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**Abstract:** National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) emerged in the early 1990s as a subsidiary genre of the broader black metal movement. NSBM is distinguished by thematic content that promotes Aryan superiority, pagan spirituality and opposes globalization. Buesnel's article explores the history of the early NSBM movement through an analysis of the bands Graveland (Poland) and Absurd (Germany), which have both played vital roles in the establishment of the NSBM genre. Buesnel highlights the current state of National Socialist ideology within metal subcultures and concludes with observations about the future of far-right extremism in heavy metal.

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**“National Socialist Black Metal:” A case study in the longevity of far-right ideologies in heavy metal subcultures**

**RYAN BUESNEL**  
**Charles Sturt University, Australia**  
[Ryan.buesnel@csu.edu.au](mailto:Ryan.buesnel@csu.edu.au)

**Abstract:** ‘National Socialist Black Metal’ (NSBM) emerged in the early 1990s as a subsidiary genre of the broader black metal movement. NSBM is distinguished by its thematic content, which promotes Aryan superiority, anti-globalization, and pagan spirituality. This paper explores the history of the early NSBM movement through an analysis of the bands Graveland (Poland) and Absurd (Germany), who have both played vital roles in the establishment of the NSBM genre. The author highlights the current state of National Socialist ideology within metal subcultures and concludes with observations about the future of far-right extremism within heavy metal.

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**Biographical Note:** Ryan Buesnel is a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Theology, Charles Sturt University, Australia. His thesis research is focussed on the activities of the German Christian Movement within the Third Reich era. Additional research interests include German philosophy and the arts.

**ORCID iD:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6659-7378>

Heavy metal has remained remarkably immune to the ebb and flow of musical fashion. Since its break into public consciousness in the 1970s through the trailblazing work of bands such as Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, and Black Sabbath, the heavy metal community has developed a self-contained culture that takes pride in its exclusivity and refuge as a home for the socially disenfranchised.<sup>1</sup> However, the fierce tenacity of heavy metal genres in the face of broader musical shifts has not precluded musical and thematic innovation. The early forms of heavy metal music gave birth to newer subgenres, each of which balanced faithfulness to established artistic and aesthetic traditions with a desire to innovate. Heavy metal now incorporates a staggering array of subgenres, each reflecting particular musical and thematic identifiers while still maintaining fidelity to its original ethos.

What distinguishes these different categories is a shared thematic framework that gives expression to the darker recesses of human experience and the individual psyche.<sup>2</sup> Despite its reputation for promoting the hedonistic maxim of ‘sex, drugs and rock and roll,’ heavy metal is, in fact, a nuanced and complex set of genres that each explore themes often overlooked in broader musical categories, including social alienation, suicide, and depression. It is also true that heavy metal operates as a vehicle for religious critique, of which Christianity has been a prime target. This dynamic is particularly evident within the genre of black metal, which is marked by intense anti-Christian rhetoric, imagery, and violent action.<sup>3</sup> As acknowledged by Massimo Introvigne, black metal’s purpose was to ‘spread death, destruction and terror, all in the name of Satan and against Christianity.’<sup>4</sup>

Black metal has also fostered a culture in which issues of race and nation are raised, often through the language of European mythology which functions as an analogy for contemporary issues of racial and political significance.<sup>5</sup> This paper traces the emergence of a more explicit form of political extremism, racism, and nationalism within black metal as it has been expressed in the so-called ‘National Socialist Black Metal’ (hereafter NSBM) movement. Although a contentious term,<sup>6</sup> NSBM in its broadest sense can be considered a genre that utilizes the musical forms of black metal with the thematic and visual content often associated with neo-Nazism and far-right extremism.<sup>7</sup> A recent survey of the history of NSBM defines the genre as:

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<sup>1</sup> On the forms of metal communities, see Deena Weinstein, ‘Communities of Metal: Ideal, Diminished and Imaginary’, in Naelson Varas- Díaz and Niall Scott (eds), *Heavy Metal Music and the Communal Experience* (Lanham: Lexington Books 2016), 3-22. Weinstein has elsewhere written that “heavy metal subculture becomes a home, a refuge for those dislocated in urban migration, caught between stereotypical racial politics and often fluid urban space divisions brought on by rapacious property development.” Deanna Weinstein, ‘The Globalization of Metal’, in Harris M. Berger and Paul D. Greene (eds), *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Durham: Duke University Press 2011), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Bettina Roccor also points to the shared musical features inherent to each subgenre, which results in an overarching sense of community in which Heavy Metal fans are unified ‘in their indignation.’ Bettina Roccor, ‘Heavy Metal: Forces of Unification and Fragmentation within a Musical Subculture’, *The World of Music*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2000, 83-94 (83).

<sup>3</sup> Jason C. Bivins, ‘Weight of the World: Religion and Heavy Metal Music in Four Cases’, in Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (eds), *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2017), 108–11.

<sup>4</sup> Massimo Introvigne, *Satanism: A Social History* (Boston: Brill 2016), 482.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London: Routledge 1997), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Hedge Olson, ‘Voice of Blood: National Socialist Discourse in Black Metal’, *Popular Music History*, vol.6, no. 1, 2011, 135-149 (139).

<sup>7</sup> Dario Martinelli, *Give Peace a Chant: Popular Music, Politics and Social Protest* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG 2017), 30; David Jo Murphy, ‘Hate Couture: Subcultural Fundamentalism and the Black Metal Music Scene’, Ph.D. dissertation, Nui Maynooth University, 2011, 62.

An ensemble of values and ideals based on territorial needs: anti-Christianity, nationalism, and defense of the race and its traditions- often pagan traditions as opposed to Judeo-Christian ones.<sup>8</sup>

As such, it is the *expression* of such themes through the imagery and lyrical content of a band which lends itself to categorization as NSBM. This separates it from Black Metal as a broader concept, which has traditionally been aligned with themes of misanthropy and occultism.<sup>9</sup>

Although Black Metal is receiving increasing attention in academic and popular literature,<sup>10</sup> there is much work to be done in terms of analyzing the thematic material of extreme metal bands who advocate white supremacist and nationalistic views, whether implicitly or explicitly.<sup>11</sup> Many of the extant analyses either ignore the reality of NSBM or exaggerate its influence within the broader metal scene.<sup>12</sup> Either of these approaches prevents an objective and critical analysis. This paper is a response to this gap in the literature. It first discusses the emergence of racial and pagan themes in Norwegian black metal and then traces the history and thematic content of two critical bands in NSBM: Graveland (Poland) and Absurd (Germany). The article offers further observations about the contemporary state of NSBM and closes with some comments about the future of far-right ideologies within heavy metal.

## Varg Vikernes and the Second Wave of Black Metal

Norwegian musician Varg Vikernes emerged in the early 1990s during a period now referred to as the Second Wave of Black Metal. As an extension of the original black metal movement of the 1980s, Norwegian musicians developed the genre further, launching innovations in sound and aesthetic sensibilities. The new black metal also featured a renewed emphasis on Satanism, Paganism, and Norse mythology, which have remained consistent throughout the genre's development. Key bands from this period reflected the geographical spread of black metal throughout Norway: Darkthrone from Kolbotn, Mayhem and Satyricon from Oslo, Gorgoroth and Immortal from Bergen, Enslaved from Haugesund and Emperor from

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<sup>8</sup> See Max Ribaric and Davide Maspero, *Wolves Among Sheep: History and Ideology of National Socialist Black Metal* (Milan: Tsunami Edizioni 2015), 13. Readers consulting this volume should be aware of the authors' sympathy toward the NSBM movement.

<sup>9</sup> On the varied manifestations of Occult themes within black metal see Kennet Granholm, 'Ritual Black Metal: Popular Music as Occult Mediation and Practice', *Correspondences*, vol.1, no. 1, 2013, 5-33.

<sup>10</sup> Popular works on the history of black metal include Dayal Patterson, *Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult* (Los Angeles: Feral House 2014); Michael Moynihan & Dirk Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Los Angeles: Feral House 2003). Increased academic attention has been paid to black metal theory since the Hideous Gnosis symposium in 2009. A recent volume by Nicola Masciandaro and Edia Connole explores the theoretical context of Black Metal. See: Nicola Masciandaro and Edia Connole, *Floating Tomb: Black Metal Theory* (Milan: Mimesis International 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Eva Kingsepp makes an important contribution to the study of NSBM, and highlights the complexities involved in categorisation. A shared emphasis on war and occult visual symbolism can make it difficult to determine what constitutes a specifically National-Socialist infused black metal. See Eva Kingsepp, 'Nazi Symbolism in BM NSBM', paper presented at the conference 'Youth (Sub) cultures in Changing Societies', Tallinn University and the Institute for International and Social Studies, Estonia, 2-4 February 2011.

<sup>12</sup> In his analysis of political extremism in the Polish context, Rafal Pankowski states that 'the main cultural resource for the contemporary extreme-right neo-pagan movement is to be found in the black metal scene.' This should perhaps be qualified with a reference to the presence of these themes in other forms of metal music. See Rafal Pankowski, *Right-Wing Extremism in Poland* (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2012), 6.

Notodden. In the early years of the movement, notoriety was achieved through a wave of church burnings and murder, which ensured the movement received increasing attention from Norwegian media.<sup>13</sup>

Varg Vikernes remains one of the most significant artists within this movement. His pioneering work with solo project Burzum is widely considered to be representative of the genre as it grew from a small underground network of musicians to an established metal subgenre. Yet Vikernes' outspoken belief in the supremacy of the Aryan race and the racial inferiority of Jews represented a significant departure from the generally misanthropic themes of black metal.<sup>14</sup> Vikernes is also noteworthy for his multiple criminal convictions. In 1994 he was sentenced to 21 years in prison for the murder of rival black metal musician Øystein Aarseth as well as a series of church burnings. In 2013 he was again arrested by French anti-terror police due to allegations he was plotting a major terrorist attack.<sup>15</sup> For his sympathizers, these events have helped establish Vikernes's credibility as one who fuses political proclamation with praxis.

Lyrically, Vikernes' displayed a gift for writing poetically and evocatively about the enchantment of the natural Scandinavian environment- a feature evident in the work of other bands such as Immortal, Emperor, and Darkthrone. The centrality of the natural world as a spiritually infused object of worship reverberates throughout Vikernes' songwriting and indeed has become a hallmark of the black metal genre.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Vikernes' legacy has been clouded by his far-right extremism, which has ostracised many in the black metal community. The truth of Vikernes' vitriol toward Jews and other 'inferior races' has been most evident in his written works and interviews, which appear to have intensified since his release from prison in 2009. In a 2012 interview, for example, Vikernes' depicts Jews as 'pigs' who control the media- a sentiment reminiscent of the paranoid ramblings of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.<sup>17</sup> In 2013 Vikernes again testifies to his deeply held anti-Semitic convictions when he wrote that:

We live in a world where everything European is at risk of being destroyed. The Jewish-owned mass media/entertainment industry attacks everything that is ours. The Jewish-dominated education system attacks everything that is ours. Almost everyone in our Jewish-controlled parent generation is attacking everything that is ours, and these traitors to our race have been brainwashed beyond any hope of redemption.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Owen Fung, 'The Construction of 'Peoplehood' in the Second Wave of Norwegian Black Metal', *Reinvention*, vol.3, no.2, 2010, [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross\\_fac/iatl/reinvention/archive/volume3issue2/fung/](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/reinvention/archive/volume3issue2/fung/)

<sup>14</sup> In his 2002 booklet *Irmingsul*, Vikernes outlines his vision for a Europe of the future. He writes that "the new Europe will be led and run from Scandinavia," which he regards as the "high fortress of the Aryan tribe." Varg Vikernes, 'Irmingsul', undated 2002, available on the *Burzum* website at

[https://www.burzum.org/files/books/irminsul\\_eng.pdf](https://www.burzum.org/files/books/irminsul_eng.pdf); See also Stefanie von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival: Transformations of Germanic Neopaganism* (Leiden: Brill 2016), 337. On Black Metal's misanthropic aesthetic, see Patterson, *Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult*, 484.

<sup>15</sup> Adam Taylor, 'Notorious Heavy Metal Musician Arrested in France for Suspected Terror Plot', *Business Insider*, 17 July 2013.

<sup>16</sup>On the links between environmentalism and black metal see Miroslav Mareš, 'Environmental Radicalism and Extremism in Postcommunist Europe', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, vol. 2, no.1, 2008, 91-107 (102).

<sup>17</sup> See: Kai Grimmsberg, 'Interview with Varg Vikernes', 29 April 2012, available on the *Burzum* website at [http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/2012\\_interview\\_heavymusic.shtml](http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/2012_interview_heavymusic.shtml). In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler wrote that it was 'international Jewish world finance' who were responsible for the destruction of Germany. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1943), 148.

<sup>18</sup> Varg Vikernes, 'An Introduction to our Ancestral Cult', 4 January 2013, available on the *Burzum* website at [https://www.burzum.org/eng/library/an\\_introduction\\_to\\_our\\_ancestral\\_cult.shtml](https://www.burzum.org/eng/library/an_introduction_to_our_ancestral_cult.shtml).

Such views- and Vikernes's unabashed willingness to express them publicly- naturally cast him as a notorious figure in the early black metal movement, and it is this notoriety that has allowed Vikernes access to an audience that extends beyond the black metal community.<sup>19</sup> Despite his growing marginalization within the black metal scene, Vikernes still exerts ongoing influence over several black metal musicians who resonated with the possibility of linkages between extreme music and far-right ideology. One of these musicians is Rob Darken of the Polish band Graveland.

### **Graveland and Polish NSBM**

One of the earliest incarnations of National-Socialist inspired black metal is the Wrocław-based band Graveland, founded by musician Robert Darken (born Robert Fudali).<sup>20</sup> Darken's talent for creating highly evocative and poetic lyrics also incorporated vehemently anti-Judeo-Christian themes, which were reflective of the broader black metal scene. In the early stages of the band's development, Darken envisioned Graveland as a Polish extension of the events occurring in Norway and was primarily inspired by what he perceived as a righteous protest against monotheism. Darken recounts that the music and ideology of black metal 'united us and mobilized us to create something new.'<sup>21</sup> Over time, Darken began to express explicit racial themes within his lyrics. According to Darken, various members of prominent Norwegian bands shared these extremist sympathies- an observation that highlights the presence of nationalistic and racist beliefs even with those who do not outwardly identify as NSBM.<sup>22</sup> Yet it was Darken who would become one of black metal's most outspoken racists and advocates for the destruction of Christianity and a return to Europe's Pagan roots:

*We will become the killers,  
The shadow of each Christian  
Their temples will be covered by blood  
We will destroy their altars  
We will turn their graves into ashes.*<sup>23</sup>

He also wrote of his belief in the supremacy of the white race, such as in the song White Hand's Power from the 1997 album *Following the Voice of Blood*:

*The white hand,  
Proud and strong.  
Behold the banner is flying  
It calls us to join  
Because the white hand prevails.*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Louise Brown, 'Black Metal Comes of Age', 29 September 2015, available on the *Norwegian Arts* website at <http://norwegianarts.org.uk/black-metal-comes-of-age/>.

<sup>20</sup> Colin Larkin describes Darken as one of the central instigators of the National Socialist Black Metal movement. See Colin Larkin, 'Graveland', in *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006); Donna Weston and Andy Bennett, *Pop Pagans: Paganism and Popular Music* (London: Routledge 2013), 62.

<sup>21</sup> 'Graveland Interview', 16 March 2015, available on the *House of the Whipcord Magazine* <http://houseofthewhipcordzine.blogspot.com/2015/03/graveland-interview-in-english.html> 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Graveland, "Call of the Black Forest," track 2 on *The Celtic Winter*, No Colours Records, 1994.

<sup>24</sup> Graveland, "White Hand's Power," track 2 on *Following the Voice of Blood*, No Colours Records, 1997.

Adverse reactions to Graveland have been ongoing. Four Graveland albums are currently banned in Germany, as they are considered “unsafe for youth.”<sup>25</sup> To this day, original Graveland recordings are difficult to purchase in general, owing to what Darken refers to as “omnipresent censorship.”<sup>26</sup> In interviews, Darken sheds additional light on why he is considered a promoter of violent hate speech. In an interview with *Pit* magazine, for example, Darken implores readers to ‘start the holocaust again.’ He continues to advocate for the demise of Judeo-Christianity, claiming that it is necessary to “kill the Jews and Christians.”<sup>27</sup> Commenting on how he understands his mission, Darken states that his purpose is to “burn Christian temples until smoke covers the world.”<sup>28</sup> Proving that the passing of time has not particularly mellowed his views, an interview from 2006 sees Darken espousing the timeworn “international Jewish conspiracy” argument as a primary reason for the alleged cultural attack on Aryanism. Darken makes clear his abhorrence for Jewish-owned Hollywood and its corrupting influence, arguing that it is ‘a cradle of decadence and depravity, spiritual emptiness and intellectual shallowness.’<sup>29</sup> Many of these sentiments are revealed in Graveland lyrics, which posit the reality of a timeless cosmic struggle between Wotan and the god of Judeo-Christianity:

*The battle for souls  
Will soon come to be  
Runes will speak in ancient tongue  
The four wings of the sun  
The ancient Aryan sign  
Wotan rises his shield.*<sup>30</sup>

Within the Polish context, Darken understands the ‘Jews and their henchmen’ as controlling the Polish media, which is part of a deliberate ploy to destroy the white race.<sup>31</sup> For Darken, the propaganda disseminated by Jews working in Poland’s media industry corrupts young minds, who are too immature to question the destructive realities of multiculturalism and globalization. One of the primary ways this corruption occurs is through the mechanism of commercially driven music, which enslaves youth and forces mediocrity and consumerism on an undiscerning public. Defending his decision to release his music through the controversial underground record label No Colours, Darken decries the depravity of mainstream music and unsubtly suggests that “commercial labels stink of Jewish shit.”<sup>32</sup> Extending his rhetoric towards a discussion of the Polish education system, Darken pontificates about the alleged distortions of the school curriculum, which actively cover-up the crimes of Bolshevik Jews and instead places an undue influence on the plights of the Jewish people in the Second World War.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Russell Smith, “Amid Political Upheaval, A Chance for Death Metal’s Rebirth,” *Globe and Mail*, December 7, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Interview: Rob Darken of Graveland’, 1 February 2017, available on the *Death Metal Underground* website at <http://www.deathmetal.org/interview/interview-rob-darken-of-graveland/>.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Rob Darken Interview’, 24 February 2010, available on the *NSBM Polska* website at <https://nsbm-polska.livejournal.com/8165.html>.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> J. Bennett, ‘Rob Darken Interview’, 1 March 2006, available on the *Vanguard News Forum* website at <https://vnnforum.com/showthread.php?t=35503>.

<sup>30</sup> Graveland, “The Four Wings of the Sun,” track 5 on *The Fire of Awakening*, No Colours Records, 2003.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Rob Darken Interview’, 24 February 2010, available on the *NSBM Polska* website at <https://nsbm-polska.livejournal.com/8165.html> (viewed 21 February 2019).

<sup>32</sup> ‘Interview with Darken 1997 for Ichorzine’, available on the *Black Death Metal History* website at <https://blackdeathmetahistory.wordpress.com/2018/02/12/interview-with-darken-1997-for-ichorzine/>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Central to Darken's worldview is a glorification of what he refers to as Europe's 'Germanic Pagan roots.'<sup>34</sup> Darken draws heavily on völkisch Wotanism as a source of inspiration and understands himself as a faithful bearer of the spiritual ways of old. The primary purpose of Graveland's music, writes Darken, is to extol the "heroic acts of our ancestors," and in this sense, Graveland's can be interpreted as an example of spiritual proselytizing using the medium of extreme heavy metal. With Christianity in Europe facing institutional crises and numerical decline,<sup>35</sup> Darken envisages a renewal of Pagan religious practices amongst European cultures who have become estranged from their true origins due to the corrosive influence of Judeo-Christian monotheism. Of his role in ushering in a new era of European Paganism, Darken wrote in 1997 that:

I am the forerunner of the era of rebirth of Paganism and a Pagan empire. Now Christianity- strange to our lands and culture- is collapsing. It did not destroy our true beliefs and the traditions of our ancestors. The time of rebirth is coming, and we will take part in a battle (against Christianity).<sup>36</sup>

Darken's musical re-packaging of timeless Pagan spiritual traditions reflects a deeply held moral vision that sees the pinnacle of human virtue as being manifested through the realities of war and its corresponding acts of bravery and honor.<sup>37</sup> Although Darken never explicitly extrapolates what precisely constitutes the moral and ethical uprightness of battle, it is clear from his broader proclamations that he understands his own political and cultural views as being motivated by a desire to preserve and protect.

*Their blood was dripping from our blades  
In the ferocious ardour of that fierce battle  
Non-heathen foes of our people,  
Countless enemy men tumbled  
Our sworn revenge was done.*<sup>38</sup>

The twin notions of preservation and protection are informed by a polytheistic cosmology which understands the Pagan pantheon as representing distinct spheres of influence. In battle, therefore, the warrior who fights for his culture and nation is to be admired for their selfless willingness to defend against an enemy who represents cultural subversion and negation.

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<sup>34</sup> 'Graveland Interview', 8 May 2008, available on the *Frostkamp* website at <https://frostkamp.wordpress.com/2008/08/05/graveland-interview/>.

<sup>35</sup> For a balanced assessment of the decline of Christianity in Europe, see Hugh Mcleod and Werner Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003).

<sup>36</sup> 'Interview with Darken 1997 for Ichorzine', available on the *Black Death Metal History* website at <https://blackdeathmetahistory.wordpress.com/2018/02/12/interview-with-darken-1997-for-ichorzine/>. Darken's belief in a resurgence of Pagan spirituality throughout Europe is not ill-conceived. In the introduction to *Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe*, Kathryn Rountree reviews the popularity of modern European Paganisms and provides an excellent assessment of the complex relationship between ancient Paganism and its contemporary expressions. Kathryn Rountree, 'Context is Everything: Plurality and Paradox in Contemporary European Paganisms,' in Kathryn Rountree (ed.), *Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe: Colonialist and Nationalist Impulses* (New York: Berghahn 2015), 1-24.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Graveland, "Semper Fidelix," track 2 on *Dawn of the Iron Blades*, No Colours Records, 2004.



Because Darken understands his own religious and cultural views as being shaped by ancient customs and spiritual traditions, he decries the label NSBM as unrelated to his position.<sup>39</sup> In recent times Darken has sought to distance himself from his more vitriolic statements of earlier years, preferring instead to generalize his polemic away from the condemnation of specific ethnic groups. In terms of the propagation of racism and hate, however, the more problematic aspect of Darken's ongoing activity relates less to his explicit anti-Semitic statements and calls for violent political action and more in his consistent and outspoken 'orders of creation' worldview.<sup>40</sup> For Darken, Europe belongs to Europeans, Africa belongs to Africans, and America belongs to the Americans. The phenomenon of mass immigration and globalization represents a disaster for the human race, chiefly because it violates the fundamental concept of 'separateness' and results in moral, racial, and cultural collapse.

Darken has continued to release Graveland albums as well as a host of other musical projects. He has again been the subject of additional controversy, owing to the outspoken nature of his previous statements on issues of race, immigration, and anti-Semitism. With an increased profile and a new generation of listeners, Graveland has recently undertaken several European and American tours, only to have some of these performances banned due to the influence of anti-hate groups.<sup>41</sup> Irrespective of a growing awareness of the problem of racism in metal, Darken's creative projects continue unabated.

### **Absurd: the German connection**

The black metal band Absurd originated in 1992 in Thuringia, Germany, and is a powerful example of National Socialist ideology within extreme metal. If Vikernes can be said to have infused the black metal genre with far-right concepts, then the music of Absurd and the activities of its founding members offered the prototype for how the future NSBM scene would unfold.

Within a genre known for violence, Absurd was able to distinguish their brand of hate through an intensification of racial and theological themes, which gave fierce expression to the band's commitment to overthrowing the Judeo-Christian heritage in Europe. In an interview with the U.K. chapter of the notorious far-right activist group *Blood and Honour*, Ronald Möbus (one of the band's co-founders along with his brother Hendrik) reflected on the critical reception of their first full-length album, *Facta Loquuntur*. He speaks of the almost instantaneous categorization of the band as a leader within the newly developed National Socialist Black Metal' scene and talks with pride of the band's subsequent blacklisting from both record companies and promotional outlets.<sup>42</sup>

Over time, Absurd's lyrics grew even more orientated towards Norse mythology, pride in racial identity, the superiority of the Aryan race, and the requirement for violent action

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<sup>39</sup> J. Bennett, 'Rob Darken Interview', 1 March 2006, available on the *Vanguard News Forum* website at <https://vnnforum.com/showthread.php?t=35503> (viewed 22 July 2019).

<sup>40</sup> It is not without irony that the so-called 'orders of creation' doctrine emerged in the Protestant Church within the Nazi era. The theologian Paul Althaus was instrumental in shaping a theology which suggested that through the act of creation God had created certain orders (i.e. race, marriage, family) which were inviolable. Paul Althaus, *Völker vor und nach Christus. Theologische Lehre vom Volke* (Leipzig: Deichert 1937), 3-5.

<sup>41</sup> Dario Ayala, 'Producers Cancel Concert by Black Metal Band Graveland', *Montreal Gazette*, 28 November 2016.

<sup>42</sup> "Absurd Interview," undated, available on the *Blood and Honour* website at <http://www.bloodandhonourcentral.co.uk/interviews/absurd.html>.

against spiritual enemies.<sup>43</sup> Judaism and Christianity- which have oppressed Europe through force- was a primary target for Absurd's rage:

*What breathes must now die,  
That the world will be cleaned!  
Murdering Jews and Christians,  
Lustful, full of cruelty.  
Mass graves fill up.<sup>44</sup>*

Such themes were linked with more explicit references to National Socialism and the Third Reich. The direct inspiration band members received from Nazi ideology is evident, for example, in a 1999 E.P. named *Asgardsrei*, in which a speech of Adolf Hitler is sampled throughout the instrumental track *Crux Gammata*. The penultimate song on this recording is titled *Germanien Über Alles* (Germany Over All), which is an explicit invocation of the German anthem co-opted throughout the Nazi regime. Composed by the poet August Heinrich Hoffmann, the original lyrics were intended to refer to the strength that would come from the unifying of the German states. In their tremendous skill for appropriation, however, the Nazis chose instead to emphasize the racial and cultural connotations of the first verse. Absurd's rendering of the anthem in *Asgardsrei* reflects this interpretation, which is further strengthened by their use of such familiar Nazi phrases such as 'one's honor is one's loyalty.'<sup>45</sup> Elsewhere, Absurd lyrics positively reference the gas Zyklon B as a tool for achieving racist goals:

*I satisfy my greed with human flesh  
With Zyklon B  
with poison and blood  
If you want me  
Come to my kingdom.<sup>46</sup>*

The history of the band includes multiple forays into criminal activity. In 1993, band members took part in the murder of a fifteen-year-old boy named Sandro Beyer. Each received a term of detention, although founding member Hendrik Möbus was able to continue releasing Absurd albums from within prison. Upon his release in 1998, Möbus solidified his position as a leader within the NSBM movement through the development of the so-called *Deutsche Heidnische Front* (German Heathen Front), which was a subsidiary chapter of the broader *Allgermanische Heidnische Front*. The German group was a small association of like-minded individuals who shared a commitment to National Socialist and Pagan ideas. Taking its broader inspiration from Teutonic and Norse myths, the group advocated for a restoration of ancient German Pagan religion within a National Socialist

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<sup>43</sup> Lyrics for the 2008 song *Ulfhednir-Todesschwadron* reveal these motifs in a characteristically direct manner: 'Death squadron, we torture and murder, killing for Wotan, we are the werewolf order.' See Absurd, "Ulfhednir-Todesschwadron," track 1 on *Weltenfeind*, World Terror Committee, 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Absurd, "Pestnaz," track 3 on *Thuringian Pagan Madness*, Capricornus, 1995.

<sup>45</sup> *Meine Ehre heist Treue* (My honour is called loyalty) was adopted by Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler as the official motto of the Schutzstaffel (SS). Robert Koehl writes that *Meine Ehre heist Treue* embodies the friend-foe dichotomy of the SS, and that the motto reflects the desire to 'bind potential friends together and to destroy all other groupings.' Robert Koehl, 'The Character of the Nazi SS,' *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1962, 275-283 (280). This dynamic is reflected in the philosophy of NSBM musicians who categorise the world into those who represent the racial elite and those who embody biological and spiritual corruption.

<sup>46</sup> Absurd, "Werewolf," track 1 on *Thuringian Pagan Madness*, Capricornus, 1995.

*weltanschauung*.<sup>47</sup> In 2001, after being arrested in New York for political hate speech and related activities, Möbus gave an interview in which he stated that he is concerned with promoting the ‘preservation and advancement of the Aryan race.’ As a champion for this cause, Möbus understood his mission as being a ‘tool for racial evolution, paving the way to the superman.’<sup>48</sup> Importantly, the group functioned as a form of pre-internet era social networking, allowing members and affiliates to connect with the movement’s international base of members. Möbus’ advocacy spread into America, in which he received ongoing assistance from the infamous Neo-Nazi William Pierce.<sup>49</sup>

Möbus’ position within the extreme-right musical landscape has transformed into one of quasi-martyrdom. A primary reason for this is the belief amongst sympathizers that he has been the victim of injustices motivated by both the ‘international Jewish conspiracy’ and the silencing forces of politically correct leftist groups. In his post-incarceration activities, Möbus has demonstrated his ongoing commitment to extreme-right politics and racial theories by way of various appearances in right-wing forums and gatherings in which he appears to have recast himself as a social commentator on European affairs. An example of this is Möbus’ recent appearance at the Pact of Steel conference held in Kyiv in December of 2018. The conference—designed to foster discussion about nationalism, paganism, and black metal—is known for its advocacy of right-wing thinkers. Möbus delivered a lecture titled “*The White God of War: Roman von Ungern-Sternberg*,” in which he discussed the relevance of von Sternberg for the contemporary task of reconquering Europe.<sup>50</sup> As a band, Absurd continues to release albums despite controversy and restrictions. Their uncompromising reputation ensures they are condemned by their detractors and hailed as heroes by their supporters. The 2018 reissue of the album *Blutgericht* contains the following testament to Absurd’s unrelenting devotion to Pagan revolution:

*None of the servants of the Son of God will escape  
Although we are only a few of the pureblood  
Our superiority will give us victory  
Foolish Christians breed.  
But they underestimate Pagan rage.*<sup>51</sup>

## Contemporary NSBM in Eastern Europe and Beyond

Recent years have witnessed an expansion of NSBM’s appeal across the globe, although Eastern Europe continues to be an epicentre for the genre.<sup>52</sup> Contemporary NSBM artists

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<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press 2003), 206-7.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Hendrik Möbus Speaks’, 2 April 2001, available on the *Mourning the Ancient* website at <http://www.mourningtheancient.com/mobus.htm>.

<sup>49</sup> Southern Poverty Law Centre, *National Socialist Black Metal Becoming Soundtrack for Racist Right: Intelligence Report Fall 2000* (Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Centre 2000), available on the Southern Poverty Law Centre website at <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2000/national-socialist-black-metal-becoming-soundtrack-racist-right>. On the far-right extremist activities of Pierce, see George Michael, ‘The Revolutionary Model of Dr. William L. Pierce’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2003, 62-80.

<sup>50</sup> The full video of Möbus’ lecture can be found on the *Militant Zone* website: <http://www.militant.zone/pact2018/>

<sup>51</sup> Absurd, “Heidenwut,” track 2 on *Blutgericht*, Nebelfee Klangwerke, 2005.

<sup>52</sup> See Olson, ‘Voice of our Blood: National Socialist Discourse in Black Metal’, 142.

often combine elements of other metal styles whilst retaining varying degrees of imagery and thematic content inherent to National Socialism and far-right extremism.<sup>53</sup> Of particular significance is the rise of extreme metal bands from Ukraine, a trend which is possibly related to the growing popularity of far-right political groups in that country.<sup>54</sup> The annual *Asgardsrei* festival held in Kyiv, for example, is well known for its open support of far-right bands, with the 2019 event featuring performances from Finland's Goatmoon and Greece's Wodulf- both of which are associated with NSBM.

Yet NSBM is not a strictly Eastern European phenomenon, and representative groups can be identified throughout Europe. In France, the band Peste Noire has been unable to avoid being associated with National Socialism, despite their attempts to qualify this support with an appeal to their broader influences.<sup>55</sup> Finland is also a prevalent country for NSBM-related metal. The long-running project Goatmoon is openly supportive of NSBM and has attracted controversy as recently as 2016 due to their performance at a neo-Nazi festival in Chicago. Greece is also home to several NSBM artists. The long-running band Wolfnacht is an explicit example of black metal fused with Nazi-ideology.<sup>56</sup> Jonathan F. Williams also identifies the Athens-based Der Stürmer as particularly influential, acknowledging the potential for what he refers to as the 'lunatic fringe' to guide its listeners into forming racist worldviews.<sup>57</sup> The geographical spread of these bands would suggest that growing censorship and restrictions on live performances and record distribution are not preventing the dissemination of NSBM ideology.

### **The future of National Socialist Black Metal**

As noted by Britta Schellenberg, the quality of NSBM music has improved in recent times,<sup>58</sup> represented by better production values and more professional live performances. This, alongside the increasing commercialization of black metal, has perhaps led to a willingness of extreme metal fans to seek out more underground and subversive genres— a space that used to be filled by Norwegian black metal. Interpreters also cannot overlook the link between NSBM and the political activities of far-right movements within Europe and beyond, as these networks have demonstrated keen abilities to foster connections amongst disparate groups of activists and sympathizers.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Recent Polish examples include L.S.S.A.H (an abbreviation of the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler), Antisemitex, Cień, and Blood Stronghold.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Hockenos, *Free to Hate: The Rise of the Right in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge 1996), 193-296.

<sup>55</sup> 'Peste Noire- Interview and Collaboration 2017', undated 2017, available on the Militant Zone website at <http://militant.zone/kpn2017/>

<sup>56</sup> On Wolfnacht's National Socialism, see Christodoulos Apergis, 'Screaming Ancient Greek Hymns: The Case of Kawir and the Greek Black Metal Scene', in K.F.B. Fletcher and Osman Umurhan (eds), *Classical Antiquity* (London: Bloomsbury 2020), 89.

<sup>57</sup> Jonathan F. Williams, 'Burke, Black Metal, and the Golden Dawn: Deconstructing the Dangerous Appeal of National Socialist Black Metal', *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society*, vol. 7, no.1, 2018, <http://www.presenttensejournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/JWilliams.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> Britta Schellenberg, 'Germany', in Ralf Melzer and Sebastian Serafin (eds), *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe: Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies* (Frankfurt am Main: Druck- und Verlagshaus GmbH & Co KG 2013), 53.

<sup>59</sup> Nikki Sterkenburg, *Far-Right Extremism: A Practical Introduction* (Rotterdam: The RAN Centre of Excellence 2019), 5.

This raises the question of whether NSBM should primarily be considered a music genre, or whether it is perhaps more accurate to interpret it as another example of the far-right's ability to use a diverse range of musical genres to spread its message.<sup>60</sup> If the latter interpretation is adopted, this would free black metal from the perception that racism and nationalism are inherent to it. Certainly, the parasitic way in which far-right movements often adapt to popular culture would suggest that black metal is perhaps another victim of this strategy. The internet, too, has facilitated the free exchange of extremist propaganda.<sup>61</sup> In the world of digital sharing, the international transmission of NSBM music is rendered simple and effective. Digital recording technology has also allowed self-produced recordings to be uploaded directly to the internet. This has resulted in a greater volume of NSBM recordings being freely available on sites like YouTube.

However, there are also strong signs that NSBM and its related subcultures are being shunned by the broader heavy metal community. Within the black metal scene itself, criticism has come by way of a burgeoning anti-Fascism movement which maintains that the racism of NSBM has no place in extreme metal discourse. 2019's *Black Flags Over Brooklyn* anti-fascism metal festival in New York points to the rising tide of discontent amongst metal fans who are resisting the linkage between some extreme metal genres and racism.<sup>62</sup> The controversy surrounding the relationship between Graveland and Behemoth also illustrates the extent to which consumers of heavy metal are sensitive to the political leanings of its musicians. Adam Darski –founder of the popular Polish extreme metal band Behemoth– had his origins in the early 90s black metal scene. During this time, he was a friend of and musical collaborator with Rob Darken. In more recent times, a photo of the two musicians surfaced on the internet, causing various metal commentators to question whether Darski harboured sympathy toward Darken's racist beliefs.<sup>63</sup> The surrounding controversy points to a desire to purge the scene of such influences. Music technology companies are also attempting to cleanse their platforms of extremist content by censoring bands and musicians with ties to NSBM. Recently, the music streaming service Spotify took action to remove the discography of bands suspected of having associations with NSBM and white supremacy themes.<sup>64</sup>

However well-intentioned these responses may be, they also serve to reiterate the basic fact that black metal has an ongoing association with racism and nationalism despite the best efforts of the majority to distance themselves from this problematic relationship. The threat of political and digital censorship– as well as its ostracization from the broader metal community– merely serves to reinforce the purity of NSBM's underground status. For many of its musicians, extreme-right political leanings are reflective of the true essence of black metal. Peste Noir's founder has stated that "real black metal is always extreme right-wing

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<sup>60</sup> Timothy S. Brown has traced the history of Nazism in music, particularly as this relates to its manifestations in England and Germany. See Timothy S. Brown, 'Subcultures, Pop Music and Politics: Skinheads and "Nazi Rock" in England and Germany', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2004, 157-78.

<sup>61</sup> For a case study in the use of social networks as a networking tool for the extremist group 'Soldiers of Odin,' see Yannick Veilleux-Lepage and Emil Archambault, 'Mapping Transnational Extremist Networks: An Exploratory Study of the Soldiers of Odin's Facebook Network, Using Integrated Social Network Analysis', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2019, 21-38.

<sup>62</sup> For a review of the festival, see Hank Shteamer, "Brooklyn Anti-Fascist Metal Fest Was a Beacon for a Troubled Scene," *Rolling Stone*, 28 January 2019.

<sup>63</sup> "Behemoth's Nergal Denies Insinuations of Racist Beliefs After Being Photographed with Alleged National Socialist Black Metal Band," *The PRP*, 20 December 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Resnikoff, 'In Response to Our Article, Spotify is Removing Dozens of Neo-Nazi Hate Bands', *Digital Music News*, 16 August 2017.

music,” while Varggoth of Ukrainian band Nokturnal Mortum has suggested that political commentary and black metal music share a natural affinity.<sup>65</sup> Herein lies the heart of NSBM’s curious capacity for longevity despite growing resistance: the more it endures by way of opposition, the more it takes refuge in its self-appointed status as the rightful inheritors of the black metal legacy of rebellion against dominant cultural, religious, and political narratives.<sup>66</sup> If black metal was indeed conceived in a spirit of misanthropy, rebellion, and iconoclasm, then NSBM continues this tradition through its espousal of deeply unpopular racism and nationalism. In this way, NSBM retains key elements of black metal’s original ethos and can claim for itself that it exists on a plane of historical continuity.

Whatever future directions extreme heavy metal genres may take, the tenacity of racist and nationalistic themes within many of its subgenres ensure it will remain a dynamic medium for the propagation of extreme-right ideology. Such topics tap into broader narratives of social disenfranchisement, political instability, and grievances against various cultural trends, including the perceived threat of loss of cultural identity due to mass immigration. NSBM has proven to be resilient in the face of ostracization from the black metal community and increased digital and political censorship. When this longevity is coupled with the symbolic appeal of heavy metal for the disaffected, the medium remains fertile ground for the dissemination of prejudice and hate.

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<sup>65</sup> ‘Peste Noire Interview’, March 28 2007, available on the *Under the Dark Soil* website at <https://underthedarksoil.wordpress.com/2007/03/28/peste-noire-interview/>, ‘Nokturnal Mortum Interview’, May 8 2005, available on the *Frostkamp* website at <https://frostkamp.wordpress.com/2008/08/05/nokturnal-mortum-interview/>

<sup>66</sup> In his analysis of postings on a black metal web forum relating to NSBM, Karl Spracklen suggests that a significant number of responses (11%) viewed NSBM as a natural extension of the black metal ethos. Karl Spracklen, ‘True Aryan Black Metal’: The Meaning of Leisure, Belonging and the Construction of Whiteness in Black Metal Music’, in N. Scott (ed.), *The Metal Void: First Gatherings* (Oxford: ID Press 2010), 87.