translation from Estonian by me).

The black/pagan metal scene of that time brought up topics related to national history and its heritage in independent Estonia. Loits cultivated an extreme metal soundscape with elements of folk and rock'n'roll and turned it into powerful music with texts that emphasised national pride and glorified a soldier's spirit (Tõnu 2022, translation from Estonian by me). Loits paid attention to the uncertainty of the political agenda and problematic social and historical topics. One of the band members reflected on it this way: "And of course, the political situation has changed a lot during the time... Somehow have happened that all Loits three albums have been released on the same point when we have had changes in Estonian society. There always been kind of riot exactly the same time when album is going out" (from the interview materials, 13.10.2022).

This way, Loits became a significant band quite rapidly and has become one of the most long-living metal bands in Estonia. As one of the possible factors for this can be considered Loits' developing in tune with societal changes and expectations: "We have been lucky because all those situations in Estonia have made a good commercial for Loits. So with the changes in society, Loits have changed also" (from the interview materials, 13.10.2022).

In turn, Kaido Haavandi, who is also known under his pseudonym Draconic, stood behind the creation of Manatark. He has also been a band member of Tharaphita. Draconic has become an important figure in the Estonian metal scene due to establishing the crucial spaces for the subculture: Hard Rock Laager festival, Hard Rock club and club Tapper. Hard Rock Laager festival started out in 2002 and has been conducted annually since then. It is considered the most important and biggest metal (and core) music festival in Estonia, according to both fans and musicians. The festival plays an essential role in reinforcing the communal subcultural identity and serves as a space for performing communal practices; young Estonian bands perceive performing there as a fact of communal recognition and even honour to a certain extent (fieldwork observations of 01.07-03.07).



*Figure 2. Hard Rock Laager. (2022, July 5). In Wikipedia.
https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_Rock_Laager*

Another low tide at the end of the century and early 2010s, which was related to the economic crisis and another scene dispersion. Meanwhile, during the 2000s and early 2010s, the European metal scene witnessed several new developments and trends. One of the most notable trends was the emergence of metalcore and post-hardcore bands, which combined elements of hardcore punk with extreme metal. These new subgenres quickly gained popularity and attracted a younger audience to the metal scene. These new tendencies reached Estonia, where the “drop” and the low activity of the old bands made new bands more visible. In an interview dated 2011, a band member of Sõjaruun indicates: “I think the emo/deathcore genre has reached its climax also here in Estonia” (Stevenson 2011).

However, some of the bands in my research focus emerged in the 2000s. Among them are Bestia (founded in 2000), Langenu (2004, but started in 2001 under a different name) and Tapper (founded in 2004). These bands have gone through many ups and downs as well as have changed the lineup a few times along the way.

Estonia's economic rise in the early 2010s contributed to the growth of the metal scene in the country. After the economic crisis of the late 2000s, the metal scene in Estonia began to experience a resurgence, in part due to the increasing use of the internet and social media. With the advent of platforms like Facebook or Bandcamp, it became easier for metal bands to promote their music and upcoming shows to a wider audience. In addition, the increasing availability of the Internet allowed fans to easily access information about gigs and concerts. According to my personal experience and fieldwork results, the most convenient and popular way of getting information about upcoming events is by following the venue pages on Facebook, specifically Rock'n'Roll Heaven, Hell and Genialistide Klubi in Tartu or Rockclub Tapper, Sveta Bar and Helitehas in Tallinn. Apart from this option, websites like Songkick and Bandsintown allow fans to track their favourite bands and receive notifications about upcoming shows in their area.

Along with the older bands who used the improving situation to their advantage (in terms of active performing and online presence), new bands were emerging. Some of the bands of my research focus emerged at this time: Ulguränd (2011), Kaev (2018), Wolfskrone (2021) and Pagansarv (2021). Ulguränd, a pagan metal band, started out as a side project of two brothers who were also behind the creation of Langenu, a black metal band that writes their lyrics and performs in the Seto language. One of the founders of Ulguränd recalls: "Within half a year, we already had our first gig. For this gig, we invented the name Ulguränd, which means a "distant travel" or something like this. But then it became more and more serious [the band]. And there have been many, many lineup changes and I am the only constant member" (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022). In their thematic orientation, Ulguränd focuses on the representation of historical events from the distant past: "We mostly sing about historical events and stuff like this. Mostly Viking age and periods close to this time period" (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022).

Wolfskrone is a young band that positions itself as nature-worshipping black metal (Wolfskrone Facebook page). With music leaning towards the atmospheric black metal subgenre, the band represents a range of thematic directions related to natural environments, landscapes and practices. "I say nature-worshipping black metal because when I wrote the music for the album, it was fall time and it was just the beginning of

the transition to winter. So I thought that this was a pretty good genre name for this project because I didn't just create atmospheric black metal, I created alongside with the nature", indicates one of the band members (from the interview materials, 22.10.2022).

As for the other mentioned bands, Kaev is a pagan black metal band and they are currently working on releasing an album. Pagansarv is also a pagan black metal band, which was created by ex- and active members of Urt (Pagansarv Bandcamp).

Apart from the pagan/black metal bands unit, the modern extreme metal scene consists of diverse subgenres, such as death metal, thrash metal and variations. Specific subgenre gigs are common (meaning events, where, for example, only death metal bands play), however, crossovers also happen. The social clustering inside the scene is based on the music differences (in terms of both performance and consumption) as well as differences in values and ideals. These communities are rather reserved in terms of membership, yet they are highly oriented on releasing and promoting the music of the band members.

Black Magic Estonia in Tallinn began as a small group of people who established a venue that served as a party spot, a stage and an after-show location for occasions such as Howls of Winter. Vincent Arckharum, one of the key figures related to the place and a musician involved in such bands as Pime, Süngehel or Kõdu, mentions that the need for a black metal venue was very strong about a decade ago as there were no black metal venues in Estonia back then. Thus, he and a group of like-minded enthusiasts decided to establish their own space that would serve as a space for rehearsals, underground concerts and events, but also as a social hub. After having found an affordable place for creating their clubhouse, they founded Black Magic Estonia, which is active nowadays (Vincent Arckharum in Undergrounded).

According to the interview with Vincent, Black Magic Estonia (BME) is highly oriented towards providing a space for communal practices where both regular members and guests would feel accepted and comfortable. These qualities of the place were highlighted by musicians from around the world who have visited BME and have found it to be a unique and special place for black metal enthusiasts to gather and hang out (Vincent Arckharum in Undergrounded). Vincent mentioned that the fact that some musicians have even missed their flights to stay an extra night at the club shows that BME is more than just a venue for underground concerts and events, but also a place

that fosters a sense of community and belonging among black metal fans (Vincent Arckharum in *Undergrounded*).

In Tartu, a venue of a somewhat similar kind and function is called Pergerus. Pergerus was established in 2012 and started as a rehearsal room for bands Langenu, Ulguränd, Tapper and Mortferus who all shared common members. With time, the idea of the place grew bigger: “We knew each other well and we saw it as an opportunity to form something larger than just paying rent together. But we thought that we should have our identity, our own name. And one of us actually formed this name Pergerus out of parts and pieces of other band names: Per comes from Tapper, “ge” comes from LanGEnu and “rus” came from Mortferus” (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022).

Similarly to Black Magic Estonia, Pergerus is a black metal-centred community. The main difference between the two groups is that Pergerus only includes band members while BME includes like-minded people fond of black metal who organise events like concerts or movie nights. Pergerus occasionally organises small-scale events too but their main focus is communal practices related to bands-members’ activities: “We see ourselves as a group of creators of music and visual art” (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022).

As a community of musicians, Pergerus has been active not only in event organising but also in music production. The Tarbathian Fortress split³ released by the members of Pergerus in 2020 is one of the results of collective creative work. The work on the Tarbathian Fortress united such bands as Sküllfükk SS, Ulguränd, Ziegenhorn, Koffin, Igor Mortis, Swarn, Kaev, Langenu and Form around one goal, which eventually resulted in a vivid representation of the scene in Tartu (Maddy in *Aristocrazia*). Collaboration and teamwork helped the community members to re-establish the “collective feeling” and re-enforce the dynamics that had started to fade with time during Pergerus’ existence (Maddy in *Aristocrazia*).

Pergerus represent themselves as distinct from the community of other bands, which they emphasise in symbolic practices like, for example, hanging the Pergerus’ flag at the bands-members events or festivals (from the fieldwork materials).

³ A split album (or split) is a music album that includes tracks by two or more separate artists.



*Figure 3. Pergerus flag at Hard Rock Laager 2022. Warhorn Records Instagram
<https://www.instagram.com/warhornrecords/>*

3.2 Overview of the subcultural constitution: zones and social units in the scene

Explaining how the pagan metal subcultural network functions is important for the research because subcultures are not just a collection of individuals but rather complex social networks of people who share common interests, values and practices. Understanding how the subculture functions as a social network can help to identify key influencers, opinion leaders and gatekeepers within the community as well as to understand how information and cultural practices are transmitted within the group.

Generally, subcultures share the features intrinsic to the community, namely network with its alterations and strategies as well as regular interactions, collective performances and consensus. Pagan metal subculture in Estonia, as well as any other subculture, is a “culturally bounded (but not closed) network of people” (Williams

2011: 148) and its shared meanings, including material components of style, are transmitted among network members but also outside of it, to the mainstream culture.

3.2.1 Subcultural network

The principles of knowledge transmission and interaction within the networked communities can be explored through Dorothy Noyes' perception of the linked individuals' structure (Noyes 1995). She suggests these features of a network: a division between the first-order zone (immediate acquaintances) and the second-order zone ("friend of a friend"); greater or lesser density; centrality and peripherality; clustering (Noyes 1995: 457). In terms of interactive aspects, she indicates the criteria of multiplexity or single-stranded relationships, content, frequency, duration and affective intensity (ibid: 457).

The structure of the network proposed by Noyes is applicable to the interconnected individuals in the Estonian pagan metal subculture. The first-order zone is dense and can be multiplex, meaning that individuals often hold multiple roles within the subculture. For example, a person may own a label that releases music produced by pagan metal bands while also being a merchandise creator, a band member and a friend or acquaintance of many musicians within the subculture. The most devoted metalheads who are actively involved in processes inside the subculture I also consider part of the first-order zone. An example of such groups of people can be the creators of the Black Magic Estonia club or Pergerus discussed in the previous subchapter.

On the other hand, the second-order zone is much larger and involves the audience. The network connections within this zone are sparse (there are individuals who do not know each other) and the level of clustering is high (individuals form tighter groups of interests, mainly friend groups). This is a constantly changing zone of the network as many "outsiders" may occasionally attend thematic events, for example, when invited by friends, who do not have anyone else to go with.

For my research, the main focus is on the first-order zone as all of my research participants belong to this category, being musicians within the Estonian pagan metal subculture. Within this subculture, the first-order zone mainly consists of the musicians themselves, including band members, venue owners, label owners, merchandise artists,

gig photographers and others closely related to the organisational and performative aspects of the subculture activities.

One of the main specifics of the extreme metal scene in Estonia lies in its underground position, meaning that metal can be considered a minor genre compared to mainstream music genres, such as pop, hip-hop, rap or generic rock (Karjalainen 2022: 232). As a result, the subculture is placed in a somewhat peripheral position within the larger music industry and operates on a much smaller scale compared to mainstream genres.

This position of metal strengthens the sensed cohesion among the subculturists (Karjalainen 2022: 233) and creates a sense of solidarity among the members. This is evidenced by the fact that the scene members often have to rely on their own resources to organise and promote the events, distribute music and produce merchandise – all these practices contribute to the density of the network.

The subculture's multiplexity is the reflection of the interrelational aspect – the musicians usually share the roles of either friends, good acquaintances or even family members. For some of them, this factor can be defining in their motivation to support their communal belonging. For example, F, a bass player, says that there is no “scene” in Estonia as it was before, in times of Loits and Tharapita, and he himself plays in bands just because his friends play in those bands. One of his family members was also a member of one of his current bands (from the fieldwork notes). H indicates that he was invited into both bands where he currently plays by friends' recommendations (from the questionnaire materials).

The fact that musicians often share roles as friends or acquaintances reinforces a sense of camaraderie and shared experience, which can contribute to the subculture's overall cohesion, sense of community and density of the network. It also suggests that the scene represents a rather tight network, where multiple social roles can be at play.

A contribution to this idea can be an idea shared as a joke by some research participants that there are 15 musicians in the scene and they all are just mixed up between bands with different names (from the fieldwork notes, 23.09.2022). Furthermore, the documentary “Tartu Under the Horns” conveyed the idea that despite many bands producing only a demo and then disbanding, the individuals involved still

remain active in the subculture, often forming new bands and continuing to contribute to the scene (from the fieldwork notes, 23.09.2022).

On a side note, the density and multiplexity of the social relationships in the network can also be a source of conflicts, which leads to the bands splitting or certain band members quitting a band. For instance, B mentioned that they had to ask one of the former band members to quit: “...Then we kicked him out. [...] I think he grew a bit tired and we felt that we better to do it ourselves” (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022).

One of the dispersion factors in the scene is the geographical factor. There are research participants who distinguish between Tartu and Tallinn scenes and sometimes characterise them in different ways: some see the Tartu scene as more creative but at the same time more isolated (from the fieldwork notes). For example, G mentions that there are two sides in Estonian extreme metal – North Estonia and South Estonia – and that he can hear differences very well (from the questionnaire materials). However, even though I focused on Tartu-based musicians more, it is important to indicate that these two units are still deeply interrelated. For example, one band can consist of Tartu, Tallinn or other cities-based musicians, who constantly travel between different areas for rehearsals and gigs. Due to this factor, I suggest that on the first-order zone level, the dispersion is not the crucial factor for the objectives of my research and the geographical factor would be more relevant if the research included the second-order zone too. In addition, the geographically-based division is not strong enough for suggesting that there are two distinct metal scenes – rather, there is one scene with different units. H specifically touched upon this topic in a questionnaire response: “What bothers me a bit is the talk of scenes. Many people who are more into metal like to talk about the differences between the scenes in Tallinn and Tartu for example like they are two completely different things, but Estonia is so small and it feels stupid to somehow try to divide it even more” (from the questionnaire materials).

3.2.2 Communication-interlocks

I want to expand on the ideas of the subcultural network by the concept of the “communication-interlocks” developed by J. Patrick Williams (Williams 2011). It emphasises the possibility of subcultural knowledge spreading through diverse sorts of societal channels. Williams argues that “ideas, objects, and practises – the essential parts of culture – are transmitted via “communication-interlocks,” social linkages or conduits within and among networks of people” (Williams 2011: 41) and distinguishes between four types of such linkages: multiple group cultures, structural roles, “weak ties” and media diffusion. The first three widely resonate with Noyes’ features of the network (clustering, first-order zone and second-order zone concepts respectively). Media diffusion is an important aspect of subcultural knowledge transmission since, through media, this knowledge is transmitted across subcultural boundaries to the “outer world”. Such bilateral exchange of knowledge shapes the vision of how the “outsiders” perceive the subculture (ibid: 41). However, this aspect requires a different research direction and does not lie in the research focus of this thesis.

The first type of communication-interlocks, group cultures, is based on the idea that subcultures consist of smaller group cultures. One way of calling these group cultures is “idiocultures” (see Fine 1979) but for this research, the name “scenes” is more appropriate (Williams 2011: 40). Williams gives an example of a “tribal” tattoo knowledge transmission in this interlock. One person, interested in a particular tattoo he or she found in a magazine, shows it to a friend and, as a result, they both cultivate an interest in tribal tattoos and piercings. This motivates them to find festivals where like-minded people gather and attend them. By attending them, they meet more people with similar interests as well as find bands, merchandise and other objects and practices with which they start interacting regularly (ibid: 40). “Through all the interactions that comprise these connections, the modern primitive subculture is sustained and slowly changed as new people, ideas, and practices are inserted into the cultural process over time” (ibid: 40).

The example provided by Williams largely corresponds with how the participants described the scene formation to me, or rather how they formed smaller clusters (bands and groups of interests) that later became part of the Estonian extreme metal scene. All my respondents started playing musical instruments very young (9-15 years old) and they indicated a fondness for metal (sometimes also punk) music as the first and foremost motivation. They were introduced to metal by someone from their environment: for instance, H mentioned a metalhead relative and for C it was the school environment where older schoolmates played in bands. Their passion for music eventually led to them forming bands with a few like-minded friends. For example, J was already in his first band when he was 14 and at the age of 16 joined one of the bands of my research interest.

Participants from the smaller towns, however, indicated that they were not able to form or join the scene in their hometown and for A, for instance, it was one of the reasons for moving to Tartu. A, following his interest in music, started attending a guitar class advertised in his town and eventually founded a band with acquaintances from Tartu, which was the main reason for him to move there after high school graduation. He indicates: “If you go to a bigger place, like Tallinn, you can actually maybe chase your passions of becoming a musician there, there are people who are doing this. There are concerts and everything going on. But in [hometown name], you cannot do that there. And I had to get away from it, me staying there was just not an option for me” (from interview materials, 10.07.2022).

When it comes to “weak ties” communication-interlock, these are the kinds of relationships subculturists sustain in different networks, such as family, colleagues, audiences and groups of friends (Williams 2011: 40). The name “weak ties” comes from the fact that the subculturists may only interact with each other in some institutional context (e.g. school or work), where their relationship with others is mainly functional (ibid: 40). However, these weak ties are present both within and out of the scene network. The second-order zone members can serve as weak ties for the first-order zone members because the second-order zone can be way more exposed to floating memberships. To be more specific, when talking about a second-order zone, Noyes discusses “peripheral network members” (Noyes 1995: 458) and their input into the

integration of the community into the larger society by the boundary encounters that happen on the edge.

The first-order zone consists of structural roles. According to Williams, recognised members of a subculture may perform roles of gatekeepers and guides to becoming a “core” member of a local scene (Williams 2011: 41). This is where my research participants are located.

The research participants’ description of the community structure fits this concept. One of the creators of Pergerus describes their community this way: “We have a core group, people who are more active and there are some kind of like satellites who sometimes are more with us and sometimes they just mind their own business” (from interview materials, 11.08.2022).

This way, by combining Noyes’ and Williams’ notions, I present the basis for understanding social mapping in the pagan metal subculture. By focusing on the first-order zone, I aimed to gain insights into how the perception of subcultural authenticity is created, maintained and reproduced from the perspective of those who are actively involved in the subculture in order to discuss it in the next chapter. Investigating the first-order zone members can also shed light on how they navigate the tension between “staying true” to the subcultural values without limiting the subcultural practices and the thematic focus of their creative activities.

CHAPTER 4. The perception and reproduction of authenticity within subcultural space

Chapter 4 explores the interplays of authenticity and identity within subcultural space, focusing on the Estonian pagan metal subculture. In the first part of the chapter, I examine how the subcultural participants' values and worldviews are shaped by their response to Estonian history and the role of "reflexive anti-reflexivity" in this response (Kahn-Harris 2004, Kahn-Harris 2007). In the second part, I will look at the ways they construct and reproduce subcultural identity through the prism of the "reproducing authenticity" concept coined by Susanna Larsson (Larsson 2013). By illuminating these interplays between authenticity and identity, I aim to shed light on what is the emic perception of authenticity and how it can be analysed from the etic point of view.

4.1 The meaning of the historical context in forming subcultural values and worldview

In this section, I will delve into the role that Estonian history plays in shaping the values and worldviews of participants in the subculture under study. Estonia has a rich and complex history of political and cultural struggles, including occupation by various foreign powers, independence movements and resistance to Soviet rule. These historical events have had a lasting impact on Estonian identity and continue to shape the country's cultural landscape.

In the previous chapter, I talked about Estonian pagan metal bands in the context of the extreme metal development in Estonia. Here I want to indicate the statistics collected from the Encyclopaedia Metallum and presented by Deena Weinstein in *Pop Pagans: Paganism and Popular Music* (2014): among the countries with twenty or more metal bands of any style, those with the highest percentage of pagan metal to all metal bands are Lithuania (12.3 per cent), Ukraine (10.7 per cent), Belarus (9.7 per cent) and then Estonia (9.2 per cent). Moreover, the top ten countries with the highest ratio of pagan metal bands per person are led by the Faroe Islands (due to its population of fewer than 50,000) and then it is followed, in order, by Estonia (!), Finland and Iceland (Weinstein 2014: 63). These statistics might not correctly represent the current

genre stratification in the pool of Estonian metal bands and the current picture requires re-visiting and re-analysing. However, these facts are still highly relevant for my research as they show the popularity or rather the demand for this specific kind of music in terms of both performance and listeners' consumption.

When I asked about what could be the reasons for such results, B indicated, "maybe it's the idea behind the music what also helps people to gather. It's not only heavy riffs, but it's also some kind of ideology behind it" (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022). Considering the above-mentioned statistics and thoughts, I want to analyse the circumstances in Estonian history to which pagan metal could respond. In the context of Estonian history, it has a special meaning as there are a number of historical circumstances at play. The anti-Christian flavour derives from Mediaeval times. In the 13th century, what is now modern Estonia was forcibly baptised in an extremely cruel series of crusades with the island of Saaremaa being conquered the last in 1227 (Laur et al 2002: 48-52). The resistance was so fierce that the two main reasons why the Swordbrothers succeeded in taking over the indigenous people were the lack of unity between different communities headed by leaders who were in disagreement with each other and the Crusaders' decisive advantage in the professionalism of the warrior class and the superior military technology: for instance, Andres Kasekamp mentions that armoured knight on horseback was the equivalent of the tank in modern times (Kasekamp 2018: 15). Compared to, for example, the Ukrainian history context, the Christianisation of Kyivan Rus was carried out in a relatively bloodless way and pagan traditions and practices dissolved into Christian ones or were integrated by the church itself (*Rus' Primary Chronicle* in Izbornyk). Moreover, the segregation from the Baltic German ruling elite was kept immensely high, which allowed Estonians to preserve their social order and vernacular beliefs (see Kasekamp 2018, Raun 2002).

The narrative of anti-Christian attitudes and resistance is widely present in the subculture under research. For example, G wrote that "Estonians lived in peace [...] whole time and with their religion until 12-13. century came crusaders and ruin the beautiful harmony of people and that's why we need to remind people our roots" (from the questionnaire materials). Hence, the participants see the Crusades as a historical factor that influenced their perception of religion, social order and values (such as freedom or cultural self-expression).

The National Awakening in Estonia went in a form of a strong wave, playing a crucial part in consolidating the nation, developing national self-awareness and contributing to the high level of folklore collecting (the response to Jakob Hurt's call "Paar palvid Eesti ärksamaile poegadele ja tütardele" published in 1888 is one of the most peculiar instances of this kind I have ever encountered in the world's history). For collectors, participating in collecting work was one of the ways to connect the abstract (or "imaginary", according to Anderson's metaphor of "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) concept of nation with something concrete and personal (Kikas 2017: 273). I consider it important to mention that Jakob Hurt and the other important figure of the National Awakening Carl Robert Jakobson justified the pagan Estonians' retaliation, even inhumanity, against the Crusaders in the 13th century. Hurt does this in his book *Pildid isamaal sündinud asjust (Pictures about the things happened in the fatherland, 1879)* and Jakobson in his *Kolm isamaa kõnet (Three speeches on the fatherland, 1870)*.

Considering the European context, National Romanticists turned to folklore and used local landscapes as the canvas for reconstructing the national myth, subsequently revealing it as something deeply incorporated into the national memory. In relation to modern pagan metal, musicians around the world turn to historical events for inspiration and in searching for identity. They do it by utilising the specificities of local contexts in lyrics and imagery. This way, they create a sense of continuous and well-defined heritage through the intertwinement of myths, histories and landscapes (Manea 2016: 113). "Music turns out to be a medium for shaping a cultural memory revolving around discourses on nativity", as Manea indicates (ibid: 113).

This way, in the case of pagan and black metal musicians, their interest in the past, history and heritage can be seen as a way of expressing their connection to their cultural roots and their sense of identity as members of a particular nation or ethnic group, and this is also how they create a particular kind of identity that is both individual and concerns a group. The musicians' focus of interest is often linked to a sense of cultural pride and a desire to preserve and celebrate their cultural heritage, which may be seen as under threat from globalisation and other forms of cultural homogenisation (see Deeks 2016, Mustamo 2019). Mustamo in her research about black and folk metal subcultures highlights that both musicians and fans praise wild nature

and the warlike imagined past of their homeland (Mustamo 2019: 72). She also indicates that there is a strong antagonism between modernity and the idealised past even though a “too romantic” attitude toward the history is perceived critically (ibid: 72).

Going back to the Estonian context, my fieldwork analysis led me to similar results. The participants recognise the crucial role of Estonian history in shaping their identity and music. H shares this opinion about the role of history in Estonian metal: “Overall Estonians have not had the best luck in wars, have been slaves for many-many years and had their sacred places destroyed by crusaders so there are many reasons to want to write music about those times. Metal seems to be the best genre to express the emotions for such times in history” (from the questionnaire materials). B also expressed that there is a certain magnetism towards history, nature and folklore in pagan metal (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022).

Furthermore, after years of Soviet occupation and relative isolation, a sudden “shock therapy” opened Estonia to the world, which, together with liberalisation, has brought the power of globalisation to the country (Pajur & Tannberg 2017). Due to its dramatic development, especially in the fields of IT and other technologies, there was no smooth transition in re-establishing nationhood under new conditions and accepting the gains of globalisation (Rinne 2016). In relation to the pagan metal subculture, a certain opposition to the politics of globalisation, or “the politics of West” as some participants named it, is also reflected in the way musicians talk about their worldview. It is also reflected in the reasoning for highlighting the history topics in bands’ lyrics and performances.

4.2 The discussion on reflexive anti-reflexivity in the subculture

Before starting the discussion on the main topic of this subchapter, I would like to provide the reader with a disclaimer. This thesis focuses on the subcultural dynamics of pagan metal in Estonia, a post-Soviet country, within the broader context of metal music studies. However, it is important to note that the majority of the scholars and literature referenced in this work predominantly originate from Western contexts, such

as the UK and the USA, and often explore topics related to other cultural and historical contexts (e.g. Spracklen or Kahn-Harris draw on the Nazi era).

Due to the limited availability of scholarly works specifically addressing the post-Soviet context and extreme metal subcultures, this thesis engages in a critical dialogue with the existing literature, drawing upon theoretical frameworks and concepts developed in different cultural contexts. While these perspectives provide valuable insights into the subcultural phenomena under investigation, it is essential to acknowledge the potential limitations and nuances that may arise when applying them to the unique sociocultural landscape of Estonia.

To better understand the interrelation of political viewpoints and subcultural self-expression, I asked some participants for their opinion on how Estonian history is represented in nowadays public discourse. Concerning this topic, one of the bands of my research focuses on shedding light on diverse historical events of Estonian history, especially the Second World War topics. Thus, in response to my question, a member of that band C shared that “[...] it was quite harsh already. [...] Then the Western world had the pressure to write over your history and if you wanted to come out with ideas, it’s not wrong at all. It’s Estonian viewpoint. [...] This is how we are Estonians. You can’t take it away. We have been in frontline protecting your freedom. [...] And if you lost our viewpoint [...], the viewpoint of people have always lived between in the front line of the Eastern and the Western world. If we lost it, you have to understand that Western world will lose their freedom” (from the interview materials, 13.10.2022). These ideas seem to find agreeable feedback among both musicians and fans in the subculture. Proof of this can be the fact that C’s band has remained one of the most popular extreme metal bands in Estonia for more than a decade. Thus, another reason for the subgenre’s popularity can be the global political agenda and the way it has been performed in Estonia.

I believe it is highly relevant to explain this because of such extensive attention to the history and focus on the oppression, the narratives of protecting the homeland, freedom or appreciation to the local landscapes, pagan metal musicians are often accused of Nazism or other sorts of radical ideologies. From personal experience, whenever I have presented at a conference, someone from the audience has asked me how I tackle the radical views of my research participants. In my opinion, these kinds of

questions are indicative of an existing public view of pagan metal musicians as radical extremists. Indeed, this opinion is popular not only in the media but also among metal music studies scholars. For instance, Kahn-Harris mentions: “An interest in pagan mythology can easily become an interest in racism and fascism. The apparently uncritical celebration of pagan pasts, the obsession with the ‘unpolluted’ countryside and the distrust of the cosmopolitan city were common features in nineteenth- and twentieth-century fascist and racist movements” (Kahn-Harris 2007: 41). Another scholar, Karl Spracklen, claims that “being anti-Christian is already problematic, because it can easily turn into a general attack against Jews and foreigners. But when being anti-Christian lines up with this imagined Vikingness, it becomes about defending a local place and culture, and a pure bloodline, against the pollution of outsiders” (Spracklen 2020: 117).

I find such ideas in academic papers highly problematic as they imply an automatic causal relationship between the interest in historical events alongside the anti-Christian mindset and National Socialism. While, no doubt, there are radical far-right subculturists in the metal scenes around the world and in Estonia, my research participants do not share such views. The black metal bands ideologically leaning toward the ideas of Nazism, white supremacy and high level of elitism are defined as NSBM (National-Socialist Black Metal). Except for the lyrical focus, such bands might organise thematic festivals, gigs, run websites and so on. In the Estonian extreme metal scene, NSBM and radicalism are highly unpopular (based on the fieldwork observations). While cherishing the importance of topics such as freedom-fighting and oppression, the musicians I chose for my research did not express ideas of racism or discrimination. For a comparison, Aila Mustamo in her research indicates that despite folk and black metal subcultures in Finland having a reputation of far-right and anti-immigration subcultures, immigration is not among the most important societal themes in their ideology, and there are many resisting discourses as well (Mustamo 2019: 79).

Nevertheless, even considering the above stated, some bands of my research focus have been accused of radical views. For example, H indicates that both bands he is a member of have been accused of Nazism: “Just recently some [band’s 1] concerts in Finland were cancelled because the organizer found out our connections to [band 2]

who has had problems with it in the past. It honestly feels sad that people seem to have to act like that without knowing us personally. It just seems to be a popular thing to do. If someone starts to think you are a Nazi then there is never a possibility to sensibly discuss the topic. They make up their mind in a blink of an eye and there is no return” (from the questionnaire materials). C, whose band has been accused as well, explained that he now tackles such accusations with silence and does not engage in a conversation since previously he had made multiple statements and given explanations refuting the accusations (from the interview materials, 13.10.2022). In terms of my research focus bands, such accusations do not reflect reality, as far as my fieldwork results show.

Keith Kahn-Harris expressed extreme metal subculturists’ attitude towards politics as “reflexively anti-reflexive” (Kahn-Harris 2004, Kahn-Harris 2007). In accordance with Keith Kahn-Harris’ research, I want to unpack the “reflexive anti-reflexivity” in the following way. In the context of extreme metal subcultures, members often have a strong awareness of the social and cultural forces that shape their scene and society more broadly. They may recognise the ways in which their subculture reproduces and reinforces dominant power structures and they may be critical of those structures. This awareness is reflexive.

However, members of the extreme metal scene may also be “anti-reflexive” in the sense that they seek to separate their musical practices from their political beliefs or values. They may see music as a separate sphere of activity that is not bound up with politics or social issues. This separation is willful and intentional, and it means that members of the scene may not engage with critical questions about the political implications of their music or the scene more broadly. In other words, extreme metal scene members can be “reflexively anti-reflexive” because they have a critical awareness of the social and cultural context in which they operate, but they intentionally choose to separate their musical practices from their political beliefs or values.

This reflexive anti-reflexivity can be traced in the community of my research focus too. Specifically, my participants say that they are “out of politics”, “do not like politics”, “just want to play music and are not interested in politics” and similar phrasings (from the fieldwork notes). However, even though musicians might be “out of politics” in the sense of not explicitly supporting a political party and power, they are making claims of various kinds that can be interpreted to be political (for instance,

about the definition of “Estonianess” or about the opinions on Estonian history). They are creating and promoting a rather particular idea of Estonianness, which is a political act in itself and makes them political actors. This way, explaining the role of reflexive anti-reflexivity in the frame of my research is important because it shows that, in their view, the participants do not see themselves as intentionally politically driven in their forms of self-expression.

Furthermore, I understand the reflexive anti-reflexivity in relation to the pagan metal subculture as a response to the historical and cultural forces that have shaped its experiences and identities. The reflexive anti-reflexivity of the pagan metal subculture can be seen as a way to navigate the tensions between resistance and co-option. Members of the subculture might see the potential for their subculture to be co-opted or appropriated by mainstream culture or political movements. For example, the aspect of nationalism I talked about earlier is one of the possible variations. Since pagan metal often features themes related to national or ethnic identity, it could potentially be co-opted by nationalist or far-right political movements. Since NSBM bands sometimes use the thematic approaches of folk and pagan metal bands, it might be difficult to distinguish between them (see Maspero et al 2015 on NSBM topic). As a result, some pagan metal bands may be wary of being associated with NSBM or other far-right movements and may intentionally separate their musical practices from their political beliefs or values as a means of maintaining autonomy and resisting co-option.

Moreover, I interpret Kahn-Harris’ reflexive anti-reflexivity (see Kahn-Harris 2007: 141-157) in relation to the pagan metal subculture as a possible way to create a space for personal expression and identity formation. Even though the exploration of cultural heritage is not a neutral activity that excludes any political intention, for the participants, the separation of music from politics might allow them to explore their cultural heritage (by researching and singing about history-related topics) and express themselves without being bound by political or social constraints. This way, they reflect on history and draw inspiration from it without giving it a political connotation.

Under the influence of the historical context where freedom of self-expression was often oppressed and limited, the subculture could become a place where members could express themselves and explore their identities in a way that is not available in mainstream society. It is a chance for subculturists to practice the reflection on the

historical past while at the same time accumulating subcultural capital (Thornton 1995), or cultural capital specific to the subculture, which could be used to establish social status within the subculture and gain recognition and respect from other members. This subcultural capital could be derived from various sources such as knowledge of the subculture, its history and musical styles as well as commitment to its values and practices. I will talk about it in relation to authenticity in the following subchapter.

4.3 “Reproducing authenticity” and subcultural identity

Before discussing the topic of the subchapter, I once again would like to offer the reader a disclaimer. Authenticity is a debated concept in folkloristics: “The label ‘authentic’ also seems to be problematic because the label implies that the matter has been recognised as such and this awareness undermines authenticity” (Venbrux & Meder: 206). Folklore, by its very nature, is fluid and subject to change over time. It evolves through the interactions, interpretations and adaptations within communities. When it comes to authenticity in the subcultural context, the issue is no different – subcultural identities are often performed and enacted through symbols, styles and practices that oftentimes change with time as a subculture evolves. Authenticity in the subcultural context can be seen as a performative accomplishment rather than an inherent quality.

Regina Bendix, a renowned scholar in the field of folklore studies, offers valuable insights into authenticity (Bendix 1997). Searches for authenticity have been a constant companion to the feelings of loss inherent in modernisation (ibid), and by delving deep into the subject, Bendix tracks the history of such searches and explores how understanding of the notion of authenticity has been changing with time (for example, in the context of the turn from a textual or “itemised” to a process-oriented focus in folkloristics – Bendix 1997: 195).

She also discusses authenticity in relation to concepts of genre, ethnicity or tradition. One can draw on diverse insights from her work, for instance, that authenticity is shaped by the ways in which individuals, communities or institutions present and interpret cultural practices, artefacts or traditions, so the meanings and interpretations of authenticity can vary and what may be considered authentic in one context may not be

in another. The recognition of something as authentic can also be politically manipulated as certain individuals or institutions may hold more influence in enforcing a particular understanding of authenticity.

Of crucial importance to this master's thesis is the concept of "reproducing authenticity" developed by Susanna Larsson (2013) in the context of metal subculture. I will explore in this section how members of the pagan metal subculture perceive subcultural authenticity and reproduce it. I will examine how subcultural practices are used to establish and maintain boundaries between the subculturists emically perceived as "more authentic" or "less authentic". Finally, through this analysis, I will offer a deeper understanding of how the subcultural perception of authenticity contributes to the construction of a subcultural mythos that reinforces the subculture's values and beliefs.

To begin with, "subcultural capital" is a term that refers to the cultural knowledge, skills and practices that are valued within a particular subculture or social group (Thornton 1995). It includes both material and symbolic resources that are used to establish and maintain social status and cultural authenticity within the subculture.

The concept of cultural capital was first introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist. Bourdieu argued that cultural practices and tastes are not just a matter of personal preference, but are also shaped by social factors such as class, education and cultural capital (Bourdieu 2011). Based on this, the concept of subcultural capital was formed by Sarah Thornton in her book *Club cultures: music, media and subcultural capital* (1995). In a subcultural context, subcultural capital allows the holder to see him- or herself as distinct from other young people and to be seen to be so by relevant subcultural others (Jensen 2006: 263). Subcultural capital may be acquired through various means, such as participating in specific cultural practices, possessing knowledge of certain cultural references or displaying certain styles or tastes. It can be used to establish social hierarchies within the subculture as individuals who possess more subcultural capital are often seen as more authentic or legitimate members of the subculture.

In the case of this research, the first-order zone of the subculture contains the most subcultural capital because this is where the most committed and dedicated members of the subculture are found. The subculturists from the first-order zone have

invested a significant amount of time, effort and resources into their involvement in the subculture, which has allowed them to accumulate subcultural capital. Moreover, they have developed strong ties with other members of the subculture, which further enhances their status and recognition within the subculture. It does not mean that the first-order zone is entitled to the subcultural values in a way that the second-order zone has no access to, however, the first-order zone is more resistant to “liminal” memberships and external cultural influences.

This way, “encapsulation” is intrinsic to the first-order zone of the subculture (Noyes 1995). Encapsulation refers to the process of maintaining the boundaries between a subculture from the larger society or culture in which it exists. In the case of the pagan metal subculture in Estonia, encapsulation is present towards the relationship between the local subculture and mainstream culture, and between the subculture and the global extreme metal scene as well. C described the latter as “the most important problem in the Estonian scene” (from the interview materials, 13.10.2022) because, in C’s opinion, this prevents bands from getting “out there” and establishing international connections. However, the majority of my research participants expressed a reluctance to get global. B justifies it as follows: “Since I don’t want to be world famous myself, then I don’t pay so much attention to be approachable to everyone” (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022). Furthermore, the Tartu Under the Horns documentary largely discusses the “Tartu scene” as an isolated network that does not strive for fame: “In Tartu, they want to preserve art for themselves” (Tartu Under the Horns, 2022).

Talking about the “encapsulation” of a community, Noyes indicates: “resistance to the exit of the expressive forms from the network is easily understood as a protection of cultural capital, the appropriation of which robs the network of a resource” (Noyes 1995: 464). In the context of the quote, the “exit” of expressive forms from the network can refer to the loss or removal of resources from the subculture, which can lead to a decrease in its subcultural capital. For example, if a member of the subculture stops participating in certain subcultural practices or stops creating subcultural artefacts, it could result in a loss of subcultural capital for the community. The resistance to this exit I see: 1) as a protective measure to preserve the subcultural capital of the community, and 2) as insurance for preserving the *authenticity* within the subculture.

In an endeavour to examine a subcultural identity and its correlation with authenticity, Susanna Larsson has developed the notion of “reproducing authenticity” (Larsson 2013). She approaches authenticity as something that, first and foremost, comes from the way an individual constructs him- or herself in relation to society and secondly, the way a subculturist positions him- or herself in terms of in-subcultural authentic being and representation.

Larsson understands authenticity as related to individual morals (one’s own sense of originality) and as related to socially constructed morals – an in-group social negotiation of morals (Larsson 2013: 98). This suggests that authenticity is a combination of an individual’s sense of originality and the socially constructed morals of their subculture. These social norms and values act as a barrier that distinguishes the subculture from the larger society, which means the encapsulation of subcultural capital. Therefore, authenticity involves both being true to oneself and being a part of a group that shares similar values and beliefs. In the context of my research, it implies that the authenticity of the Estonian pagan metal subculture is shaped by the subculturist’s own sense of originality and the subculture’s socially constructed morals, values and practices. These morals, values and practices, in turn, are developed and reproduced within the in-group context.

An individual subcultural self-understanding of authenticity Larsson calls “constitutive authenticity” (Larsson 2013: 102), meaning that subculturists see their individual authenticity as the one that precedes the collective sense of authenticity – something that comes naturally and can be “proved” by a symbolic artefact or event.

The constitutive authenticity shifting to the collective dimension constructs the “reproducing authenticity”, meaning the way individuals unite around practices and morals and together negotiate their collective identities (Larsson 2013: 102). In other words, subculturalists may prioritise their own personal sense of authenticity, based on their in-group’s understanding of beliefs, over external influences or critical perspectives. This results in a closed and self-referential subcultural scene, but also reinforces a sense of community and belonging within the subculture, where authenticity is seen as the point of reference.

In the context of the Estonian pagan metal subculture, I will discuss the “reproducing authenticity” through two major and strongly interrelated subtopics developed by Larsson: social in-group and thematic in-group.

4.3.1 Social in-group

When Susanna Larsson mentions that “the heavy metal music and culture has been instilled in the individual heavy metal fans to the point where they consider themselves one with the music” (Larsson 2013: 100), it corresponds to something I refer to in this research as “metal as a lifestyle”. Authenticity refers here to not simply acting “naturally”, but to being devoted to the lifestyle, meaning that a subculturist does not participate in the scene practices occasionally but he considers them as an integral part of his lifestyle.

One’s position in the scene and one’s “level” of authenticity in the scene are defined by other first-order zone members in the Estonian pagan metal subculture and by the amount of time he invests into his lifestyle as a metalhead. For example, participation in a band rehearsal for a truly devoted (and hence, authentic) musician must not be a “special event” but a part of his performed everydayness (del Negro & Berger 2004: 10) and must be perceived by other scene members as such. C indicates: “I think in metal scene, or black metal scene, or extreme metal scene, the most important way of existing is [...] that ideas that you represent and the lifestyle must be a part of your life” (from the interview materials 13.10.2022). In the interview, B particularly talked about unstable musicians who have so many other tasks to do that they eventually quit their bands or quit the scene entirely: “They want to get into the things, but after some time they get tired of it and they simply disappeared from that [the scene]” (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022). I interpret it in a way that a person who does not have enough time to participate in the life of the band or the scene activities is perceived by the participants as less authentic.

This way, I want to highlight the aspect of devotion since “less authentic” members are less devoted to the subculture and, thus, cannot be trusted in practical matters of the subculture like event organising or band managing activities. This leads to another characteristic of an “authentic musician”, which is the length of one’s

participation in the scene. Earlier in subchapter 3.2 I indicated that all of my participants started getting into metal as children or teenagers, which allowed them to accumulate the most subcultural capital over the years and, this way, to maintain their devotion to the subculture. Even though it was not clearly phrased and stated by any of the participants, my analysis results show that the longer one is in the scene, the more he is perceived as authentic. The most devoted subcultrists have obtained a reputation of being authentic over the years that does not require additional “proof” from their side. This is what can be called recognisability in the social in-group, meaning the social in-subcultural context where “individual and collective dedication is known and need not be argued for” (Larsson 2013: 95).

At the same time, from the etic standpoint, the reputation one has in the first-order zone does not tell an outsider about the specific reference points according to which this reputation was constructed in the collective perception. This is why at different points of my conversations with the research participants some of them brought up concrete evidence of dedication or a life story that would exemplify someone else’s devotion. Such examples can demonstrate a collective acceptance based on others seeing one as more authentic.

I would like to illustrate the individual understanding by the multiple examples C mentioned when talking to me. Firstly, he provided me with a story about a young musician at an international festival who tried to present his special promo text to different musicians, event organisers and records representatives. However, doing so did not lead to getting his promo accepted. In the context of this story, C highlights several moments of individual understanding of authenticity: finding contacts and networking – presence (“you *have to* be present”) in the scene’s social activities always, not only when you, for instance, need promotion for your band; complete understanding of the scene members, their values and morals – knowledge based on the accumulated subcultural capital (“the most important is that you know the guys, you know the background [...] you are just there drinking beer with them [...] and [eventually] you are much more successful because you don’t *press* yourself into their world, you are already there and you already understand everything”) and, subsequently, this presence and knowledge combined give you collective acceptance based on others seeing you as more authentic.

Then, C shared another story about one scene member, who was mostly inactive in the scene's social life but who was a great collector and who had an extensive collection of cassettes, vinyls and CDs. The interviewee mentioned that the man did not consider himself a scene member because of his lack of presence in social settings but the comprehensive collection was seen as devotion and thus was perceived by the interviewee as authentic interest. At first glance, it somewhat contradicts with what C said earlier about presence, yet from this story I drew the conclusion that the collector had been present in the scene long enough and had participated enough in the subcultural practices to obtain the reputation of an authentic subculturist. I suggest that this example further demonstrates the way reproducing authenticity concept practically works in terms of acceptance: the devotion to collecting is individually recognised as something authentic by C, but this recognition is also based on the collective understanding of subcultural authenticity.

Knowledge, devotion and presence in the context of the Estonian pagan metal subculture are inseparably bound with the discussion of the role of Estonian history in forming subcultural ideas and values. In the context of the Estonian pagan metal subculture, I find the historical reflection impactful on how the participants understand authenticity in the social in-group. The participants are highly overt about the importance of historical circumstances in shaping their subcultural identity. In the interview, B articulated: "Deep knowledge about history is definitely [a] positive side, it shows that [...] I can talk with that person on the same level" (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022). In this quote, the "deep knowledge" of history can refer not only to factological information such as specific events or dates but also to a particular kind of understanding and interpretation of history.

C conducted his own thorough research on Estonians who participated in the Second World War in order to be as precise as possible in his band's artistic expressions (from the interview materials, 13.10.2022). He visited and interviewed the war veterans as well as read diverse materials on the topic. Yet, when talking about it, C phrases his intentions this way: "I always want to be 100% sure what I'm talking about" (from the interview materials, 13.10.2022). This seems to indicate that C's intentions are also aimed at his self-perception of individual authenticity based on the value of knowledge. This way, he projects his constitutive authenticity to his bands' creative expressions (i.e.

lyrics and merchandise), which, in turn, are exposed to the subcultural context where they are collectively reproduced. During participant observation, some subculturists indicated that C's band served as a huge source of inspiration for them (in terms of visual self-expression, music writing or morals). Thus, the way C's constitutive authenticity shifted into the collective context and, importantly, influenced the subcultural identity construction of other subculturists shows reproducing authenticity in action.

However, some participants were hesitant to give credit to the impact of history in their subcultural artistic expressions as they related it to involvement in politics. When discussing the role of the historical reflection in the scene, D shared: "[...] there is some resistance to the Christianity and past occupation memories. [...] But personally, I don't want to make my music too involved and I don't want to talk about politics too much in the music" (from the interview materials, 22.10.2022). This example demonstrates the tension between subcultural self-realisation and historical, political, economic or social circumstances that influenced one's subcultural identity. The rejection of illuminating the history topics in one's creative expressions in this context is specifically explained by the unwillingness of getting into politics and not by the lack of interest in history (based on interview materials, 22.10.2022). In relation to reflexive anti-reflexivity, such behaviour can be seen as a protection mechanism against external accusations as it has happened to some other bands in the scene, and this could also be interpreted as an example of the existence of multiple views of what counts as "political" in the scene.

Finally, all the aspects discussed above the participants themselves unanimously define as "passion". When answering the questions about others' authenticity, the participants tended to prefer this word to others. Participants use expressions like "you just have to be passionate", "passion is the most important factor" and alike (based on fieldwork materials). For some, passion also includes resisting public pressure and staying devoted to their music no matter what. In particular, A, when talking about one band, admired how truly passionate they are about what they do, even though there is a politically-based ideological tension in the scene regarding that band. Again, due to reflexive anti-reflexivity in action, A expresses that he dislikes when bands "let their political views get in the way of music" and he himself stays "out of politics", but at the

same time, he brings up that band as an example of authentic passion in the subculture (from the interview materials, 10.07.2022).

Passion seems to be an umbrella term for participants that unites the values of devotion, presence, knowledge and acceptance and from passion derives the “true sense of self”, which can be experienced by both individual subcultural self-expression and observing the subcultural expressions of others. One of the demonstrative examples of this process I found in the subcultural sense of style.

4.3.2 Thematic in-group

In the thematic in-group, according to Larsson, people can only rely on markers of recognisability such as attributes, symbols or other visual expressions (Larsson 2013: 104). The “look” constituent is one of the defining features of the metal subcultures around the world and it serves as the indicator of belongingness, especially in the subcultural social contexts where one is not necessarily familiar with other subculturists.

My fieldwork demonstrated that, from the emic subcultural perspective, the devotion to music is seen to be more significant than the visual rules when it comes to authenticity. The majority of the research participants stated that for them looks do not define authenticity. For example, H wrote in the questionnaire response the following: “[...] I wouldn’t tie authenticity to a certain look. I’m more wary about people who talk about being fans of metal but really not knowing many bands at all besides Metallica or some other mainstream ones” (from the questionnaire materials). This also corresponds to the above-discussed importance of the knowledge aspect. Knowledge is more crucial than wearing “leather and spikes” in H’s perception of other musicians as authentic.

Moreover, C even underlines that the level of devotion might not always be related to what extent the scene members care about the subculturally “accurate” appearance: “Those guys who are very serious into this scene and have been in the scene very long time in Estonia, they actually look like a quite usual person. The look has never been important” (from the interview materials, 13.10.2022).

Yet the research participants themselves had attributes that to me, as a metalhead, served as a clear indication of their subcultural belonging. These visual

attributes are the ones commonly spread in metal subcultures around the world: T-shirts and hoodies with local and foreign metal bands, patches with band names and logos sewn on jackets or vests, chains and long hair. I paid careful attention to the appearance of the subculture members in the contexts of communal activities such as gigs, informal events and the Hard Rock Lager 2022 festival, and noticed that it is rather unlikely for a subculturist not to have at least one or two identifiers of the subcultural belonging. Larsson suggests that even though music precedes the visual rules when it comes to authenticity, “this clashes with an implicit demand for belongingness” (Larsson 2013: 104). Subcultural recognisability and, thus, acceptance depend on visual indicators, which are, in turn, the sole method of directly connecting individuals with a particular social setting.

The discrepancy between the claims of the research participants that looks do not matter and their consistent adoption of a specific dress style associated with extreme metal fandom suggests an interesting dynamic regarding authenticity and its reproduction. From an emic perspective, the participants may see their dress style as a natural expression of their authentic subcultural identity, while at the same time rejecting the notion that appearance is a defining aspect of this identity. From an etic perspective, it can be argued that a certain look is a symbolic representation of the subculture and the consistent adoption of this style by the participants reinforces its authenticity in the eyes of both insiders and outsiders. This suggests that subcultural authenticity may be a social construct that is perpetuated through the reproduction of specific subcultural practices, rather than being solely determined by individual self-expression. The observation of the participants carrying subcultural attributes even outside the official subcultural events once again demonstrates that, for a truly authentic subculturist, metal is a lifestyle and not a special occasion. It is such a natural part of everydayness to an extent that it becomes being seen as the “usual” way of looking.

To support my point, I must also add that subculturists comment on those scene members who overdo their looks by “trying too hard”. I have noted jokes that addressed them and comments regarding how “ridiculous” or “pointless” it is to overdo with merchandise or accessories (from the fieldwork materials). Some musicians connect it mostly with the young people who have just started getting into metal and wear merchandise associated with the most world-famous metal bands (for example,

Metallica, Slayer or Slipknot). B commented on it this way: “I used to listen to some bands like Metallica myself [...] I think it’s acceptable that younger people don’t know that much, but at the same time, it definitely helps if one is simply devoted to the music they like. There are many for whom metal is just a face” (from the interview materials, 11.08.2022).

Interestingly, Lii Araste investigated how the style of the Estonian metal subculture serves as a boundary mechanism and she pinpointed similar reactions coming from her research participants (Araste & Ventsel 2015: 268). She indicates that “Estonian metal-lore is full of jokes about abusing ‘our’ symbols claiming this way authenticity through irony” (ibid: 268).

Considering those participants who referred to some scene members as “usual-looking”, I see appearance choices as important but not the sole determinants of authenticity. Thus, it implies that spending too much time on dressing up as a metal fan is seen as pointless (as it must derive “naturally” from one’s subcultural knowledge). On the other hand, musicians do rely on looks as a recognisability factor when it comes to second-order zone subculturists. This suggests that if one’s awareness about someone else’s subcultural reputation is absent, they “evaluate” authenticity according to the way someone else is able to transmute their subcultural knowledge and devotion into visual attributes like, for example, the selection of patches on their jackets. From the first-order zone member’s perspective, it may demonstrate their commitment to the scene: “If you see that a youngster is wearing a battle vest and there is Metallica and Darkthrone patch, then you know that this is the beginning of the road [...]. Not because it’s a statement. You’re wearing statements. So it must be thought through, not just random favourite bands” (C, from the interview materials, 13.10.2022).

By using the visual elements, subculturists signify a certain knowledge to them. However, conveying this knowledge to other subculturists requires the subcultural context – meaning that a certain knowledge signified in a visual attribute must be recognised as such in the particular context. This is something that was discussed extensively by the CCCS scholars in terms of style as a communication function. According to Clarke, objects and their meaning constitute signs, which are assembled into certain form of discourse (Clarke 1976). “However, when the bricoleur re-locates the significant object in a different position within that discourse, using the same overall

repertoire of signs, or when that object is placed within a different total ensemble, a new discourse is constituted, a different message conveyed” (Clarke 1976 in Hebdige 1979: 104).

For Hebdige, the bricoleur is a key figure within subcultures who appropriates and recontextualises existing cultural materials and symbols to create a distinct subcultural style (Hebdige 1979). This particular style bears a communication function in the subculture. The elements of style are deliberately chosen and combined to create a distinct and recognisable subcultural identity. By adopting and performing this style, subcultural participants aim to convey their affiliation with the subculture and signal their shared beliefs, values and interests. Style serves as a visual and auditory language that resonates with the subcultural community and distinguishes them from the “mainstream”. This aligns with Hebdige’s idea of style as communication: “The communication of a significant difference, then (and the parallel communication of a group identity), is the ‘point’ behind the style of all spectacular subcultures” (Hebdige 1979: 102).

In essence, the concept of the bricoleur in the works of Clarke and Hebdige highlights the agency and creative resourcefulness of individuals within subcultures who construct their identities by repurposing and recombining cultural materials in ways that challenge and resist mainstream cultural norms. However, further discussion of this topic will require a different direction than the focus of this research and venture into the field of semiotics, which is beyond the scope of the thesis.

This way, I suggest that a subculturist who listens to the music and also dresses as a “metalhead” may collectively be perceived as more authentic. In the context of the pagan metal subculture, looks are one of the ways of directly associating people with a certain social context and a collectively constructed moral that, as mentioned before, can also serve as both an indicator of belongingness and a barrier to the outside.

4.3.3 Authenticity reproduction in the collective space

For my participants, the feelings of estrangement regarding society outside the subculture are usual. The desire of subcultural participation does not draw on the taste of a specific kind of music exclusively as there are numerous social and economic

factors at play. Subculturists find understanding and response to their feelings in subcultural participation since the basic function of a subculture is to create a community in which social problems are solved (Riches 2011: 323). Because of this, it can be important for the subculturists to save the subculture from appropriation or dilution that are caused by external factors such as, for instance, commodification. A common sense of authenticity, hence, can work as a way for preserving boundaries. “Authenticity means drawing lines and revolting against conformity” (Taylor 1992 in Larsson 2013: 106).

Larsson suggests that the authentic interest in music is something created by the individual and then reproduced culturally by the collective since a “heavy metal moral is reproducing authenticity when someone from the same context utters it” (Larsson 2013: 103). The mechanism through which authenticity is reproduced can be seen as a social process, where members of the subculture collectively negotiate and establish what is considered authentic and desirable within the group. This negotiation can take place through social interactions, shared experiences and the production and circulation of cultural artefacts such as music, literature and visual art. In some cases, this negotiation may also involve the creation of hierarchies or subcultural capital, where members who are seen as more authentic or dedicated to the subculture are valued and rewarded with social status and respect.

Events and festivals are the main spaces where ideas of what is authentic are transmitted between members in communication-interlocks. In such spaces, authenticity is reproduced through the acts of engagement of the audience with the performers, performers with the other performers and the fans with each other. By engaging with the scene and participating in the scene practices, both musicians and fans construct the scene as a collective instead of as a group of separate individuals who listen to metal music.

One of the concrete examples of such collective engagement can be Hard Rock Laager. While conducting my fieldwork there (01-03.07.2022), I investigated the diverse aspects of authenticity reproduced from the mundane subcultural capital, which is accumulated through a commitment to the collective (Kahn-Harris 2007: 127). Mundane subcultural capital refers to the collective power that arises from the everyday actions and contributions of all members of a subculture. It is built over time through

the various practices and activities that keep the subculture alive and thriving and through which the scene is reproduced (Kahn-Harris 2007: 122).

Naturally, the interaction between the first and second-order zones is essential for maintaining the vitality of the subculture. Without the participation of the fans, the musicians would not have an audience to perform for, and the subculture would lose its communal aspect. Similarly, without the musicians, there would be no music for the fans to consume and participate in. At Hard Rock Laager, the different social units of the subcultural network take part in immediate collective action. There, the sense of unity and shared mundane capital is stronger than at any smaller-scale local events. Most musicians, who come to perform there, stay for the whole duration of the festival and, thus, become one with the crowd as listeners of the other performing bands (from the fieldwork materials).

This way, HRL is one of the essential collective experiences where the scene's collective values and sense of authenticity are reproduced, considering both social and thematic in-group authenticity aspects. The first point of reference for authenticity "evaluation" is the presence and length of subcultural participation. The most obvious visual evidence in this regard is HRL T-shirts. Every year, the festival organisers release festival T-shirts with diverse designs that necessarily include the year of the festival.

Even though it is possible to buy T-shirts from the previous festival years online, the most authentic and truthful experience the audience and musicians consider when you buy an actual T-shirt on the spot from the merchandising stand (from the fieldwork materials).

Then, the yearly attendance of the festival is also considered by the participants as a big indicator of one's devotion. Since the festival takes place at Vana-Vigala, people travel there from all over Estonia and for many it is a significant investment of time and finances as well as sacrificing the stability of everyday comforts – the vast majority of the participants live at a camping area in tents for the duration of the festival (from the fieldwork materials).



Figure 4. HRL 2022 female T-shirt and HRL 2009 male shirt. Taken from Hard Rock Lager online store.
<https://shop.hardrocklager.ee>

As for the knowledge aspect, in the context of HRL, a great example would be an instance of festival lore. During my stay there, festival visitors at the camping area would shout “Eero!” intermittently during nighttime. Being deprived of a chance to sleep, I started asking around about the meaning of this behaviour. By investigating at the festival and later in Tartu, I found two versions of the story’s origins. The first one tells of a man named Eero who borrowed money from somebody at the festival and did not return it. The people or a person, from whom Eero borrowed money, were looking for him at the camping area and shouting “Eero! Eero!”. Over the festival years, the regular festival visitors appropriated the shout sometimes also adding an additional part to the shout: “Eeeero! Maksa võlg ära!”⁴ (from the fieldwork materials).

In the second version, Eero did not borrow any money but simply got lost at the festival area and did not make it back to the tent where he was staying with friends. His friends were looking for him and shouting his name. I could not find information about the exact year when the incident took place, however, some participants mentioned that

⁴ “Eero! Pay off the debt!”

the tradition of shouting Eero's name has already existed since 2009 (from the fieldwork materials).

In the collective context of the Hard Rock Lager festival, all the factors combined are perceived as subculturally authentic by those who attend the festival regularly, and, this way, this sense of authenticity is reproduced by the newer audiences (like me, for instance). By reproducing authenticity, the newcomers accumulate subcultural capital, which can be the rewarding collective experience of the scene.

Conclusion

Overall, I explored three major topics in my thesis: the social constitution of the pagan metal subculture, the factors that influenced the formation of the subculture and authenticity in the subculture. The social constitution of the pagan metal subculture is influenced by a range of historical, political and cultural factors that shaped the development of the subculture over time. The formation of the subculture is also closely tied to these factors, as well as to the broader social and cultural context in which it emerged. As a result, understanding the social constitution and historical context of the subculture is crucial to understanding how it formed and developed over time.

Authenticity is a key concept within the pagan metal subculture, and it is closely tied to the social constitution and historical context of the subculture. The subculture places a high value on authenticity, which is reflected in the music, dress and other cultural practices of its members. To fully understand authenticity within the subculture, it is necessary to understand the broader social and cultural context in which it emerged as well as the specific historical and political factors that shaped its development.

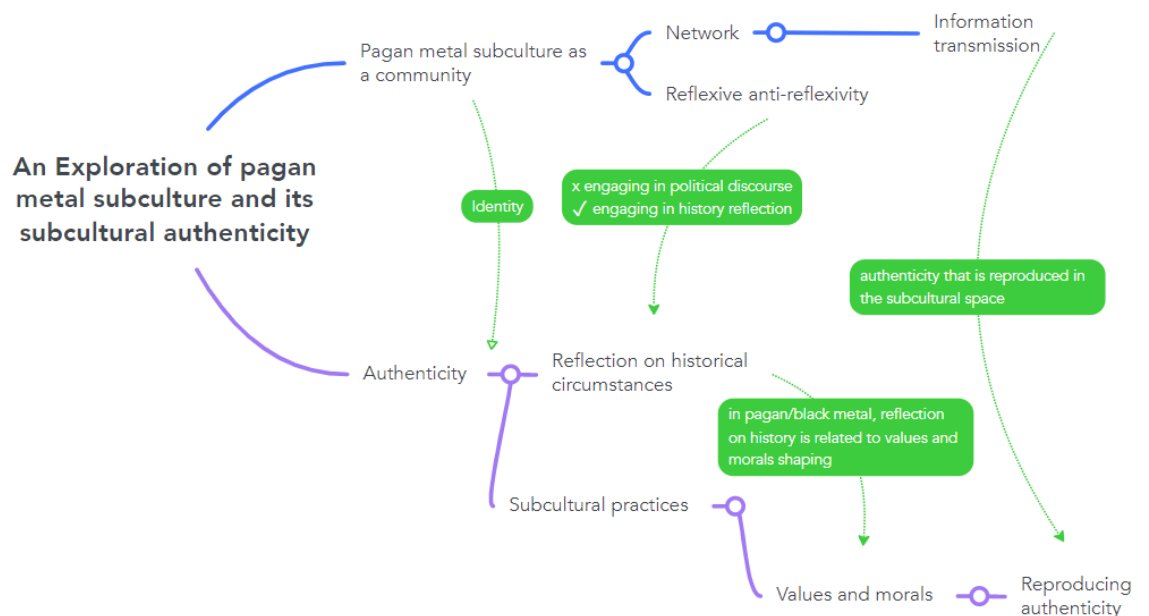


Figure 5. The mind map represents the interconnections of the main point explored in the thesis.

Made using Mindmeister. <https://www.mindmeister.com/map/2698793994>

The thesis investigated the following aims: providing a new perspective on pagan metal within the field of metal music studies by incorporating ethnological fieldwork-based research analysis; investigating the social constitution of the Estonian pagan metal subculture through the analysis of the subcultural network and social units; tracking the influence of historical and political factors on the formation of the pagan metal subculture in Estonia and its subcultural morals; examining the concept of reflexive anti-reflexivity and its role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of members within the Estonian pagan metal subculture, and to explore how this relates to historical reflections and subcultural values and morals; investigating the notion of subcultural authenticity and its reproduction within the Estonian pagan metal subculture from both individual and collective perspectives through etic analysis of the emic perception of subcultural authenticity.

First of all, the thesis contributes to the general field of metal music studies. As I discussed in Chapter 1, metal music studies have been actively developing in recent years. The scholars in the field have been rethinking the previous research in subcultural studies, incorporating new ideas and developing new subfields, such as research specifically on death metal or black metal. The subject of pagan metal on the metal music canvas is not absent, yet also not as researched as, for example, black metal.

One of the problematic aspects in research on pagan metal is the definition problem as there is no consensus on what is considered pagan metal in scholarly research and how it is different from folk metal or Viking metal. While this research does not lie in musicology and does not provide an analysis of the music part, it offers a definition of pagan metal based on my subcultural experience, other close definitions and emic points of view. I defined pagan metal as a subgenre of extreme metal music that musically derives from black metal and may or may not collide with some elements of folk metal (like the incorporation of folk instruments or traditional singing elements in music). Lyrically, its main interest lies in the, often poeticised, representation of pre-Christian historical times, oftentimes with an emphasis on praising pre-Christian religions or gods; diverse historical events mostly related to national history; nature and native landscapes. Pagan metal is a subgenre that functions around a certain idea, or rather a set of closely interrelated ideas. Musicians in the subgenre find their inspiration in folklore, mythology, traditions and historical events.

This definition serves as a thematic framework for the community under research, and it can also be used for further research. It provides a broader understanding of pagan metal not as strictly related to “pagan” but also including other topics that are related to history or cultural heritage.

This research is based on first-hand ethnological fieldwork, which included interviews, questionnaires and participant observation. The conducted fieldwork allowed me to become a part of the metal scene in Tartu and access the in-group perspectives on the subjects discussed in the thesis.

The pagan metal subculture is a thematic definition of the community that belongs to the extreme metal scene in Estonia. Some of the research participants also play in punk bands and are a part of the punk scene. In order to give a perspective on the position of the community in the scene, I discussed the formation and development of the extreme metal scene in Estonia, with focus on the bands in my area of interest specifically. Then, I discussed the pagan metal subculture in Estonia in terms of its subcultural network. As a theoretical basis, I used Dorothy Noyes’ concept of network (Noyes 1995) and J. Patrick Williams’ “communication-interlocks” (Williams 2011). I defined my focus group as a “core group” and located it in the first-order zone of the subcultural network. By focusing on the first-order zone, I aimed to gain insights into how the perception of subcultural authenticity is created, maintained and reproduced from the perspective of those who are actively involved in the subculture and possess the most subcultural capital.

Subsequently, I investigated the meaning of the Estonian history context in forming the values and worldview of the subculturists. For the context of this research, it was highly important as the bands of my focus take such themes as history, occupation and freedom, anti-Christianity and local landscapes as inspiration or sources of their lyrical content and performances. Moreover, the reflection on these topics shaped their individual identity regardless of being a part of the band – the bands’ thematic orientations follow the individual worldviews of the participants and, as a result, their perception of authenticity.

While engaging in reflections on history-related topics and expressing opinions based on them, the participants willingly follow the ideology of “staying out of politics”. This is why the discussion on reflexive anti-reflexivity was important to bring

in, as it explains the mechanism behind such subcultural behaviour. The connection between reflexive anti-reflexivity and historical circumstances in the context of pagan metal subcultural identity and authenticity lies in the way that historical circumstances have shaped the attitudes and values of the subculture. Estonia has a complex history, including periods of foreign rule, occupation and independence struggles, which have influenced the way that Estonians view politics and nationalism.

The reflexive anti-reflexivity pattern can be seen as a reaction to this history. Members of the subculture may be reluctant to engage with political issues because they feel that their political views are not relevant to their subcultural identity or because they do not want to be seen as endorsing any particular political ideology.

At the same time, the reflexive aspect of the subculture acknowledges the broader social and cultural context in which the subculture exists, including the historical circumstances that have shaped Estonian identity and values. This awareness can manifest itself in various ways, such as a fascination with Estonian folklore or a desire to represent an “authentic” view of some historical subjects in the bands’ creative expressions.

Finally, after investigating the above-mentioned topics, I moved to the topics of subcultural capital and authenticity. I looked at the notion of subcultural authenticity and its reproduction within the Estonian pagan metal subculture from both individual and collective perspectives. I grouped the aspects of subcultural authenticity into devotion, presence and knowledge and described the concrete examples from my fieldwork related to all of them. I also mentioned that there is an emic consensus about the essence of authenticity, which is laconically defined as passion. In the final subchapter, I analysed the aspects of authenticity in the collective context of the Hard Rock Laager festival, which I attended on 01-03.07.2022.

Authenticity is strongly related to the subcultural understanding of acceptance, belonging and boundary setting. All three notions are highly based on the level of subcultural capital one possesses, which influences the perceived level of one’s authenticity – the more subcultural capital one has obtained, the more authentic he or she is in the subcultural context.

Suggestions for future research in the context of pagan metal can build upon the existing knowledge and explore various aspects that warrant further investigation. One

potential area of focus is the examination of resistance to society and the role of shibboleths in shaping authenticity as a boundary protection mechanism within the subculture. This entails delving into how pagan metal subculture asserts its distinctiveness and resists mainstream norms, using specific markers, symbols or practices as shibboleths that establish and reinforce boundaries of authenticity. Moreover, conducting the lyrical analysis can provide valuable insights into the thematic content, symbolism and ideological underpinnings of extreme metal music. Exploring how lyrics contribute to the construction and negotiation of authenticity within the subculture would enhance our understanding of the genre's cultural dynamics.

Additionally, future research could investigate the ways in which the post-Soviet context influences the development and expression of extreme or specifically pagan metal in Estonia. By examining how historical and sociocultural factors unique to Estonia shape the subculture, researchers can gain a nuanced understanding of the interplay between the global metal scene and local cultural dynamics.

Finally, employing innovative research methods such as sensory ethnography or netnography can provide fresh insights into the lived experiences, subcultural practices and online interactions of the scene members. These approaches can shed light on the embodied experiences, sensory aesthetics and virtual communities that contribute to the subculture's authenticity.

Overall, future research in extreme/pagan metal should embrace interdisciplinary perspectives, engage with diverse subcultural contexts and explore the multifaceted dimensions of authenticity to enrich our comprehension of this vibrant and evolving subculture.

Resümee

Magistritöö “Eesti pagan-*metal* subkultuur: kogukond ja autentsus” annab ülevaate konkreetse grupi väärtustest, uskumustest ja praktikatest Eesti laiemas *metal*-skeenes ning käistleb nende haakumisi laiema kultuurilise, sotsiaalse ja poliitilise kontekstiga. Lisaks püütakse uurimistööga aidata kaasa nüansirikkama arusaama kujunemisele Eesti *metal*-muusika skeenedest, mis on Eesti populaarkultuuri elujõuline aspekt. Uuring osaleb käimasolevates aruteludes subkultuuriteooria üle, eriti selles osas, mis puudutab subkultuuride sotsiaalset ülesehitust ning hierarhia, subkultuuriliste piiride ja autentsuse mõisteid.

Selle magistritöö eesmärgid on:

- 1) Anda uus vaade pagan-*metal*ile *metal*-muusika uuringute valdkonnas, kaasates välitööpõhist etnograafilist lähenemist.
- 2) Uurida eesti pagan-*metali* subkultuuri sotsiaalset ülesehitust subkultuurilise võrgustiku ja sotsiaalsete üksuste analüüsi kaudu.
- 3) Jälgida ajalooliste ja poliitiliste tegurite mõju pagan-*metali* subkultuuri kujunemisele Eestis ja selle subkultuurilisele moraalile.
- 4) Uurida refleksiivse antirefleksiivsuse kontseptsiooni ja selle rolli liikmete hoiakute ja käitumise kujundamisel Eesti pagan-*metali* subkultuuris ning uurida, kuidas see seostub ajalooliste peegelduste ning subkultuuriliste väärtuste ja moraaliga.
- 5) Uurida subkultuurilise autentsuse mõistet ja selle taastootmist Eesti pagan-*metali* subkultuuris nii individuaalsest kui kollektiivsest vaatenurgast läbi subkultuurilise autentsuse eemilise tajumise analüüsi.

Magistritöö neljast peatükist esimene annab ülevaate olulisematest suundumustest subkultuuride ja *metal*-muusika uurimises. Teises peatükis tutvustatakse uurimuses kasutatavaid mõisteid ja allikaid ning kirjeldatakse välitööprotsessi. Kolmas peatükk on pühendatud *metal*-muusika skeene kujunemisele Eestis ning selle analüüsimisele subkultuurilise võrgustiku ja sotsiaalsete üksuste perspektiivist. Neljas peatükk keskendub subkultuurilise autentsuse probleemistikule.

Uurimismetoodika on välitööpõhine ning andmeid koguti osalusvaatluse, intervjuude ja veebiankeetide kaudu (november 2021 – aprill 2023). Suurem osa osalusvaatluse käigus kogutud andmetest koguti formaalses, poolformaalses ja

mitteformaalses sotsiaalses keskkonnas, kus jälgiti, vesteldi ja tehti seejärel nii digitaalseid kui ka mentaalseid märkmeid. Uuringus osalejad on muusikud ja on seotud selliste Eesti bändidega nagu Ulguränd, Langenu, Loits, Bestia, Wolfskrone, Tapper ja Kaev.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The list of attended events with events names, locations, descriptions and event links

27.11.2021	Bestia, Pagansarv ja Ulguränd Klubis Rock & Roll FB event link: https://fb.me/e/2Mrynsm4Q	This event helped me to access the scene members and establish my first connections in the subculture. I got an image of how Pagan metal bands in Tartu perform (e.g. Pagansarv's use of symbols and folk song elements during the performance). I purchased two CDs essential for my research (the music of those bands was not available online back then), which also contained lyrics (what are the main topics and ideas they sing about, how they refer to certain concepts etc).
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04.12.2021	Metsatöll live Tartu FB event link: https://fb.me/e/1Cfo2o57F	I discussed my research questions with Metsatöll members as well as the possibility of interviewing them. As I advanced in narrowing down my research focus, I realised that I do not need interviews for my research. Yet, I obtained valuable fieldwork data from the discussion with them as well as Must Bass Läks Üle Tee band members.
09.04.2022	Nihilistikrypt • Beyond the Structure • Pettunud Kodanik @ Rock & Roll, Tartu FB event link: https://fb.me/e/336pQY4mR	The fieldwork data was obtained through participant observation.
27.05.2022	The Pit: PEDIGREE / HORROR DANCE SQUAD / DEFORMATION FB event link: https://fb.me/e/1wzZxpbnv	The fieldwork data was obtained through participant observation.
01.07.2022 - 03.07.2022	Hard Rock Laager 2022	The experience is

	<p>FB event link: https://fb.me/e/1EiUE3lqx</p>	<p>described in Chapter 2, part 2.2. The fieldwork data was obtained through participant observation.</p>
23.07.2022	<p>Tartu Under The Horns Premiere (Tartu) FB event link: https://fb.me/e/27jh64zYN</p>	<p>Tartu Under the Horns is an amateur documentary made in collaboration between German and Estonian teams and was planned as a sequel to Tallinn Under the Horns. The documentary shed light on some aspects of the extreme metal bands located in Tartu and presented interviews with the musicians and scene members.</p>
23.07.2022	<p>Tartu Under The Horns Premiere (Tartu), performance: Wolfskrone, Graveater, Langenu FB event link: https://fb.me/e/27jh64zYN</p>	<p>The performance was part of the documentary screening event and gave me a chance for participant observation experience.</p>
07.10.2022	<p>SLAYING ESTLAND: Intrepid/Käptör/Valdis - Tartu</p>	<p>The fieldwork data was obtained through participant observation.</p>

	<p>FB event link: https://fb.me/e/1yAcQPJu9</p>	
15.10.2022	<p>LOITS + BLACK CRUCIFIXION: Tartu / Klubi Rock & Roll FB event link: https://fb.me/e/4Dfy12SSr</p>	<p>It was the first opportunity to see Loits live and to communicate with certain research participants. One of the musicians told me more about the band's merchandise and showed it on spot. Besides, he showed me some rare photos from the bands' history and explained who were the personalities of them. This helped to better reconstruct the band's history.</p>
21.10.2022	<p>Devil Kids: Strych:9 + Osilian + Di'Artist FB event link: https://fb.me/e/3HUPoLUjj</p>	<p>The fieldwork data was obtained through participant observation.</p>
26.11.2022	<p>Pedigree, Estoner, Kuritarvitaja FB event link: https://fb.me/e/3h4jLCnjY</p>	<p>The fieldwork data was obtained through participant observation.</p>

Appendix 2

An example of note-taking during participant observation (taken during the Tartu Under the Horns premiere, 23.07.2022)

Kruusaauk

Always looking for something new to not sound like metsatoll
Folkish but try to be modern, not be like old typical pagan bands
with violins (talking about Langenu)

In comparison to Tallinn Tartu has more experimental approach
Making music is the mentality of Estonians

Historically were doing things for someone else, with eu it's same
Seto is used for punk and rap projects but they wanted a darker
version, it's like putting together pieces of their identity

In Tartu they want to preserve art for themselves

Many bands that do a demo and then split up but they still remain
in the scene and make new bands

21:46 ✓✓

Appendix 3

The list of interviews with dates and locations

Interview 1, A	10.07.2022. Annelinn
Interview 2, B	11.08.2022. Pergerus
Interview 3, C	13.10.2022. Online (Zoom)
Interview 4, D	22.10.2022. Online (Zoom)

Appendix 4

The list represents the first part of the interview questions for B

- 1) First of all, I want to get to know you better. How did you develop your interest in music in general? What were your first instruments? What instruments do you play now?
- 2) How Ulguränd was created? Who is the “core”/founder of the band? What are the upcoming releases? The meaning of the band name.
- 3) How is the music and lyrics writing process taking place? What is a source of inspiration / what boosts your creative processes? Who is responsible for the creative processes in the band?
- 4) From the FB page: “*Ulguränd is a metal band from Tartu, Estonia, mixing black metal with heavy metal and even folkish riffs. Main themes are folklore, history and mythology.*”. How do you revisit the past? How do you decide what parts of folklore and mythology you want to reproduce in your performance? How would you define “folklorish” riffs, what makes them “folklorish”?
- 5) In the academic dimension, there are discussions regarding the use of the term while it seems like there is no strict criticism from the side of the audience in Estonia. The term rather serves as an indicator for extreme metal musically and nature/paganism/history oriented lyrically. What is your understanding of Pagan metal? Do you think this genre is relevant and especially if it is relevant for Ulguränd?
- 6) Genre. Ulguränd defined themselves as “ragnarok n roll” at the gig I attended in November. In Encyclopedia Metallum it is defined as Pagan metal. Can you elaborate on the understanding of the genre of your band? How would you prefer it to be defined? Is it crucial for you to be classified in one way or another (why / why not)?
- 7) Authenticity. Do you think that authenticity is something intrinsic to the genre (black/Pagan metal)? What does it mean to be authentic for you (in your music writing and performance processes)? What makes you feel like other musicians are authentic?

- 8) Hard Rock Lager experience. + Shared symbols and codes. Costumes and face paint are a very common way for the musicians in Pagan metal to reconstruct the historical past through commonly recognised symbols. Ulguränd doesn't use any. What is your attitude to this practice? Do you think it brings more authenticity to the perception of the band? Was there ever an idea to use any costumes or symbols during the performance?
- 9) How were your last merch pieces designed? Where did you find the idea? The use of Drakkar on merchandise.

Appendix 5

The list of questionnaire questions

1) First of all, I want to get to know you better. How did you develop your interest in metal music in general? What were the first instruments/was the first instrument you started to play on? What instruments do you play now?

2) What are the bands you play in right now? When did you start to play in the band and what were the circumstances (e.g. you started the band / you joined later at some point / etc)? What is your role in the band and how active you are in music and lyric writing?

3) Tell me about the band name/names. Why did you/your band members choose it and what does it mean (in terms of both literal and symbolic meanings)?

4) What is a source of inspiration/what boosts your creative processes (music and lyric writing if you take part in it; merchandise design if you take part in it)? How does the music and lyrics writing process take place?

5) Are there upcoming band releases? If yes, could you share the approximate date?

6) How would you personally define the genre of your band/bands? Why this genre? Is it crucial for you to be classified in one way or another (why/why not)?

7) What are the main lyrical themes of your band/bands? What is the language of your lyrics?

8) —

9) Let's talk about authenticity! What does it mean to be authentic for you (in your music writing, performance, everyday matters and social interactions)? In your opinion, what is the role of authenticity in pagan metal and other extreme metal genres?

10) What makes you feel like other musicians are authentic? By this I mean what are the behaviours, morals and values, appearance features, music or history-related (or any other kind of) knowledge, symbols demonstration and all other possible things that make you believe that other musicians are either authentic or not?

11) How would you describe the Estonian extreme metal scene? How segregated is it (by performing in certain genres, by political views, by age or by any other criteria)? What, in your opinion, are the criteria for someone to be a part of the scene and what are the criteria by which one can be excluded? Are there any current tendencies you notice in the modern extreme metal scene?

12) What makes you feel like you are part of the scene? When it comes to demonstrated acceptance, what are the things (signs, symbols, behaviours) that make you feel accepted? What is the importance of being part of the scene for your band/bands and personally for you?

13) There is an academic notion that pagan metal musicians recreate transnational identities through commonly recognised symbols and an acknowledged basis for these symbols lies in the Nordic vision of paganism. The idea is that Nordic pagan metal established a traditional “standard” to which modern musicians turn even in countries which are not related to Scandinavian tradition at first glance. How valid do you think this idea is? What do you think about the role of the Nordic element in Estonian pagan (and other kinds of) metal? What is the importance of “Nordic heritage” for you and your band (both on the levels of historical legacy and metal music history)?

14) Here I want to quote stats gathered and presented by sociologist Deena Weinstein in her article “Pagan metal” published in 2013: “...the top ten countries with the highest ratio of Pagan metal bands per person is led by the Faroe Islands (due to its population of fewer than 50,000) and then it is followed, in order, by Estonia, Finland and Iceland”. This means that according to the 2013 results taken from Encyclopedia Metallum Estonia occupied the second place in the world by the ratio of pagan metal bands per person!

This way, if we turn to Estonian history, what do you think are the historical reasons for such a demand for the genre in the country? Can you see pagan metal as one of the ways of reinventing and rediscovering history/turning back to the roots?

15) If you needed to name one symbolic thing that would represent your national identity, what would it be and why? Why do you think this thing would clearly underline your Estonian identity and would it be that clear for other Estonians?

16) What is your honest opinion about the “Tartu Under the Horns” film (in case you watched it)?

17) —

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