

Eastern Hate

Antisemitism and the Development of Polish Black Metal

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The historiographical emphasis on Norway as the birthplace of the so-called “Second Wave of Black Metal” risks overshadowing the contributions of other countries to the formation of the genre.¹ As musical and ideological innovations were taking place throughout Norway an equally vibrant black metal scene was emerging in Poland. From its earliest inceptions, Polish black metal reflected a musical aesthetic that set it apart from its Norwegian contemporaries. Although operating within the general musical and thematic framework of Norwegian black metal, Polish bands such as Taranis and Graveland contributed a sonic intensity and rawness that was distinctive. Moreover, many musicians within the Polish black metal community added to its contextual uniqueness through their incorporation of Slavic themes within their lyrics and melodic structures. However, from its foundational years in the early 1990s, many Polish black metal bands also evidenced a preoccupation with National Socialism and far-right ideologies. While these themes were also present in some strands of Norwegian black metal (i.e. Varg Vikernes and Burzum), their intensity and prevalence within Polish black metal suggest something more than mere flirtation or shock tactics. It is the ongoing presence of such ideologies in the evolution of Polish black metal that points to a more systemic and cultural issue that has, thus far, largely eluded closer scholarly scrutiny.

Black metal historian Dayal Patterson describes Polish black metal bands Graveland (fig. 1) and Behemoth as two of the most influential groups to emerge from within the black metal movement – a view that acknowledges the significance of Poland as a major contributor to black metal history. Yet despite its influence and notoriety, it remains comparatively rare to find scholarly treatments which explicitly deal with Polish black metal as a self-contained context within black metal historiography. The following chapter situates National Socialist-associated Polish black metal in its historical environment, beginning with the early 1990s movement the Temple of Fullmoon – an association of black metal mu-

sicians and bands that became more politically radicalized over time. It next analyses emerging trends within the contemporary Polish black metal scene and explores potential evidence of networking and collaboration. Finally, I will discuss the concepts of misanthropy and hyper-individuality, and question whether these aspects of black metal philosophy help enable the ongoing association of National Socialism, antisemitism, and other forms of extremism within the broader scene.

Political context and the Temple of Fullmoon

In his study of the history of antisemitism within Poland in the post-Holocaust era, Leo Cooper notes that the relative absence of Jews within Poland since 1968 has led to the phenomenon of “antisemitism without Jews”. According to Cooper, while three and a half million Jews lived in Poland before the war, approximately five to ten thousand remained as of the year 2000.² The absence of a significant Jewish presence within Poland meant that antisemitic attitudes remained unchallenged and tended to reinforce historic myths associated with a global conspiracy of Jewish economic dominance.³

Such antisemitic feelings saw a resurgence in the period following the collapse of Communism in 1989. In 1995, the Polish journalist Jerzy Turowicz wrote an article for the nationwide newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* discussing what he believed to be an increasing tolerance toward antisemitism in Polish society. For Turowicz, antisemitism operated within a generally accepted rubric of beliefs and attitudes that, while often unspoken, was nevertheless discernible in the ebb and flow of everyday life:

Antisemitism or more precisely anti-Jewishness lies slumbering in the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviour of the so-called man in the street. What we are witnessing today is not only antisemitism but a general tolerance of its symptoms.⁴



Fig. 1 Graveland live at Kolovorot Festival in Kyiv, Ukraine, in 2017.

As Turowicz understood it, antisemitism within Polish society had become pervasive enough for it to be considered mainstream, rather than the proclivity of an extreme minority. Certainly, the issue of antisemitism within Poland had been one vigorously debated throughout the 1980s – debates made more complex amid ongoing internal political conflicts. As Kostanty Gebert writes, the accusation that antisemitism continued to plague Poland came largely from the international Jewish community rather than internal protest.⁵ In response to such claims, representatives from the Polish government tended to downplay the issue, while members of Poland’s Jewish community sat on the fence. Formal groups and associations arose within the Polish United Worker’s Party (PZPR) and its oppositional forces that sought to address the perceived undermining of Polish society via Jewish influence. One such organization was Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne “Grunwald” (“Patriotic Union ‘Grunwald’”), which had its origins in the PZPR.⁶ Such

groups frequently emphasized zealous nationalism with an attendant antisemitism as a core element of their platform.

Turowicz made his observation with the benefit of some hindsight: Communism had fallen in 1989, and yet the past five years had continued witnessing a rise in antisemitic activity, particularly in the political arena. In 1990, clear signs of emboldened antisemitic sentiment were felt when Warsaw’s Umschlagplatz Holocaust memorial was defaced with the slogan “a good Jew is a dead Jew”. Response to this crime was lukewarm at best. Although the government Minister Aleksander Hall had expressed disgust at the act and pledged police protection for Jewish memorial sites, this failed to materialize. As Kostanty Gebert observes in his analysis of antisemitic sentiment surrounding the 1990 presidential elections, the repair of the site was mired in bureaucratic stagnation and attempts to minimize the significance of the attack.⁷

The flames of antisemitic feeling were further stoked in political debates leading up to the presidential elections of 1990. Campaigning for the presidency under the slogan “I don’t want to, but I have to”, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Lech Wałęsa attracted controversy for his opening speech to the Citizen’s Committee on 12 June. In it, Wałęsa expressed a degree of concern toward new members of the government who were of Jewish origin, a view he supplanted with a paranoid call for Polish Jews to publicly declare themselves – as if there existed a covert ploy for Jewish domination through subterfuge.⁸ Despite the controversy his tactless language attracted, Wałęsa would ultimately win the presidential elections and serve in this role from 1990–1995, a period which coincided with some of the most formative activity in the Polish black metal scene. Wałęsa’s term as president was marked by further tensions concerning Polish and Jewish relations, as documented by Peggy Simpson.⁹

Such was the unsettled political and cultural environment in which Polish black metal music evolved. While Norway has been referred to as the “spiritual home” of black metal,¹⁰ Poland’s role has tended to be overlooked within the scholarly literature. One potential reason for this is that what one finds in the early examples of Polish black metal is an alignment with racial and political themes that were not as consistently present in the Norwegian context. Indeed, Michelle Phillipov observes that aside from a few violent incidents that occurred in the Norwegian scene in the early 1990s, much of its ongoing development has been relatively benign.¹¹ The example of political extremism in Polish black metal, however, raises a different set of questions as to whether the Norwegian example can truly be considered sufficient to define the thematic and ideological content of the genre. In a contemporary scene often anxious to disavow any foundational links between black metal and far-right extremism, this reality can be disconcerting.

Early records produced within the Polish scene reinforce such links. In 1995, the band Fullmoon released *United Aryan Evil*, which opens with the instrumental Aryans Ride over Falling Israel.¹² The original cover art features a group of young men parading down a local street holding an eagle and swastika flag standard while performing the Sieg heil salute. Such public explicit endorsement of National Socialism was rarely matched by their Norwegian contemporaries. In 1994, the Wod-



Fig. 2 A 1918 depiction of the Slavic god Veles in the form of a Wolf. Gray, Louis H., *The Mythology of All Races*, Vol. 3, Boston: Marshall Jones, 1918.

zisław Śląski band Veles released their debut demo titled *Triumph of Pagan Beliefs* on the label Dead Christ Commune.¹³ The reference to the Slavic God in the band’s name pointed to the growing individuation of the Polish scene as self-contained, and one which saw redemptive value in the evocation of Slavic Pagan mythology as an antidote to the crisis of modern existence (fig. 2). Veles remain an important band in the history of Polish black metal whose lyrics expressed a desire to revert to a glorified version of a Pagan past. This vision of the past was contrasted with the contemporary world, which was mired in materialism and racial intermixing. The song Millennium of Disgrace from their 1997 full-length album *Black Hateful Metal* captured something of this idea:

Where's your pride, White man?
Has the cross veiled your eyes?

Loyalty is our honour – loyalty to blood
Awake, Aryan, and handle the sword
The time has now come
Thousands of years of disgrace to erase!¹⁴

Similar to their Norwegian counterparts, Veles decried the influence of Christianity due to its historical expansionism that was perceived as causing the forced demise of local cultures and religions. Yet the frequent admonitions to remain loyal to one's blood reflect an intensified focus on the role of race as determinative in the struggle for national existence.¹⁵ This is especially clear in the allusion to the SS mantra "Meine Ehre heisst Treue" ("My Honour is Loyalty"), which links the contemporary struggle for Polish emancipation with that undertaken by Himmler's "black corps".¹⁶

Other notable examples within the early to mid-1990s that displayed an affinity for nationalistic and racial themes include Thor's Hammer, Legion, Kataxu, and Capricornus – many of whom shared members. The first demo cassette produced by solo project Capricornus in 1995 is a particularly egregious demonstration of antisemitic vitriol set within the familiar call to a glorified Pagan past. In the song *Blut und Ehre* ("Blood and Honour"), Capricornus suggests that the modern world had lost all its spiritual values due to the machinations of an international Jewish conspiracy. Despite what seems like an irreversible decline into materialism and decadence, Capricornus maintains that a faithful remnant "from the heart of the Aryan tribe" will usher in a new world order:

The nation heard Wotan's voice!
The warrior's ethic has been reborn!
Blood and honor is our motto

The recordings associated with the Capricornus project are undoubtedly some of the most overt displays of pro-Nazi sentiment in the Polish black metal canon. Later in the same song, the *Waffen SS* are praised for their sacrifices in battle:

Brave and young were the warriors in black
uniforms
In Russia's snow as in the heat of Africa

They sacrificed their lives for the greatest
of all ideas,
The elite of the great nation, SS- pride of Wotan!

Vikings of the modern world, invisible force...
They shed their Aryan blood with honor and pride
Jewish lies can never cover the truth in our
hearts...
We praise the mighty SS, last defenders of
our race!¹⁷

The aforementioned examples are not intended to suggest all Polish black metal was exclusively racial or nationalist in origin. They do, however, demonstrate certain consistency of emphasis that should not be overlooked in the historiography of black metal. Not only were individual bands and musicians giving expression to the necessity of cultural and racial restoration, but such ideas were achieving collective representation via loosely organized networks. One way this was manifest was through the formation of the so-called Temple of Fullmoon – a cooperative of musicians who, at least initially, shared similar views surrounding the intersection of black metal and far-right politics.¹⁸ Founded by musician Jacek "Venom" Szczepański of Kutno band Xantotol, the Temple of Fullmoon has been compared to Norway's "The Black Circle", although the two associations had a different emphasis despite some aesthetic similarities.¹⁹ The two artists most commonly associated with this short-lived organisation are Robert "Rob Darken" Fudali of Graveland and Adam "Nergal" Darski of Behemoth. Both are responsible for some of the most influential recordings in Polish black metal history, although Darski would eventually dissociate from the group allegedly due to its emerging right-wing political agenda.

Darken, who has since sought to de-emphasize his earlier antisemitic statements, was a key figure in the Temple of Fullmoon.²⁰ As late as 2003 he would state that "I am a Pagan and I hate Christianity, Jews, and others that would like to destroy my Pagan identity."²¹ Reflecting on its history, Darken describes the years 1995–1997 as particularly troublesome for those associated with the group, including false accusations of murder and church burnings. Under growing pressure from the government and police, the movement disbanded. During a gathering in Szklarska Poręba in 1995, the police conducted arrests of its members and confiscated many of its resources.²² As a result, the authorities were able

to gain valuable information as to the networking activities of extremists associated with the Polish black metal scene. After the arrests, the majority of those formerly involved went their separate ways, however, a remnant of those devoted to its beliefs remained, with Darken praising these individuals for their ideological steadfastness in the face of external pressure:

At that time many people that were too weak to deal with such problems left the underground, and others disassociated themselves from us. But those who stayed in the underground despite all difficulties and danger are now stronger and very valuable for neo-Pagan movements.²³

Despite such optimism, the influence of the Temple of Fullmoon would eventually wane. In 2007, Raborym from Wrocław band Dark Fury indicated that the movement was a “song of the past.” Nevertheless, he also maintained that during its most influential period, the Temple of Fullmoon spread “real terror” throughout their community.²⁴ Actions undertaken included spraying swastikas and racial slogans throughout their city, as well as defacing a local Synagogue. A 1994 interview with musician Capricornus also alludes to possible church burnings, although these are not directly attributed to Temple of Fullmoon members.²⁵

It is difficult for outside commentators to glean a true insight into the scope and activities of this movement, as the majority of source material documenting this period stems from a limited range of interviews with the bands involved. Because of this, the act of determining fact from idealized myth is a complex endeavour. Unlike the activities of the so-called Norwegian “Black Circle”, the Temple of Fullmoon did not garner extensive international coverage in the media, further complicating the quest to obtain an external account of its history. It is difficult to speculate as to why this might be the case, although it is certainly possible that due to the history of antisemitism within Poland, the ideology of the Temple of Fullmoon did not appear as especially outlandish or transgressive. By 2017, the European Jewish Congress observed that antisemitism had continued to permeate “many layers of Jewish society,” and that in the preceding year no senior government official had met with representatives of the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland.²⁶ Against this historical development, one cannot but wonder whether the

thought-world inhabited by groups like the Temple of Fullmoon was especially unique. It is also noteworthy that, at least initially, the movement valued its hermetic exclusivity. In general, its members did not actively court press coverage in the same way as figures like Varg Vikernes.²⁷

Instead of attempting to outline a rigorous historiography of this period, the interpretation of this movement should focus on how the memory of the Temple of Fullmoon functions in the minds of those involved. A recurring element in the available interviews is an appeal to this era as the symbol of a time in which the spiritual essence of black metal was at its most pure. As Darken recalls: All that is left are the memories full of emotions and adventure... all failures and misfortunes are not able to stop the longing for those years.²⁸

In stating this, the artists frequently contrast the “purity” of the early movement with the commercialized, politically correct trajectory of the genre in later years, which often sees concerts cancelled due to the perceived far-right sympathies of musicians.²⁹ This, it is believed, represents a betrayal of the original transgressive ethos of black metal.³⁰ The ongoing significance of the Temple of Fullmoon and its associated bands within Polish black metal history is that it can serve as a barometer against which the legitimacy of emerging black metal bands is measured. As Darken put it back in 1996, “the only true black metal bands in Poland belong to the Temple of Fullmoon.”³¹ As much as the passing of time may have matured the outlook of many of the musicians involved, aspects of this sentiment continue to be expressed in contemporary Polish black metal discourse.

Emerging trends in Polish black metal

A 2014 study undertaken by Marek Kucia, Marta Duch-Dyngosz, and Mateusz Magierowski suggests that while Jews remain largely absent in contemporary Poland, antisemitic attitudes persist.³² Such attitudes continue to derive from historic myths and stereotypes that go largely unchallenged in the absence of significant Jewish representation that could offer a counter-narrative. The authors draw attention to several factors that influence the formation and intensity of antisemitic positions, namely “insufficient education, lack of interest and a desire to learn about the history and culture of

others, lack of inter-group contact, and the stereotypes present in daily life".³³ Such attitudes and beliefs still have the potential to cross over into violence. According to the Never Again association, over 600 cases of hate crimes and hate speech occurred in 2011–2012.³⁴ Interestingly, Rafał Pankowski and Marcin Kornak note that the majority of these crimes do not occur against minorities (e.g. Jews), but against political opponents, homosexuals, and smaller religious organisations.³⁵ Much of this agitation is in response to nationalist debates about ethnicity and Polish identity, according to which being a true Pole means being Catholic. This demonstrates a certain irony, in that while figures such as Rob Darken from Graveland could bemoan the ongoing influence of the Catholic church in Poland, it was Catholicism itself that was contributing to Poland's antisemitic climate.³⁶ In this sense, at least, there was a vague commonality.

Pankowski describes Polish black metal as "the main cultural resource for the contemporary extreme-right neopagan movement."³⁷ As of 2005, Christian Dornbusch and Hans-Peter Killguss also noted a resurgence of nationalistic and racist black metal within Poland. This was observed in the lyrical themes and imagery of bands such as Selbstmord, Antisemitex, and Othar, amongst others.³⁸ While a somewhat cartoonish infatuation with the pageantry and ideological world of National Socialism still exists in some quarters, more recent developments have highlighted the flexibility of the scene and a certain willingness to distance itself from overt associations with the past. If the early 1990s represented a period of almost propagandistic endorsement of National Socialist ideas and symbols, then more contemporary iterations of Polish black metal often focus more on the intersection of Neopaganism, Slavic history, pan-Slavism, and cultural pride and preservation.³⁹ None of these are necessarily troublesome in and of themselves; the black metal genre as a whole is often used as an outlet for the expression of cultural, historical, and spiritual particularity.⁴⁰ Rather, these ideas become disconcerting when they are utilised to potentially obfuscate ongoing allegiances to more extreme ideologies. Discerning when such obfuscation may be occurring, however, is not always a simple task.

A fitting example of this trend lies within the thematic contrast between the early thought of Rob Darken and his more recent utterances. As has been frequently discussed, Darken's statements in various media outlets throughout the 1990s and 2000s demonstrate his ongo-

ing preoccupation with antisemitism, racial theory, and various aspects of Nazism.⁴¹ This aspect of his thought appears to have receded in the last few years, although it is difficult to determine if this represents a genuine change of outlook or if it is simply more commercially expedient to do so. One way this change is manifest is via Darken's increased willingness to affirm the myths, traditions, and spirituality of other cultures. Darken's contemporary views on Paganism, for example, emphasise its international character. In a 2021 interview with *Dargedik* magazine, Darken stated that "for me, the term Paganism refers not only to the Slavs or Vikings, but also to other civilizations, cultures, and races on earth".⁴² Speaking with his South American audience in mind, Darken continues by remarking that "metal music connects people around common values and ideals. It is not some kind of propaganda tool of globalist corporations".⁴³ Such sentiments are anathema to Darken's earlier statements, such as his longing for the "rebirth of the pagan Aryan empire."⁴⁴ What is interesting is that despite a certain "mellowing" in Darken's position, he perceives that greater numbers of South Americans are returning to their true beliefs and the roots of their Ancestors. This is a source of admiration for Darken, who derives meaning from his musical activities insofar as this helps inspire international fans to rediscover the myths, traditions, and spirituality appropriate for their context. Such sentiments are suggestive of the concept of a *Heimat* (Homeland), a term appropriated by National Socialism for the purposes of emphasizing the centrality of ethnicity, pre-Christian spirituality, and cultural homogeneity as a basis for shared identity.⁴⁵

One may suspect that former beliefs are still operational at a personal level, yet attempts have been made to avoid any firm external links that may conclusively affirm this. Naturally, we do not want to become so cynical as to maintain that an individual such as Darken is incapable of personal change and maturation. Yet his example remains important, for it demonstrates that much of the contemporary Polish black metal landscape exists in a nebulous context in which the associations of the past continue to haunt the present.

For those bands and individual musicians who have remained true to the "spirit" of early Polish black metal and its extreme ideologies, an enduring question must surely concern whether there continue to be formal networks of like-minded musicians who are united based on shared racist beliefs. If the Temple of Fullmoon

briefly functioned as an outlet for ideological sympathizers, how do contemporary far-right bands organize their activity, especially as this concerns the production and distribution of their music? Determining the existence of formal right-wing or extremist networks can be difficult and is often layered behind levels of secrecy and vagueness. Yet there are some clear indicators that Poland continues to play a vital role in the dissemination of National Socialist-inspired black metal music on an international basis. One way this is evident is via the distribution labels that operate as promotional outlets.

There are numerous Polish labels responsible for the production and distribution of black metal, NSBM (National Socialist Black Metal), and RAC (Rock Against Communism) music. A search of relevant online webstores highlights releases from countries as diverse as America, Finland, Greece, and Ireland. Many of these labels reveal a strong ideological bias toward racist viewpoints and National Socialism. The mission statement attached to the Wrocław-based distribution website Lower Silesian Stronghold, for example, recounts the infamous “fourteen words” of the white power movement.⁴⁶ The Białystok label Old Forest is another example of ideologically motivated online platform for the distribution of far-right leaning bands, with their current and past roster including representation from Costa Rica, Germany, Finland, and America.

Internet webstores enable such labels to function autonomously without the oversight of mediating influences. Of course, not all releases featured are explicitly reflective of National Socialist themes, but this fact alone may say something important about the general perception of extreme ideologies within the broader black metal community and the willingness of some artists to align themselves with openly racist bands. It is also worth considering international labels responsible for the distribution of Polish NSBM. One example concerns a subsidiary of the well-known German label No Colours Records. This particular offshoot hosts a plethora of titles by some of the most notable bands associated with National Socialist-inspired black metal and RAC, including Absurd, Wolfnacht, and Der Stürmer. Included on their roster is significant Polish representation by way of bands including Capricornus, Galgenberg, and Thor’s Hammer.

These examples demonstrate the enduring nature of National Socialist themes within black metal and its related subgenres, with recordings spanning the last

three decades. No record label, however underground and niche its appeal, can function for any extended period without sufficient organisational skills and a degree of networking and collaboration which must extend to those involved in the physical manufacture of products and their marketing (e.g. record, cassette, and CD production). They also highlight the essential point that there is a clear market for such material, although it can be difficult to determine if consumers of this music are “true believers”, are attracted instead by the appeal of its so-called “transgressive” element, or still for some other reason. Indeed, the role of such labels in the promotion of extremist heavy metal might be a prudent area for future research, as the extent to which record labels help facilitate international networks is relatively unexplored.⁴⁷ It is also noteworthy that Polish bands have enjoyed significant international representation on music festivals such as Asgardsrei and Hot Shower. Świdnica band Selbstmord appeared at Milan’s Hot Shower festival in 2013, as did Infernal War in 2014 and Graveland in 2016. Dark Fury performed at Ukraine’s Asgardsrei festival in 2018 alongside Sunwheel – a Warsaw based band featuring members of Kataxu and Gontyna Kry. These are but two representative examples within an underground black metal scene that continues to attract an audience despite the efforts of anti-fascist groups to silence them. Pam Nilan has noted that such festivals often have a dual function, in that the unifying experience of physical participation in the event itself is subsequently transposed into online communities where relationships can be cultivated over time.⁴⁸ All of this suggests a degree of international coordination (including in the online sphere), and further demonstrates the leading role played by Poland as a propagator of black metal aligned with Neopagan, racial, and nationalistic themes.

According to Dominika Kasprovicz, some modern forms of Polish black metal are also closely aligned with the Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Tradycji i Kultury “Niklot” organization (“Association for Tradition and Culture ‘Niklot’”).⁴⁹ Based in Warsaw, the group seeks to promote “the character of one’s nation” and the “quality of its human material that is the primary factor of its success or failure”.⁵⁰ Anton Shekhovtsov describes the “Niklot” organisation as a Neopagan “metapolitical fascist” group influenced by the historic nationalist movement Zadruga.⁵¹ It remains committed to the separation of ethnic groups, the superiority of the Slavic peoples,

and is distinctly antisemitic. Importantly, “Niklot” is said to have actively recruited members from skinhead and the National Socialist black metal scenes.⁵² Alongside “Niklot” exist numerous other conservative and Neopagan movements that seek to promote pre-Christian Slavic beliefs, including the Nationalist Movement and the National Rebirth of Poland.⁵³ Such individual groups contribute to a broader political climate that can offer a form of legitimacy to the activities of extremist black metal music.

Ideology and ethical provenance

A 2019 article in the *New Yorker* posed the vexed question as to whether heavy metal has an ongoing Nazi problem.⁵⁴ Largely written in response to National Socialist sympathizing black metal bands, the authors profile a range of anti-fascist voices who are attempting to offer a counter-narrative to this trend. Yet the simple fact that black metal has a recurring issue with National Socialism and other forms of political extremism should prompt deeper questions as to the ideological world black metal inhabits, and whether there are concepts embedded in its underlying philosophy that allow such associations to flourish. Simplistic attempts to portray National Socialist and white supremacist influences as “co-opting” black metal are unsatisfactory, as is the use of collective moral and ethical standards that are not necessarily congruent with a philosophy of hyper-individuality, misanthropy, and self-perceived elitism.⁵⁵

The *New Yorker* article undoubtedly reflects an increased sensitivity to the presence of Nazi symbolism and themes within the genre. Yet there is evidence that other voices from within the genre view National Socialist themes as a natural extension of the thought world in which black metal exists. Finding such evidence can involve treading into the murky world of internet discussion forums where, under the cover of anonymity, such views are more likely to be shared openly.⁵⁶ Claims for the legitimacy of these themes within black metal often meet with the counter response that a nihilistic disdain for humanity has the advantage of not venturing into condemnation of specific cultures or ethnicities based on such categories as race. For some, this is held to be a more desirable position. A representative example of this view is offered in a 1997 interview with

Vegard “Ihsahn” Tveitan and Tomas “Samoth” Haugen from the Norwegian band Emperor. They were asked by the metal magazine *Terrorizer* about potential affinities between a social-Darwinist worldview and fascist ideology.⁵⁷ In response, Ihsahn acknowledged that fascism, Satanism, and black metal are all extreme ideologies that are perceived by many of the genre’s fans as inherently bound together. Samoth resonated with this view, stating that although he sympathizes with such links, “that doesn’t mean I wear a swastika and worship Adolf Hitler or whatever”.⁵⁸ Reflecting the misanthropy that is embedded in the black metal ethos, Ihsahn states that he tends to look down on “humanity as a whole” rather than specific cultures. Appearing to disavow biological racism, he further claims that it is “naïve to think that your intelligence is based on the colour of your skin”. Even so, he can still maintain that it is important to “keep different cultures as they are, because so many cultures have been lost because of the Christian religion”.⁵⁹

The problem with this view – i.e. that a general loathing of humanity is reconcilable with the black metal ethos so long as it doesn’t single out a particular culture – is that it makes the category of hatred an aesthetic choice without due regard for the fundamental dignity of humanity in general. The overriding concern here is how one’s hatred is broadly perceived, not whether such misanthropy is justified in the first place. After all, one who feels hatred for “humanity as a whole” will, by definition, still hate Jews and other minorities as people; it’s just that such an individual will be careful to not base this hatred on cultural or ethnic particulars, which somehow makes the hatred of a person more acceptable. Thus, attempts to differentiate between generalized hatred and a culturally or ethnically specific hatred can appear to be epistemological sophistry rather than serious attempts to come to terms with a recurring issue. All the while, far-right black metal can find its niche in this tension. For these reasons, black metal and its association with far-right ideologies remains fraught with unresolved complexities that operate on a basic philosophical level. Until such difficulties are dealt with openly (and in a way that doesn’t involve recourse to simplistic notions of “co-opting the genre”), it is likely that those clinging to National Socialist and extremist themes will find an outlet in black metal.

Conclusion

As I have noted in a previous article, National Socialist-inspired black metal and its related genres have proved remarkably resilient in the face of societal and cultural changes and efforts of the broader black metal community to exorcise its influence.⁶⁰ A partial explanation for this lies in the diversification of its appeal beyond the immediate context of Europe. In a recent article reflecting on the role of classical imagery in white supremacist heavy metal music, Jeremy Swist suggests that “for much of its history the metal scene in general has consisted mostly of white, male artists and audiences, which accounts both for its congeniality to white supremacy and toleration, if not acceptance, of white supremacist artists”.⁶¹ This is echoed by Taylor Van Doorne, who notes that “most NSBM musicians are white men”.⁶² While this may remain largely true, it is also worth noting that emerging bands and solo artists associated with nationalistic black metal originate in a number of non-European contexts, including Indonesia and Mexico.⁶³ This suggests that although the historiographical and sociological focus on extremist black metal has rightly emphasized its European roots, future scholarship should take into account how the nationalistic and racial impulse of European black metal is being adapted to new and emerging contexts.

In this chapter, I have also suggested that more structural reasons exist for the ongoing association of black metal music with neo-Nazism, racism, and other forms of political extremism. Contemporary debates in this area often fail to adequately address the issue at its philosophical foundations, thus avoiding deeper scrutiny of how hateful racist ideologies may indeed be an unintended consequence of a genre that often extols a fundamental antihumanism. With misanthropic and transgressive worldviews remaining key elements in the genres underlying philosophy, it becomes difficult to then impose a set of normative moral and ethical standards that determine what is acceptable and what is not.

What remains central to the ongoing development of National Socialist black metal, however, is the foundational role played by Poland as both an innovator and influencer. For the artists themselves, the appeal of extreme ideologies seems to lie less in eugenic and racial theories and more in the insistence on national and cultural separatism. Drawing on powerful narratives of an idealized cultural heritage, black metal artists such

as Dark Fury contrast this with a contemporary Poland corrupted through globalisation and mass immigration. As always, in such a mindset, the ultimate cause of this can be attributed to the machinations of the international Jew, who remains the mythical figurehead for societal ills.

Although it is unlikely that National Socialist-inspired Polish black metal will regain the notoriety of its formative years in the early 1990s, racism and the politics of the right remain an ongoing presence within Polish black metal scene, whether through overt lyrical references or through more subtle imagery and symbolism. While the issue is certainly more in focus in the international black metal scene, more work is required in exploring how black metal philosophy enables and justifies the presence of extremist ideologies.

References

- 1 On the historiography and thematic content of Norwegian black metal, see: Hagen, Ross, “Musical Style, Ideology, and Mythology in Norwegian Black Metal”, in Wallach, Jeremy, Berger, Harris M., and Greene, Paul D. (eds.), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 180–199; Spracklen, Karl, “True Norwegian Black Metal – The Globalized, Mythological Reconstruction of the Second Wave of Black Metal in 1990s Oslo”, in Lashua, Brett, Wagg, Stephen, Spracklen, Karl, and Yavuz, M. Selim (eds.), *Sounds and the City: Leisure Studies in a Global Era*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 183–195; Allin, Jason, Podoshen, Jeffrey, and Venkatesh, Vivek, “Second Wave True Norwegian Black Metal: An Ideologically Evil Music Scene?”, *Arts and the Market*, 7 (2017), 159–173.
- 2 Leo Cooper, *In the Shadow of the Polish Eagle: The Poles, the Holocaust and Beyond*, New York, Palgrave, 2000, p. 224.
- 3 Such rhetoric often reflects the ideas outlined in the discredited book *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which first appeared in segments in Russian newspapers in 1903. On the history and reception of the *Protocols*, see: Hagemester, Michael, “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: Between History and Fiction”, *New German Critique*, 103 (2008), pp. 83–95.
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- 5 Gebert, Konstanty, “Anti-Semitism in the 1990 Polish Presidential Election”, *Social Research*, 58 (1991), pp. 723–755.
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- 12 Fullmoon, *United Aryan Evil*. Isengard Productions, 1995. Track no. 1.
- 13 Veles, *Triumph of Pagan Beliefs*. Dead Christ Commune, 1994.
- 14 Veles, *Black Hateful Metal*. No Colours Records, 1997. Track no. 8.
- 15 Benjamin Olson notes that 1990s black metal outside of Norway “had to be as uncompromising as possible to be taken seriously”. Somewhat paradoxically, Olson goes on to offer a more substantive rationale for the intense racial fixation of black metal music in Poland, situating this in the disempowerment felt by “angry young Slavs across the former Soviet bloc who were looking for any means of empowerment, meaning and identity that they can find”. Olson, Benjamin Hedge, *I am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture*, master’s thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2008, pp. 117–118.
- 16 The Wrocław-based band Infernum featured an instrumental song by this title on their 1994 full-length album *...Taur–Nu–Fuin...* (Infernum, *...Taur–Nu–Fuin...*. Astral Wings Records, 1994. Track no. 6). On the ideology of the Schutzstaffel (SS), see: Ingraio, Christian, *Believe and Destroy: Intellectuals in the SS War Machine*, Malden: Polity, 2013, pp. 52–61.
- 17 Capricornus, *Kein Blut soll verunreinigt werden*. Capricornus Productions, 1995. Track no. 2.
- 18 The Temple of Fullmoon was originally named the Temple of Infernal Fire by Adam “Nergal” Darski of Behemoth.
- 19 Kelly, Kim, “The Shade and the Light: Nergal of Behemoth Interviewed”, *The Quietus*, 10 February (2014), <<https://thequietus.com/articles/14452-nergal-interview-behemoth>> [accessed 10 January 2023]. On Norway’s “Black Circle”, see: Dyck, Kirsten, *Reichsrock: The International Web of White-Power and Neo-Nazi Hate Music*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017, pp. 58–59.
- 20 Of Darken’s political leanings, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke writes: “His views are unabashedly fascist: the Pagan spirit underlies all reaction to Christianity, democracy, and technical civilization, where money takes the place of gods. The Holocaust was the culmination of this reaction.” Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity*, New York: New York University Press, 2003, p. 205.
- 21 “[Graveland Interview]”, *Heathenpride Magazine*, 1, (2003), unpaginated. An archived copy of this magazine can be found at: <https://archive.org/details/heathenpride_1/page/n1/mode/2up?q=darken> [accessed 5 February 2023].
- 22 “[Graveland Interview]”. A photo of this gathering was featured on the original cover the demo tape Fullmoon, *United Aryan Evil*. Isengard Productions 1995.
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- 26 “EJC Expresses Grave Concern over Rise in Antisemitism in Poland”, European Jewish Congress, 31 August 2017, <<https://eurojewcong.org/ejc-in-action/statements/ejc-expresses-grave-concern-rise-antisemitism-poland/>> [accessed 9 May 2023].
- 27 Most notably, in his self-serving interview with the Bergens Tidende newspaper in January 1993.
- 28 Mythic Imagination, “Excerpt from the Graveland Interview about the Temple of Fullmoon era”, *Black Death Metal History*, 14 February (2018), <<https://blackdeathmetahistory.wordpress.com/2018/02/14/excerpts-from-graveland-interview-for-houseofthewhipcordzine/>> [accessed 6 January 2023].
- 29 A recent example of this is the cancellation of the planned Australian tour by Norwegian black metal band Taake. Mike Hohnen, “Promoters Cancel Australia Tour of Norwegian Metal Band Taake, Accused of Far-Right Sympathies”, *The Guardian*, 6 January (2023), <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/jan/06/promoters-cancel-australia-tour-of-norwegian-metal-band-taake-accused-of-far-right-sympathies>> [accessed 1 February 2023].
- 30 On black metal and the transgressive, Keith Kahn-Harris writes that “racist discourses are part of a wider set of transgressive discourses that are drawn on within extreme metal, including Satanism, the occult and extreme violence”. He further suggests that such discourses remain largely theoretical and exploratory, and that “the scene provides a measure of ‘insulation’ that allows members to play with a range of highly transgressive themes”. Kahn-Harris, Keith, “The Failure of Youth Culture: Reflexivity, Music, and Politics in the Black Metal Scene”, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7 (2004), pp. 95–111 (p. 105). This split between the theoretical and the practical has the convenient benefit of protecting the philosophy of black metal from its association with those who act on their transgressive impulses.
- 31 “Rob Darken Interview”, *Pit Magazine*, 15 (1996), <<https://web.archive.org/web/2012111115138/http://www.angelfire.com/nh/carpathianwolves/graveland2.html>> [accessed 15 February 2023].
- 32 Kucia, Marek, Duch-Dyngosz, Marta, and Magierowski, Mateusz, “Anti-Semitism in Poland: Survey Results and a Qualitative Study of Catholic Communities”, *Nationalities Papers*, 42 (2014), pp. 8–36.
- 33 Kucia et al., Anti-Semitism in Poland, p. 21.
- 34 Pankowski, Rafał, and Kornak, Marcin, “Poland”, in Melzer, Ralf, and Serafin, Sebastian (eds.), *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe: Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies*, Frankfurt am Main: Druck- und Verlagsaus Zarbock, 2013, pp. 157–68 (p. 157).
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- 38 Dornbusch, Christian, and Kilguss, Hans-Peter, *Unheilige Allianzen: Black Metal zwischen Satanismus, Heidentum und Neonazismus*, Münster: Unrast, 2006, p. 48.
- 39 On pan-Slavism in the Serbian black metal context, see: Radovanović, Bojana, “Ideologies and Discourses: Extreme Narratives in Extreme Metal Music”, *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies* 10 (2016), pp. 51–58 (pp. 56–57). In Poland, the band *Черногаст (Chernogast) from Kraków* explore pan-Slavic themes, while Barbarous Pomerania from Koszalin discuss Slavic Paganism and heritage within the philosophy of Aryanism.
- 40 One can point to the black metal emerging from China, much of which draws on local history and culture as a source of inspiration. A recent example is the 2022 E.P. release from the band 御矢 (Holyarrow), which discusses the 1661–1662 Siege of Fort Zeelandia and the subsequent liberation of Taiwan from the rule of the Dutch East India Company (御矢 [Holyarrow], 大員合戦 / 1661–1662 *The Siege of Fort Zeelandia*. Pest Productions 2022).
- 41 Buesnel, Ryan, “National Socialist Black Metal: A Case Study in the Longevity of Far-Right Ideologies in Heavy Metal Subcultures”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 54 (2019), pp. 393–408.
- 42 Zeratulstra, “Interview with Graveland: ‘Here in Europe and also in my country, we practically cannot play concerts, which is hindered by all kinds of censorship agendas’”, *Dargedik Rock Metal Webzine*, 15 November (2021), <https://www.dargedik.com/2021/11/entrevista-graveland-pagan-black-metal_0438423516.html> [accessed 25 May 2023].