Title: Basque Pagan Metal: View to a Primordial Past

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Pagan Metal and Basque Identity

Pagan Metal, a genre within the Extreme Metal scene, blends local traditional ethnic instrumentation and melodic material with Black Metal musical elements, the lyrics focusing on localised pagan themes. While generally expressing an extreme anti-Christian sentiment embedded in themes of oppression and a glorified pagan past, it tends to distance itself from the neo-Nazi and Satanist elements that have come to be associated with its predecessor - Black Metal. While there are sometimes significant discrepancies across various websites as to whether such bands are Pagan, Folk, Black or otherwise, the constants are Black Metal musical style combined with local folk-style music and instrumentation, with lyrics referencing local Pagan legends and communicating a strong sense of local identity.

This article explores Pagan Metal from the Basque Country, with the aim of defining what kind of identity it represents, and where that identity is situated within the context of a continuum of Basque identities. It is argued that Basque Pagan Metal expresses a specific musical identity, with links to the ideology of the 1980s Basque punk movement *Rock Radikal*. Further, it is proposed that Basque Pagan Metal has diverged from this musical heritage in that, in keeping with the legacy of Black Metal ideology, the identity it expresses is apolitical – that is, while *Rock Radikal* expressed an openly political identity, that expressed in Basque Pagan Metal is explicitly culturalist, resonating more with the primordial nationalism espoused by the ‘father of Basque nationalism’ Sabino Arana.

The discussion that follows is an exploration of ethnic and cultural identity as expressed in Pagan Metal music in the Basque Country. It examines how socio-cultural and historical context influences the way this identity is both expressed and interpreted. This will primarily be conducted through semiotic analysis of the music and discussion of the genre within the context of the rise of Basque nationalism in the late 19th century, the emergence of radical nationalism, and the *Rock Radikal* movement. The Basque group Numen is put forward as a case study through analysis of their 2003 album, *Jarrai Beza Kondairak* (Let the Legend Continue), specifically the first track *Euskaldunak* (The Basques).

Background: Heavy, Black and Pagan Metals

To understand what is represented by Pagan Metal, a discussion of its evolution from Black Metal is necessary. The origins of Black Metal are heavily debated amongst fans and musicians within the community, however it is widely accepted within the fan base that the first Black Metal album was penned by English group Venom with their 1981 LP, *Black Metal*. Through a series of sensational and highly publicised events associated with Black Metal, including church burnings, Satanist and neo-fascist accusations, Norway has come to be associated most strongly with the genre. The originators of Norwegian Black Metal were Oslo group Mayhem, founded by Øystein “Euronymous” Aarseth (a man who became a major figurehead in Black Metal before his murder in 1993 by Varg Vikernes, sole member of the one-man project Black Metal band, Burzum). Mayhem were closely followed by Kolbotn locals Darkthrone with their seminal album *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* released in 1991.

Much of Darkthrone's early work contains pagan allusions; however it is with Swedish group Bathory that the roots of Pagan Metal can most clearly be seen, specifically the expression of the localised and historicised ethnic identity which is exemplified in the music of Numen. Their fourth release, *Blood Fire Death* (1988), although ostensibly a Black Metal album, was thematically based on the Valkyries and Norse Gods, marking a clear shift from the more Satanist leanings of previous albums. Quorthon, Bathory's lead singer, was quoted in a Swedish newspaper as saying that he had always been obsessed with the Viking Age and *Ásatrú* – a neo-pagan religion, the name of which translates as 'belief in the Norse Gods' (Moynihan & Soderland 1998, p.172). Within its belief system, Christianity is perceived as an alien religion that was forced upon the ancestors – a theme which is often reiterated in Pagan Metal.

Around this time there was an explosion of Norwegian Black Metal groups who were important figures in the development of what is now termed Pagan Metal, including Immortal, Enslaved and Emperor, amongst others. Enslaved and Emperor were undoubtedly an influence through their epic and abrasive, keyboard-laden, folk and classical inspired Black Metal, however Enslaved in particular began their careers in 1991 by emulating the themes of later records by Bathory through exploring the Viking-era history of their native land. Darkthrone's highly influential *Transilvanian Hunger* (1994) album features an entire side of songs with lyrics composed by Varg Vikernes themed around a Pagan/Norse cosmology/mythology (the album infamously sported the slogan "Norsk Arisk Black Metal" or "Norwegian Aryan Black Metal" on the back cover, for which the band eventually apologised and had removed from future pressings).

These pagan themes eventually became a feature of Pagan Metal as the genre was codified, however its nationalistic elements can also be traced to the influence of Black Metal. The early Burzum records (1991 – 1993) were themed around the Norse-inspired Lord of the Rings saga with barely-veiled themes of nationalism, Paganism and isolationist individualism. While Mayhem's 'brand' of Black Metal emphasised death, violence and evil, it is with Burzum's *Vikernes* that the genre is steered toward a more codified extremist philosophy, and also where the glorification of ancient pagan religion begins to emerge very clearly. *Vikernes* dreamed of a Norway cleansed of Christianity and other non-Scandinavian religions and returned to its pagan Norse roots, an Odinism described by Moynihan and Soderland as racial nationalism (1998, p.152). What is clear here, is that in this emerging Norwegian Black Metal, Paganism had become confounded with nationalism, at its most extreme bordering on 'fascistic paganism or pagan fascism' (York 2003, p.163). It is also clearly influential on Heathen Metal, a (pagan) sub-category of National Socialist Black Metal, which shares most characteristics with Pagan Metal but is peppered with an open nationalist and racist worldview. As Keith Kahn-Harris notes in his book which investigates the Extreme Metal scene, the link between Paganism, racism and fascism can be seen in many fascist and racist movements since the nineteenth century (2007, p.41), however it is important to note that Pagan Metal does not project a racist worldview.

Black Metal also influenced the development of Pagan Metal in its links to the Norse and Finnish language revivals which in turn came out of a revival of ancient Viking and Finnish myths (Smith 1996, p.457). This point has important implications for the local reception of

Basque Pagan Metal, where language revival and mythology also intersect. The use of regional or minority languages is an important feature of Pagan Metal, dating back most prominently to Black Metal group Enslaved's use of Old Norse as the only language on their early releases (they now generally sing in English to reach a wider audience) and exemplified today for example in the use of the Basque language by the majority of Basque Extreme Metal groups. Enslaved's *Hordanes Land EP*, *Vikingligir Veldi*, *Frost*, *Eld* and *Blodhemn* are all entirely in a variant of Old Norse no longer spoken in most of Norway. Early Pagan Metal groups like Cruachan also contributed to the use of ancient languages by writing songs in Irish, a practice that has been emulated by many Irish metal bands since. Pagan, local folk, linguistic and nationalist themes have therefore essentially always been a part of Black Metal and played a large role in its evolution in the 1990s. Black Metal bands have cross-pollinated with Pagan Metal bands from the very beginning and continue to do so in a very fertile and popular scene.

While Norwegian Black Metal is undeniably a massive sonic and, to some extent, ideological inspiration to the modern Pagan/Folk/Heathen Metal scenes, Pagan Metal music has a history of its own, which is strongly interwoven with the emergence of all the major metal genres of the 1980s and early 1990s (but most particularly Black and, to a lesser degree, Death Metal). It could be argued that Pagan Metal is really a "post-Black Metal" form of music originating with the first Viking-themed records of Bathory noted above and the first record of British group Skyclad. The sonic characteristics of these albums, and their lyrical obsessions with mythology and the perceived injustices perpetrated by the church in the Middle Ages, are clear influences on almost all of the Pagan Metal created since. Skyclad were the first metal group to popularise the incorporation folk instruments and folk music (in this case Celtic and British folk music,

incorporating tin whistles, fiddles, traditional drums etc.) into their style of extreme metal.

They were followed closely by Ireland's Cruachan and an explosion of folk-influenced Black Metal bands in Eastern Europe, where metal fans and musicians found new freedom after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Stylistically, Black Metal music is a very broad genre and is musically varied, however a core of consistent musical elements can be identified, most importantly heavy distortion, fast guitar playing and riffing, high-pitched, screamed or growled vocals, and fast percussion, especially 'hammer' drumming, extremely fast 16th notes played on the kick drum. Prevalent features of Pagan Metal music include the above, however the Black Metal-styled music is combined with traditional instrumentation (or allusions to traditional instrumentation via the use of synthesisers) and the application of traditional rhythms and melodies to ordinary metal instrumentation. This may occur in tandem with the heavier Black Metal styled music, or through the alternation of 'folk-like' and 'metal' sections. Importantly, Black Metal's earlier Satanist emphasis is substituted for a more generic Paganism: while Pagan Metal is often openly anti-Christian in its presentation, it has no association with Satanism – while Satanists are often described as pagan (but more often as heathen), Satan has no place in the pagan cosmology according to contemporary understandings of the term.

Often a group will be variously referred to as Black Metal or Pagan Metal, depending upon which website it is found. This is further confused with the appellation of Folk Metal, which also combines Black Metal with traditional instrumentation, and may also refer lyrically to pagan themes. There is also arguably little or no difference between so-called Folk Metal bands

and Pagan Metal bands as both share the same characteristics and influences. The online *Folk Metal Encyclopedia* for example lists Viking, Pagan, Celtic, Hellenic and Battle Metal (for example) in its list of groups, and describes Numen as a Black/Folk group. An example of the above discrepancies is exemplified when comparing Numen's own web pages with other music websites: on their MySpace page, Numen refer to themselves as "Black metal from the Basque country", whereas on their official website they describe themselves as "Black Metal with some influences of the folk and traditional music of their land". This kind of blurring of boundaries is even more evident when comparing sites such as the *Encyclopedia Metallum: The Metal Archives* on which Numen are described as Black/Folk Metal, while internet radio site *Last.fm* (Spain) describe them as Pagan/Black Metal, and on their English site as Extreme Metal. While in no way decisively codified, what these genres do have in common is a strong sense of local ethnic identity, rooted in a past conveyed through local mythology, and expressed through a style of music which blends Black Metal and more traditional styles and/or instrumentation.

As Kahn-Harris notes, this blurring of boundaries in genre classification is a characteristic of Extreme Metal culture, in which 'these generic terms are often assumed to cover other genres (with death metal treated as part of thrash metal) or the genres are assumed to be discrete' (2007, p.9). For the purposes of this article, discrepancies aside, music which meets the above criteria will be referred to as Pagan Metal, but it should be noted that the genre shares many characteristics with its Black and Folk cousins, and is but one part of a much broader, and 'constantly shifting set of other scenes' which constitute the Extreme Metal scene (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p.99). This is supported by Kahn-Harris's description of the scene, of which he

says: “the considerable musical and institutional overlap between these scenes allows us to talk about the extreme metal scene as a totality.” (2007, p.22).

The Basque Metal Scene

The Extreme Metal scene in the Basque country, of which Pagan Metal is a part, is well-represented (given a population of approx. 2.7 million in the Spanish Basque country according to 2006 figures). The Basque Webzine *Herriko Burdina* (Metal Nation) lists 286 Extreme and Heavy Metal groups from the Spanish Basque provinces (Bizkaia 131, Araba 29, Gipuzkoa 74, Nafarroa 52), and 22 from the French Basque provinces. These artists span a range of genres such as Hard Rock, Death Metal, Black Metal, Grindcore and Mathcore, however the list is dominated by the more extreme styles. Fourteen of these groups are described as Black Metal (including Numen), three as Viking, two as Folk, and one as Pagan. In its list of Basque Extreme Metal groups, the *Encyclopedia Metallum* lists nineteen Black Metal bands, and seven Pagan Metal bands (three of which are also classified as Folk Metal); Numen are listed as a Black/Folk Metal. Some of the same genre discrepancies described previously are evident here: for example, the two sources above agree on the classification of only one group (Omendark as Pagan Metal); on their MySpace page, Aiumeen Basoa (Forest of Screams) describe themselves as “Basque Pagan/Folk pioneers”, while above they are categorised as Folk Metal.

Basque websites such as webzine *Euskal Metalheads* and online metal radio station *Burdinola* are entirely dedicated to the general Basque Metal scene, providing information on concerts, events, and local and international artists and covering a broad range of genres falling under

the ‘metal umbrella’, from heavy metal to extreme. *Burdinola* (in Basque and Spanish) describe on their homepage how

heavy metal has always had a following in Euskal Herria. Especially in the underground scene. In the 80's and 90's "the Basque" moved from one scene to another to hear and live heavy rock. This scene was reflected quite well in a few fanzines and local radio programs.....Anyway, heavy metal is alive in our land and some of us are want to show it.

Certainly, the live metal live scene in the Basque Country appears to be vibrant. According to the concert calendars on *Live.fm*, *Indyrock*, and *Metalcry*, there are several Extreme Metal concerts across a variety of venues every week, most of these taking place in Bilbao and surrounding areas. These concerts range from larger festivals such as Kobetasonik, an annual metal festival which features Basque and international Extreme Metal groups, to smaller venues which support local, emerging groups across a range of metal genres.

Case Study: A Musical and Paramusical Analysis

Numen formed in 1997, and have released two EPs (1999, 2003) and three full length albums (2001, 2004, 2007). On their MySpace page Numen describe their first release as containing ‘five black metal tracks’, their 2001 release as being ‘based on Basque legends and history, as well as its dark and magic mythology’, and their 2004 album as ‘an extreme piece of black

metal'. Their most recent release is described as "Basque Cult Black Metal ... from the Basque woods, following the path of the ancient cult without compromise'.

Comparative groups in the Basque Country would be Adhur (Magic Force) and Aiumeen Basoa (Forest of Screams) who, along with Numen, pioneered the Pagan Metal scene in the Basque Country. These two groups released a compilation album together along with Ilbeltz (who appear to have disbanded) in 2001 entitled *Triarchy of Vasconia*, described variously as Black, Folk or Pagan Metal, depending on the website. The entry page to Adhur's official website (in English, Spanish and Basque) is entitled 'Basque Pagan Woods'; on the home page, Adhur describe these 'woods' as dedicated to their 'pagan metal, a mixture among the extreme metal and the oldest Basque folk, that it looks for their origin in the Mythology and ancestral history of the Basque People' (sic). On the page entitled 'beginning', they describe their quest for a:

balance among the old mythology and Basque culture, and the gloomy, saddest and darkest metal, introducing passages of the Basque folk ... an original sound that would be defined as Basque Pagan Metal.

As but one example of the themes of Paganism and local identity informing this album, the second track, *Akelarreko Batzarra* (gathering of the *Akelarr* – Black Sabbath), describes the 'return of the ancient Gods and fertility rituals associated with the germination of the 'seed' which will bring about the return of the traditional owners of the lands'. Aiumeen Basoa describe themselves as Black Metal/Folk on their MySpace page and as 'Basque Pagan/Folk

pioneers' in their English biography section where they describe their 2009 album *Iraganeko Bide Malkartsutik* (Follow the Treacherous Path) as based on:

long Basque Folk/Metal tunes with lots of music and rhythm changes,
mixed with a grand variety of instruments and arrangements ...
influenced by traditional Basque Folk music as well as old Norwegian
Black metal ... with a strong Basque Mythology and Folklore based
lyrics.

In the case study album, *Jarraí Beza Kondairak*, the musical style indicators of Black Metal are blended with traditional instrumentation and style in keeping with a Pagan Metal classification. In the case of *Euskaldunak*, the two styles are contrasted in alternating sections, while in other tracks, they may occur concurrently. The track *Mari* for example begins with a solo piano introduction in what could be described as an arpeggiated ballad style, while the rest of the song is in Black Metal style but accompanied by flute; *Heriotzen Eta Neroa* (Death and Myself) begins with modal plucked guitar in a slow triplet feel, after which the song launches into full Black Metal style. As comparison material, on the 2004 album *Basoaren Semeak* (Children of the Forest), track 1 begins in Black Metal style but finishes with a ninety second outro in modal plucked guitar (accompanied by 'forest' and wolf sounds, and the final track consists entirely of Basque instruments (the double reed and hornpipe *alboka* and traditional percussion, the *txalaparta*) with guitar accompaniment played in folk-like style. On the 2001 album *Galdutako Itxaropenaren Eresia* (Heresy of Lost Hope), the first track *Gauerdia Erortzean* (Midnight Falls) is entirely guitar and flute in folk style; track 4 begins with a

txalaparta solo while the rest of the track is entirely in Black Metal style but containing sections accompanied by *alboka* and sometimes *tzalaparta*.

Numen is clearly a Pagan Metal group in meeting these musical criteria: alternation or combination of local traditional instrumentation, or imitations thereof, with sections in Black Metal style. Thematically, most of the lyrics and discourse express a strong anti-Christian sentiment and refer to localised pagan folklore. CD covers and websites reflect these pagan themes with images of, for example, local iconography and mythological references. Demonstrating a clear link to their Norse counterparts, lead guitarist Jabo explains that ‘Numen represents the set of divinities of the pre-Christian cultures like Thor in Scandinavian mythology or Mari in Basque mythology’ (Numen Official Website). Their website, *The Official Webforest*, is available in English, Spanish, and Basque, reflecting Pagan Metal’s global roots and audience. It also is accessed through a forest, ‘the forest of the numenes’ and on it their music is described as:

Black Metal with some influences of the folk and traditional music of their land. All lyrics are written in Euskera, their mother tongue, and they tell about old traditions, legends and mythology, always with a strong feeling against Christianity (Numen Official Website).

Mythological themes are a constant across all albums. As an example, in a 2004 interview published in on-line metal magazine *Mondongo Canibale*, Jabo explains the title of the album *Basoaren Semeak*:

‘Basoaren semeak’ translated into Castilian would be ‘children of the forest’; you can interpret it as ‘creatures of the forest’, and several contexts can be derived from it . . . the lyrics speak of the old pre-Christian Euskal Herria, of its traditions, its mythology (Numen Official Website).

Jabo elaborates on this theme in an interview for on-line magazine *Duorame Digital*, in July 2004, explaining that these children of the forest are

feelings personified in beings that are in another underworld, far from the 21st century; a world of human reminders and darkest feelings that give life to all type of beings that listen to the voice of night and who are guided by the forces of nature. Musically it is the bridge that connects us with that world which is so different and what we were (Numen Official Website).

Many of these themes are expressed in the lyrics of *Euskaldunak*: the first few lines take the listener far back in time when ‘our country was born . . . rich and fertile’ and invite the listener to discover how great this land was. The virtues of the original Basques are extolled, and they are described as ‘wild beasts of nature’ who, calling ‘upon the authority of language’, were ‘victorious in their primal essence’. Two points stand out in these lyrics: firstly a focus on the perceived primal character of the early Basque people, and secondly that language is identified

as the basis of victory. Both of these elements are reinforced expressively through the music accompanying the lyrics and will be explored in more detail when discussing Pagan Metal's relationship to *Rock Radikal* and early Basque nationalism.

Eskualdunak can be divided into three distinct sections, framed within a short intro and outro. The introduction is folk-like due to the acoustic instrumentation and arpeggiated triplet feel, while the open texture and predominance of 4ths and 5ths give a sense of stability and calmness; the alboka plays a drone on A. The mood changes abruptly with the introduction of the first 'metal' section, consisting of descending modal riff played on a low-tuned distorted guitar, tribal sounding toms, and vocal growling and screaming. This is contrasted in the next section which consists of low-tuned hand percussion and a Dorian melody played on flute. The next section is introduced with vocal screaming, growling and intense hammer drumming, supported by a wall of distorted guitar, with a triplet feel to the rhythmic accompaniment. Further into this section, voices harmonised in major thirds and sevenths are introduced singing 'the Basques' (*Eskualdunak*): the return to a stable tonality here through the consonant intervals on these particular words carries connotations of a 'rightful' place of the Basques. This alternates with the growled vocals until a break down section which builds into a climax of growling, screaming, frantic drumming and distorted guitar riffs, which coincides with the deeds of the original Basques as described in the lyrics. The outro constitutes a variation on the Dorian flute melody played on a harp-like instrument – the folk or primal origins of the Basques are the last thing we hear.

The impact of the track is enhanced and defined by the contrast between the two styles of extreme metal and folk. The harsh tonality of the metal sections, produced by the massive distortion resulting in part from the low tuning and the atonal chords and riffs, serves to highlight the soothing nature of the folk-like melodies in the contrasting sections. Changes in rhythm from triple to quadruple feel support the folk-metal contrast. The growled and screamed vocals are supported by the hammer drumming with its military connotations and the aggression of the instrumental sounds. The instrumental and vocal distortion overwhelms the senses, while the folk sections soothe them. Overall, the affect seems to be one of chaos, darkness, hopelessness, or even apocalypse, from which the quieter sections offer only brief respite, but to the metal fan, the intensity of the music signifies power and empowerment: ‘distortion functions as a sign of extreme power and intense expression by overflowing its channels and materializing the exceptional effort that produces it’ (Sylvan 1998, p.180). Musical meaning is dependent on the circumstances of its production and consumption (Tagg 1982), and in the context of Pagan Metal, these empowered metal sections in juxtaposition with their folk components can be read as empowerment *through* tradition, reflecting what Watson describes as the ‘constant struggle for . . . power in the sense of creating a specific Basque identity’ (1992a, p.29). The musical strategy adopted has made obvious use of folkloric genres: ‘the *authentic* symbols of defiance in the face of oppression’ and what Watson describes as typical of ‘the reaction of Basque nationalism to the quest for power’ (ibid.).

Therefore, meaning is embodied in the rhythms, melody timbre and structure of the song, and in the relationships between them (Manuel 1995, p.230). This ‘referential’ meaning, one in which signification is ‘tied to its more overtly extra-musical associations’ (ibid.) has been

described above in the description of the lyrics and website. This reading is supported through examination of the cover of the CD, which offers further reinforcement of the references to local pagan themes. The photo constituting the front cover of the insert is taken as if walking through a beech forest (for which the Northern Basque country is renowned) with the band name and title in an elaborate and old looking font. The cover art of the other two albums also feature a forest scene, with *Galdutako Itxaropenaren Eresia* also including a stone circle. The pagan implications of the stone circle are obvious, while the forest scene connotes the strong links to nature, as well as highlighting Pagan Metal's Black Metal roots: as Moynihan and Soderlind note, 'nearly every single Black Metal band has had themselves photographed amongst snow and trees' (p.179).

When opened up, the centre page reveals a silhouetted howling wolf and the band's logo. The wolf is a prominent and dark figure in most ancient and pagan mythologies, but interestingly, given the matriarchal basis of Basque pagan religion, the moon, represented by the Basque female deity Mari, is also known as the 'wolf sun'. In confirmation of this reading, the third track of the album is entitled *Mari*. Such images are quite generic in metal album art from the 1970s onwards, representing a local rearticulation of such 'generic' images on the part of band and audience so that they assume a reinvestment in the local. Adhur also refer to Mari on their website, noting that the band's name is 'related to the moon and personified in the goddess Mari, the most important for the Basque mythology' (sic). The back cover of the insert, a continuation of the forest on the front, is dominated by the band's logo, this time appearing twice in a crossed form, in imitation of the Basque lauburu, the four-armed Basque sun wheel (Adhur and Ilbeltz, discussed above, also incorporate the lauburu into their logo). The

expression of a specifically Basque identity is evident in the symbolism contained in the imagery of the CD cover, while the choice of images and style of music confirm that this identity is an organic (folk) and earth-based one.

What is evident in Numen interviews, and consistent with Pagan Metal in general, is the expression of a local identity rooted in pre-Christian mythology; further, Christianity is seen as the enemy. These traits are succinctly expressed by Jabó in interviews for various online magazines which are available on the Numen Official Website. For example, in an interview for on-line magazine *Black Metal Terror* (October 2004) Jabó says that ‘basically we speak of our earth, of our old traditions, beliefs. . . . Many of our passages are centred in the ways in which Christianity wanted to impose its culture by means of subjugation’. In an interview for *Friedhof Magazine* (September 2004), he says that ‘our lyrics are of pagan influence, where we use different passages from the old pre-Christian Euskal Herria and we reflect on some elements of our mythology’. Jabó’s comments clearly support the above interpretation of the musical and visual text, while adding a religious layer.

Just as pertinent is that the lyrics are sung in Basque. In an interview in online magazine *Mondongo Canibale* (qtd. in Numen Official Website, December 2004), Jabó reflects on the importance of indigenous language: ‘We have always sung in Euskera because it is the most sincere form than we can express ourselves in, another part of the identity of our group’. Juan Cobarrubias argues that Euskera ‘has been the major *projection screen* of Basque primordialism, ethnic identity, and ethnic nationalism. Its users see ethnic identity, arguably, as an inherited relation to the past through Euskera’ (1999, p.63) – this relationship to the

past is exemplified in Numen's musical and imagery. Estibaliz Amorrortu notes that since 'at least the last decades of the Franco period . . . the Basque language took a central role in a redefinition of Basque nationalist ideology' (2002, p.3). This central place of language within the development of Basque identity has been embraced by Pagan Metal and, as will be discussed, by *Rock Radikal* and the more radical nationalist movements.

Pagan Metal, Language and 'Basqueness'

The choice of Euskera to express the lyrics is an important one - Pagan Metal has a global audience, as do its generic counterparts. Goran Folkestad (2002) notes that musical identities are collective and can simultaneously exist on many levels from the local to the global: the 'guest book' of the Numen website supports this, revealing an audience distributed across countries as diverse as Mexico, the USA, South America, northern and eastern Europe, and Indonesia. The description of the analysis track above revealed that there is little, if anything, conclusively 'Basque' about the music itself: it *sounds* like Pagan Metal, but due to the international dissemination and production of the genre, it could be from almost anywhere this production takes place. Basque Pagan Metal is therefore a *construction* of Basqueness which relies on the connotations of the genre itself for meaning.

This seeming paradox is explained by Folkestad as characteristic of music expressing national, ethnic, or cultural identity, which he describes as being viewed from two perspectives (2002, p.156). The first of these he calls an 'inside-looking-in' perspective through which the group maintains and expresses its cohesion. This would include Basque fans and performers of Basque Pagan Metal who would relate to the music in terms of a specific Basque identity. The

second group, ‘outside-looking-in’ would include non-Basque fans of Pagan Metal who would recognise the music of Numen, for example, as expressing a localised version of a cultural identity specific to Pagan Metal. For these ‘outsiders’ it is the genre itself that carries meaning, and these fans therefore rely on paramusical aspects such as language and lyrics, and some of the imagery on the CD cover to identify the music as Basque Pagan Metal. For this audience, the Basque lyrics would be entirely incomprehensible, given that no translations are provided (indeed the growled style of singing itself leaves the majority of the lyrics largely incomprehensible). However, the comments left by visitors to fansites reveal a consistency of understanding of the intended meaning expressed within the lyrics, this being due to the global nature of the ‘sound’ of Pagan Metal: regardless of the country of origin, the musical characteristics of Pagan Metal are cohesive enough to project a universally understood meaning amongst its fans, that is, the glorification of local pagan origins.

This is in keeping with Keith Kahn-Harris’s discussion of the distribution of such scenes from regional to global, and how they can function as “quasi-autonomous parts” of the wider, global picture because of their musical and institutional commonalities (2004, p.99). Above all, Basque Pagan Metal projects a specific ‘musical identity’, which relies on the preferred reading of the generic connotations of Pagan Metal, which are understood by its global audience despite the linguistic barrier. Basque Pagan Metal expresses a local, ethnically-defined cultural viewpoint, which is understood by its audience on a global scale because the genre code dictates this reading. That it can be understood within both of these contexts is dependent on what Regev terms the ‘rock aesthetic’, ‘a major contemporary tool in the construction of contemporary reflexive communities as new identities’ (1997, p.127). Pagan

Metal incorporates elements of the rock aesthetic, more specifically the Black Metal aesthetic, and shares with other, different, interpretations a 'sameness of meaning' in that it is 'used to declare a 'new' sense of local identity, as opposed to older, traditional, conservative forms of that identity' (ibid., p.131). More specifically, Basque Pagan Metal constitutes a 'reflexive community' through which the rock habitus and the local identity habitus are merged. It is what Regev classifies as a 'hybrid' through which 'rock elements are selectively adapted and mixed with traditional local styles' (ibid., p.134). Where Basque Pagan Metal differs, is that the 'template' for this hybridity already exists within the global genre of Pagan Metal - that is, Pagan Metal is a transculture which expresses a constructed global 'pagan' identity, itself a hybrid of the rock aesthetic, while Basque Pagan Metal expresses this through the field of local identity.

Therefore, Basque Pagan Metal is an example of a transnational music which is indigenised in its local context, 'reclaimed for different interpretative uses according to the configurations of the mediators' (Regev & Seroussi 2004, p.7). As mediators, the style of Numen's music embodies a globally understood concept of identity tied to place (Pagan Metal) while paramusically, through the lyrics, imagery, and discourse, a specifically Basque identity is constructed through folklore, mythology, and language. Signification here is expressed within the context of the genre of Pagan Metal, but modified within the more local context of Basque history.

The Heritage of the *Rock Radikal* Movement: Punk, Youth and Radical Nationalism

Whilst the above provides a framework through which Basque Pagan Metal can be interpreted as part of the transnational music scene, different interpretations may arise when both musical and ethnic identity are contextualised within the social and historical continuum in which they develop. Basque Pagan Metal has developed in a highly politicised context, characterised by a movement for independence, and changing notions of what it means to be Basque. While the link between a cultural identity based on localised Paganism and a politically-defined Basque nationalism are not immediately obvious, a connection can be established in the context of Basque Metal's relationship to the 1980s Basque punk movement, *Rock Radikal*. Heavy Metal in the Basque country, followed by the extreme styles of Black and Pagan, came on the tail of *Rock Radikal*, which was born out of a youth culture marginalised economically through unemployment, and politically through the failed promise of post-Franco policy. Roughly spanning the years from 1983–93, *Rock Radikal* emerged from the peak, and subsequent decline, of the *Nueva Canción Vasca*, a musical movement which sought to preserve a rapidly disappearing Basque culture and language (Amezaga 1994, p.2). Alain Darré describes the movement as the

consecration of two specific intentions: specify Basque Rock in relation to other local or outside groups; adhere to a practical and symbolic continuity practiced today and in the past, and in doing so, through cultural alchemy capture the elements of Basqueness in the wake of Modernity (qtd. in Larraburu and Etcheverry-Ainchart 2001, p.111)

Rock Radikal arose against a politically volatile backdrop: the Spanish constitution of 1978 was deemed by some to have failed to represent the democratic aspirations of the Basque people, instead serving only to reaffirm the unity of the Spanish state and, by extension, the right of intervention in the Basque country by the Spanish army. The frustration of some Basques was expressed within marginal groups with the rise of militant activism within ETA, the military arm of the National Basque Liberation Movement (MLNV). The evolution of ETA coincides with the period spanned by *Rock Radikal* and is exemplified both musically and paramusically within the subculture.

Rock Radikal was represented in two waves, the first through bands such as Barrikada and La Polla, the second, from 1984, by bands such as Kortaku (tellingly named after Korta, an ETA activist) who, in unconscious anticipation of what Pagan Metal was to bring, incorporated indigenous mythological themes and traditional instrumentation into their music. That this is a tendency in Basque popular music is noted by José Amezaga, who observes that Basque rock has a ‘tendency to integrate various elements of ethnic culture: . . . musical styles and rhythms (combining rock with styles and rhythms used in Basque popular music), [and] the use of old, indigenous instruments’ (1994, p.3).

In keeping with punk ideology, the early stages of the movement were characterised by a rejection not only of the prevailing social order, but of *all* alternative political systems, including the rejection of the *abertzale* (patriot) promise of an independent Basque national state (Lahusen 1993, p.271). Only with later bands such as *Kortaku* did a clearly defined political position, aligned with patriotic *abertzale* revolutionary and anti-establishment ideals,

begins to emerge, expressing clear nationalistic sentiments framed within ethnic references (Lahusen, p.273). Sharryn Kasmir proposes that punk rock in the Basque Country challenged traditional notions of Basque identity which were ethnically-defined and founded in ideas of lineage, replacing this with a new collective identity defined by language and place (1999, p.182). This sentiment is echoed in the ideology of *Patxa*, a youth movement founded in *Ipparalde*, the Northern Basque country, in 1986: they affirmed a Basqueness defined not by blood, birth or name, but by language, which plays a fundamental role in the *Rock Radikal* movement (Larraburu and Etcheverry-Ainchart 2001, p.154). Txetx Etcheverry, one of *Patxa*'s founding members, refers to a popular *Rock Radikal* band saying: 'The success of Negu Gorriak is . . . above all that of a group which is deeply rooted in its people, country, culture, and specific language' (qtd. in Amezaga 1994, p.6). He could just as well have been describing Numen or any other Basque Pagan Metal group.

Many of the *Patxa* militants gravitated towards punk, contributing to the rapid growth of the genre. In *Hegoalde*, the southern Basque Country, *Herri Batasuna*, the political arm of ETA, organised a series of *Rock Radikal* concerts called *Martxa Eta Borroka* (Celebration and Combat) (Amezaga 1994, p.155). Many groups encouraged the audience to chant ETA at concerts, and the link between the music and its political context is further exemplified in practice through free entry or reduced prices for concerts, which were often subsidised by political groups (ibid., 227). The links between radical nationalist politics and the music are clear. Visually, this is represented in the logos of the principal musical groups: for example the logo of the group *Etsaik* (The Enemies) is riddled with bullet holes dripping blood, accompanied in some cases by an image of a Molotov cocktail. This refers to the 'Y Groups'

consisting of youth dedicated to the *Kale Borroka* (street struggle) whose activities included the burning of amenities and the use of Molotov cocktail and, by extension, ETA and its youth components such as *Jarrai*, *Hakai* and *SEGI* (Larraburu and Etcheverry-Ainchart 2001, p.226). The two words forming the name of *Negu Gorriak* are represented on two crossed axes, the logo of Basque butchers and also found as a weapon in Basque mythology: the same axe is found as an ETA logo, but entwined with a snake.

The link between *Rock Radikal* and radical nationalism is evidenced in the treatment of musicians by government authorities. For example, Fermin Muguruzza has had many of his concerts banned, both in Spain and in the USA, after being labelled ‘terrorist’ because of his political activity (Mantxo 2003). Fermin was taken to court by the Association for Victims of Terrorism (AVT) because of claims that one of his most famous songs, *Sarri, Sarri* was pro-ETA. The song tells about a famous Basque poet, Joseba Sarrionandia, who was imprisoned under suspicion of being an ETA member, and who later escaped in the speakers of a band who had performed at the prison. As recently as 2004, Basque groups such as *Su Ta Gar* (Metal), *Sociedad Alcoholico* (Punk), *Berri Txarrak* (Metal), and *Leihotikan* (Punk) have had their concerts banned due to accusations of ETA support from AVT and the Spanish Popular Party (Censorship in Spain). The link between *Rock Radikal* and militant activism is perhaps best exemplified by the wall mural in a bar in Arrasate, a town in the Basque province of Gipuzkoa, which depicts a young woman whose spiked hair declares in no uncertain terms a punk aesthetic: on her dress she bears the barbed wire insignia of *Gestoras Pro-Amnistia*, the amnesty organisation for ETA prisoners, while the tray she carries holds not only drinks, but figures representing bombs and prisons (Kasmir 1999, p.178).

In the preceding discussion it has been argued that *Rock Radikal* was a youth driven musical expression of the more radical political aims of ETA and the MLNV. In the Basque Country, Punk has been linked to youthful radical nationalism both by protagonists and by external commentators, as has the use of Euskera itself. There is also evidence to suggest that Heavy Metal, in the Basque Country at least, has at times taken a political standpoint. For example, in 1988, *Su Ta Gar* was the first Basque Heavy Metal group to openly proclaim its leftist nationalist support and by the early 1990s was the latest musical incarnation of militant radicalism (Backstage - Rock Basque). *La Resistencia* is a Spanish anti-ETA website, and while admittedly their analyses will be highly subjective, it is telling that one section of the site is dedicated entirely to revealing links between musical groups and terrorist support. Along with *Su Ta Gar*, the groups *Sociedad Alcoholica*, *Kortatu*, *Negu Gorriak*, and *EH Sukarra* are mentioned. What is significant is that the *La Resistencia* site devotes the equivalent of 48 pages to prove pro-ETA sentiments in the lyrics to these groups' songs. Whether this analysis is accurate or not is largely irrelevant to this discussion: what is important is that these groups are clearly perceived as supportive of radical militants and that no distinction is made between the genres of Punk and Heavy Metal in the expression of this support. On the site, *Su Ta Gar* is described as 'sympathetic to violent nationalistic regimes. . . . It is normal that this group adds the finishing touch to meetings organised by groups such as SEGI' (La Resistencia). SEGI is a specifically youth oriented organisation, which describes itself as 'a movement more than an organization: SEGI is the grouping of all young people who share the objectives of socialism and independence' (Official SEGI Website). Echoing the sentiments expressed by Numen, its manifesto states that 'Euskara or the Basque language is the flag of our identity, the heart of

our country. . . . But being Basque goes further than the fact of speaking a specific language: we refer to our essence, our identity, our traditions, customs and culture’.

Religion, Myth and Identity.

SEGI’s reference to tradition, customs and culture as essential to a Basque identity mirror in many ways the comments made by Jabo in interviews. The precedents for the construction of a national identity through culture, but especially myth and language, can be traced back to the ‘father of Basque nationalism’, Sabino Arana. Arana brought together ideas of ethnicity, ancestral rights (the *fueros*), language and mythology to portray a Basque identity that Juan Aranzadi describes as a ‘complex relationship between the rural family/farmhouse (agrarian society being Basque in the ‘purest’ sense), consecrated by Roman Catholicism and rural mythology’ (qtd. in Watson 1996b, p.23). Just as Numen use myth to define a Basque identity in opposition to a ‘foreign’ (Christian) religion, within the Basque nationalist movement, ‘myth has become a vehicle for national (Basque) identity in opposition to a foreign (Spanish) identity’ (ibid., p.21). Arana was the first Basque leader to work myth and history into a political framework; he created a ‘nationalist history with deep mythological implications . . . together with a purification of the Basque language’ (Mees 2001, p.803).

According to Joseba Zulaika ‘myth can regenerate itself in any form, using images from pre-history, religion, nature and culture in general’ (qtd. in Watson, 1996a, p.31). Folklore is the medium through which myth is carried from past to present, whether that be through language alone, or through the medium of music. Watson describes this as a ‘regenerative process . . . carried out through the medium of memory’ and describes the sense of identity built on such as

memory as primordial (1996a, p.20) by which we can understand that this identity is constructed through ‘narratives of ancestry and origin [which] are presented as objective history’ (Regev & Seroussi 2004, p.3). By expressing Basque mythology through the medium of music, and incorporating Basque language and traditional folk instrumentation, Numen’s music adopts a folkloric role within Basque society, the juxtaposition of folk music and metal exemplifying Zulaika’s claim that the ‘simultaneity between the most archaic and the most contemporary . . . becomes thus the most salient trait of everything Basque’ (qtd. in Watson 1996a, p.29).

In its alliance with the Basque national struggle, *Rock Radikal* translated Punk’s original expression of a conflict between the working class and the elite into one against ‘a repressive, imperialist and colonising Spanish state’ (ibid., p.275). Within Basque Pagan Metal, idealised Punk anarchy is replaced by metal-inspired chaos, and this hatred and conflict is expressed as one against a repressive, imperialist and colonising *religion* – that is, Christianity or, specifically, a Spanish expression of Christianity. That is, *Rock Radikal*’s overtly political expression of ethnic identity is replaced in Pagan Metal by an ethnic identity that is cultural, primarily religious, in its expression.

The precedent for this exists further back in Basque history, supporting the place of Basque Pagan Metal as part of a continuum of emerging expressions of identity in the Basque country. From its inception, the *Partida Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV), founded by Sabino Arana in 1895, was informed by Catholicism. Arana expounded a ‘primordialist or essentialist concept of nation, defined by race, territory and religion’ (Mees 2001, p.806). Its original motto was

‘Jaungoikoa eta Legizarra’ (God and Ancestral Laws) and its political strategies were embedded in the Catholic faith (Basabarua: n.d.). In *Euskaldunak*, Numen claim an identity based in pre-history; in much the same way, ‘the nationalism of Sabino Arana, with its . . . racist doctrinal nucleus and fundamentalist religious domain, constituted the denial of the apparently inexorable march of history’ (Elorza 2001, p.86). Reflecting in many ways the lyrics to *Eskualdunak*, the central theme informing Arana’s vision was ‘the articulation of an identity linked to the fortunes of struggle and conflict’ (Watson 1996b, p.142). Initially, ETA ideology was inspired by Arana’s concept of nationalism, however ‘in contrast with the Christian-Democratic ideology of the PNV, ETA brought a radical secularism to Basque nationalism with its defence of the working classes. With ETA, Basque nationalism became progressionist’ (Euskal Herria Journal), defining itself as aconfessional and rejecting the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. The majority of National Basque Liberation Movement (MLNV) members also expressed criticism of the Catholic Church. José Basabarua argues that this led to ‘a reunion with the pagan pre-Christian world of the primitive Basques’, (Basabarua n.d.) which would support an argument for interpreting Basque Pagan Metal as representing a Basque identity which aligns itself with the ideals of ETA and the MLNV, and consequently clarifies its place in relationship to *Rock Radikal*.

The rationale for this anti-Catholic stance differs between Numen and that of ETA and MLNV, with Pagan Metal trading Catholicism for Paganism, which is seen as superior, whereas the political movements favoured a more secular position which may have drawn from pre-Christian ideology and mythology, but with the aim of gaining the support of the working and rural classes. In both cases however, the result is a distancing from mainstream

conceptions of Basqueness, especially in what is still an overwhelmingly Catholic country. While this may have been an issue to contend with in the case of a political minority seeking favour, in the case of Numen, it is entirely consistent with a genre that, in keeping with its Black Metal heritage, sees Christianity as 'weak or submissive' (Kahn-Harris 2007, p.40). While Numen, and Basque Pagan Metal bands in general, may have removed themselves from the mainstream of Basque identity, they have done so in the belief that the identity they project is superior.

Interpretation versus Intent

Basque Pagan Metal, not only through its lyrics in Euskera, but also by its lyrical and visual emphasis on Basque mythology, constructs a very specific Basque identity. In the Basque Country, ethnic identity has come to be associated with radical nationalist politics, the most extreme manifestation of which is represented by Herri Batasuna, its militant arm ETA, and by extension youth groups such Haika, Jarrai and SEGI. Based on musical precedent, and the fact that the expression of ethnic identity in the Basque Country through myth and language has, through specific social circumstances, become equated with a political identity, Basque Pagan Metal might be interpreted as a politicised expression of Basque identity. However, in all of the interviews with Numen available on their website, drawn from various online magazines, Numen consistently deny any political sentiment. For example, in 'The Sentinel Webmagazine' (2004) Jabó claims that 'in Numen politics does not exist, we have not made any reference to the subject nor will we do it'. In 'The Metal Circus' (2004), Jabó says that 'in Numen we have always dealt with subjects related to our culture and mythology; we do it because they are subjects that we like and are nailed inside us. . . . In Numen there are no, nor

will be, any politicians’. Other examples can be found in *Headbanger ‘Zine* (2004): ‘As to whether we are nationalistic or not, I don’t understand that tendency to ask us questions based on a political ideology when what we do is music’ and in *Friedhof Magazine* (2004): ‘we sing in Euskera and in no way are we this protest group of the woods that you tell me. Our lyrics do not hide any type of political connotation or social protest role’.

This tendency to deny political intent is explained by Keith Kahn-Harris in his 2004 article in which he proposes reasons for the so-called ‘failure’ of transgressive subcultures to engage with or engender social or political change. Using the Black Metal scene as a case study, he examines the genre ‘within the space defined by the conceptual framework of “scene”’, which he defines as ‘a space produced by the intended and unintended consequences of members’ “reflexivity”’ (2004, p.98). Kahn-Harris notes that within the Black Metal scene, politics ‘is seen as absolutely antithetical to “music”’ (2004 p.103), and proposes that this stance results from an ““autonomous” view of music’ (2004, p.107) which seeks to separate it from social structure – only the music matters. As an example of this stance, he quotes Black Metal group Darkthrone, who insist that ‘Darkthrone is *absolutely not* a political band and we never were’ (2004, p.104). Given Pagan Metal’s Black Metal heritage, it is not surprising that this comment mirrors that of Jabo above. Kahn-Harris describes this intentional disengagement from political comment as ‘reflexively anti-reflexive’ (2004, p.108) in that Black Metal groups, in separating politics from practice, are reflexive in their ‘awareness of the structuration and politics of scenes and the wider society’ yet ‘anti-reflexive in that they wilfully seek to exclude that awareness from scenic practice’ (2004, p.106).

Because of its heritage, the Pagan Metal scene has many commonalities with that of Black Metal, and the concept of reflexive anti-reflexivity makes sense of Numen's insistence on a non-political stance. However, *Basque* Pagan Metal, or indeed any local iteration of the genre, because of its reflexivity will be subject to very specific circumstances, historical and contemporaneous, within its local context. While Numen might not *intend* to communicate a political stance, in every interview on their website, the question of political intent is raised: evidently, in the Basque Country at least, Pagan Metal is construed as political expression, no doubt in part due to the associations of *Rock Radikal* and politics described previously. This is because the modes of both production and reception that occur within a context can affect the signification of the music. This can result in a form of codal interference (Tagg 1982) by which the transmitter and the receiver have totally different socio-cultural norms and expectations: 'Meanings arise in experience as a complex gestalt of sound, lyrics [and] other expressive forms . . . the social consequences of those musical meanings may ripple outward in ways that the musicians and the listeners may have neither thematised nor intended' (Berger 1999, p.175). This is evidently at least partly the case for the ways in which Numen's music is received and raises the question as to whether certain sets of circumstances may prevent a group from ever being truly "not political" regardless of their anti-reflexivity. This tension highlights the importance of considering the interaction between context, history and intent when interpreting any kind of musical (or other) expression, but especially of music produced in historically highly politicised contexts. Any musical analysis must take into account socio-historical context, and for Basque Pagan Metal this context is a political one. Further, the Pagan Metal prototype developed in, and is associated with, a region in which fascistic paganism is well recognised (Moynihan & Soderland 1998).

The type of identity expressed in Basque Pagan Metal is defined by the perceived superiority of pre-Christian culture and, within the global metal scene, the ethnic origins of that culture are largely irrelevant. That is, a Pagan Metal fan can relate to Pagan Metal from cultures as diverse as (for example) Scandinavia, the Basque Country and South America, all of which are united by having a definable pre-Christian culture and religion. Globally, or externally, therefore it expresses a cultural identity. However, *within* the culture in question, the reading may differ, and this has important implications for the study of Pagan Metal in any country. For example, Numen's lyrics and interviews express a fairly narrowly defined ethnicity, which could be interpreted as a type of ethnic nationalism 'in which shared cultural, linguistic, historic, and other *primordial* elements precede political structures, and form the basis of national identity' (Raento 1996, p.28). Anthony D. Smith points to pre-national ethnic foundations prior to the industrial era, when an ethno-religious identity was based in 'complex networks of myth, memory and symbol' (qtd. in Watson 1996b, p.45). As such, Numen's expression of their Basque identity can be seen not only as pre-industrial, but as *pre-political*, in keeping with the focus in the lyrics and on a primordial Basque culture. Pagan Metal's contribution to a Basque expression of ethnic identity is one which is intended to transcend politics.

Conclusion

The place of Basque Pagan Metal on the Basque identity continuum is the result of numerous, sometimes seemingly unrelated factors, all of which contribute to a specific mode of expression of identity, and which also influences the modes of reception and signification. Pagan Metal music itself is linked to a specific form of expression, especially one that looks to

the ancient past in order to construct its identity. It is a 'global culture', transcending national boundaries, but is 'essentially memoryless' and therefore has to be 'painfully put together, artificially, out of the many existing folk and national identities into which humanity has been so long divided' (Smith 1990, p.179). As Regev and Seroussi note, this construction relies on 'the semantic power of music' that allows it to 'represent constructed national or ethnic collectivities' (2004, p.6). In the case of Pagan Metal, as discussed in the semiotic analysis, the music not only communicates a sense of empowerment, with musical reference to an invented folk heritage, but also relies on discourse and imagery as well as the genre's global connotations to reinforce this identity as a pagan one. In the case of the Extreme Metal scene of which Basque Pagan Metal is a part, globalisation has not homogenised musical practice but 'enabled a growing range of individuals to use [global musical resources] in the construction of identity and location' (Harris 2000, p.26). Pagan Metal as a global genre therefore constructs meaning from the pagan commonalities of each of the local genres it is represented by. It is somewhat different to other genres of Rock in that it began as a construction of local identity, itself drawn from the more global characteristics of Black Metal, then provided a template from which other local cultures could construct their own identity.

In the construction of a Basque identity, as expressed through Pagan Metal, we can clearly see examples of the three major variants in contemporary expressions of ethnic identity described by Regev and Seroussi (2004, pp.4-5). As an example of a 'pure or traditional variant', Arana set the primordialist precedent for mythology, history and religion as the basis for a Basque identity while the *MLNV* pushed for the use of the Basque language as an indicator of Basqueness. The *Rock Radikal* movement represents the second, 'globalized variant, in which

elements of contemporary global culture are mixed with traditional elements'. It set a precedent for rock music as a vehicle for the expression of a Basque identity for youth while the support of radical nationalism by many of its representatives emphasised the link between Basque rock music and nationalistic expression by youth. Finally, Basque Pagan Metal, while containing global elements, represents the third variant, or 'variety of subnational variants' in which an identity is fashioned which is intentionally separate from the traditional one: while drawing on historical precedents, it differs in that it expresses an ethnic identity which is *not* intentionally political and which sets itself in opposition to Christianity.

In conclusion, Basque Pagan Metal represents a complex array of possible readings, each of which is dependent upon the context in which it is perceived or received. This has implications for the study and understanding of the genre in any cultural context: Pagan Metal as a global genre expresses a mostly cultural (pagan) identity, but when this identity is indigenised in a local context it becomes both cultural *and* ethnic. Referring back to Folkestad's perspectives of involvement, an 'outsider-looking-in', who may not share the same cultural values or experience as the 'transmitters', might read this ethnic identity as politicised because of the context in which it developed. Above all however, this identity, regardless of its context, is pagan, and constructed via a musical transculture, informed itself by the rock aesthetic. The concept of authenticity, expressed through the rock aesthetic, is also implicit in the ideology of archaism, which is clearly expressed through both the local and global iterations of Pagan Metal. Smith describes archaism as 'the harking back to earlier cultures, or earlier phases of the same broad culture, which are deemed to be in some ways superior to present cultures' (Smith 1990, p.449) a concept to which Numen, or any Pagan Metal group, would undoubtedly relate.

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