

Béarn Folk Rock: Language, Place and the Soundscape of the New Europe

Author

Weston, Donna

Published

2012

Journal Title

Journal of Intercultural Studies

DOI

[10.1080/07256868.2012.648323](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2012.648323)

Rights statement

© 2012 Taylor & Francis. This is an electronic version of an article published in Journal of Intercultural Studies, Volume 33, Issue 2, 2012, Pages 157-174. Journal of Intercultural Studies is available online at: <http://www.tandfonline.com> with the open URL of your article.

Downloaded from

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/48205>

Griffith Research Online

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>

NAME: Dr Donna Weston

TITLE: Béarn Folk Rock: Language, Place and the Soundscape of the New Europe

SUMMARY:

It is argued in this article that Nadau, a folk rock group from the Béarn region of South-west France, are representative of a New Regionalism in which border cultures and identities are celebrated within New European constructs. Through taking a philosophical approach, it is argued that language and place are central to Béarn identity and that the Pyrenées mountains, as both ideological space and physical place, form the basis of that identity. Further, it is argued that the soundscape – of language, music and venue - created by Nadau's concerts is an acoustic manifestation of place that affirms that identity. This proposition is first approached through a lyrical analysis of a selection of Nadau's repertoire, based on Gaston Bachelard's concept of the poetic image. Edward Casey's philosophy of place is drawn on to explore the relationship between that identity and the place, and sonic space, within which it is expressed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr Donna Weston is Head of Popular Music at the Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University. She lectures in popular music history and analysis, and her research focuses on relationships between popular music, identity and place. Specific current research topics include Pagan Metal in the Basque country; Paganism, popular music and collective memory; and Music Festivals, Biophilia and Place.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Email: d.weston@griffith.edu.au

Address: Queensland Conservatorium
Gold Coast Campus
Griffith University
Australia, 4222.

Béarn Folk Rock: Language, Place and the Soundscape of the New Europe

Introduction

May 2005: the boulevard in front of the Olympia theatre in Paris undulates in a sea of berets, punctuated here and there by Occitan flags. The sounds of the Gascon and Béarnais dialects filter through the noise. That night, Béarn folk-rock group Nadau would play at the Olympia for the second time; an account by one of the audience, Andre Lasserre, best captures what that means: “And then we entered into that mythical hall, the lights went down, and we heard ‘Aqueros Montagnos’ [these mountains] lifted up in chorus by the 5000 vocal chords of the 2500 spectators. A thrill ran through us at the same time as a soft warmth ... the warmth of a fire lit by our ancestors who, thanks to Nadau, were with us that night at Olympia.” (Labes, 2008, p.19)

Nadau have become somewhat of a local institution, and it is argued here that through their original songs, sung in the Gascon dialect of Béarnais, they seek not only to preserve, but to rejuvenate local culture through celebration not only of that culture and its language, but of the local landscape of its cultural group. This proposition is approached through a lyrical analysis of a selection of Nadau’s repertoire, based on Gaston Bachelard’s concept of the poetic image. Through taking a philosophical approach, specifically a phenomenological one, I propose that language and place are central to Béarn identity and that the Pyrenées mountains, as both ideological space and physical place, form the basis of that identity. Further, it is argued that the

soundscape – of language, music and venue - created by Nadau’s concerts is an acoustic manifestation of place that affirms that identity. Edward Casey’s philosophy of place is drawn on to explore the relationship between that identity and the place, and sonic space, within which it is expressed.

Nadau, and their audience, are representative of a peripheral identity, and as such fit into the context of what Philip Bohlman (2004) calls the New Regionalism, a European trend which integrates ethnic and cultural minorities into constructs of nation (see also Bohlman 2010). Regionalism has been officially promoted in European Union cultural policies as a counterpoint to the more negative implications of nationalism. As a result the focus has shifted from national culture to “those programs and activities that represent the nation as an amalgam of border cultures, border identities, and regions.” (Bohlman, 2004, p.317) Further, the people represented by Nadau, that is the Béarn people, coincide with those who Bohlman refers to as the “New Europeans,” those groups of people “whose cultures and musics have historically lain outside the structures of nationalism.” (2004, p.310)

New Europeanness is characterised by a “New Regionalism” which has witnessed “a shift from locating musical and cultural activities in institutions that express national unity to those programs and activities that represent the nation as an amalgam of border cultures, border identities, and regions. (Bohlman, 2004, p.317) The Béarnais are New Europeans in that they have “come to enter the history of the present in new ways, not least because of their reengagement with Europe through the new nationalism.” Bohlman proposes that New European Popular Music is one of the ways the New Europeans people find their voice, (ibid., p.310) in a musical landscape

which resists centralisation (ibid., p.281). Michel Maffrand – better known as Joan de Nadau – co-founder of the group, expresses this when he tells how in the 1970s they “thrilled for the fight for identity and the liberation of the people, for this idea of an Occitanie freed from the Jacobin codes of a hyper-centralist country that was an assassin of local cultures.” (Labes, 2008, p.9)

Situated in the Béarn, at the borders of both France and of centralised French culture, it is argued that Nadau epitomise a New European resistance to centralisation, and do so through the articulation of a landscape and soundscape in which can be found “the very elements sheared off in the planiformity of site: identity, character, nuance, history.” (Casey, 1997, p.xiii)

Background: Language

We make music, but it is always on the pretext of speaking about who we are (Joan de Nadau in (Labes, 2008, p.12).

Nadau stand for, above all, the Béarn, a small country formed in the south of France in the 11th century. It was organised according to *fors*, ancient Béarn laws, which limited the powers of the prince, and protected individual rights. For the time, it was quite advanced in democratic terms. It stayed independent until the annexation forced upon France by Louis 13th in 1620 who at the same time imposed the usage of French as the official language in the place of Occitan.

Today, many of the people within the Béarn still speak a dialect as well as French – generally speaking, Gascon or Béarnais. Several localised variations of these dialects also exist and there is considerable debate concerning their linguistic roots (Brock, 2008; Moreux, 2004); regardless of these debates, language is central to identity in the Béarn. In describing the relationship of language and identity in the music of Nadau, Christophe Labes points to a “society of memory which unites multiple identities and allegiances to its territory and its history ... This land is one of heritage, of words and of a common language which has resisted the resources and strategies mobilised to eradicate it.” (2008, p.31)

The southern dialects, although descendants of Latin as were their Northern counterparts, are sufficiently different to be regarded as dialects of what many, if not all, refer to as a distinct language – Occitan. There have been, and still are, many movements which aim to standardise the language – but not without opposition from speakers of the many dialects it comprises (Blanchet, 2003). The Occitan language group includes Béarnais and Gascon in the south-west, and Languedocien, Provençal, Auvergnat and Limousin from those areas still bearing these names. The descriptive Occitan comes from one of the commonalities that members of this group display – ‘oc’, the word for yes. According to the Occitan Institute, Occitan is characterised by its linguistic diversity as well as its inter-comprehension between the speakers of its variants (L’Institut Occitan, <http://www.in-oc.org/>).

Gascon and Béarnais have many points in common with other Occitan variations, but have been influenced by close association over the centuries with the Spanish and Basque languages. For this reason, they are notably different to other Occitan dialects

in vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. (Brock, 2008) The Béarnais and Gascon Institute (Enstitut Biarnes e Gascon, <http://www.languegasconne.com>) created in 2002 in Pau, states its objective as to promote Béarnais and Gascon culture and language at a scientific level through research and publication, and at a grass roots level through language courses, festivals, radio programs and newspaper articles. The Institute's position on language is clear (translated from French):

While recognising the contribution and work of certain Occitan schools such as the calandretas, while the language of our land is taught with love, we would like to clarify our position regarding Occitanism. Occitanism, appearing at the end of the 19th century, is a doctrine that is completely alien to Béarn and Gascon heritage. Yes, our ancestors are right to refer to the Occitans, people of Toulouse. Correctly speaking, Occitanie is the Languedoc region, and Occitan is Languedocian. Occitanie, as a group of Oc speaking countries, never existed. ... No, Béarnais and Gascon are not Occitan dialects.... The usage of Occitan writing for a Gascon cuts off its people from their literary culture.

The aims and activities of the institute are primarily cultural, however its political position is made clear in a petition published online in February 2010 (<http://www.languegasconne.com/petition/index.html>), in which they “solemnly ask that [the Conseil Général] take note of our request that the Béarnaise and Gascon languages are recognized by the Conseil Général and they will be designated as ... "Béarnaise language" in the Béarn and "Gasconne language " in Lower Adour,”

claiming that these languages are to be based on the dictionary of Béarnais poet and linguist Simin Palay (1874 – 1965). The document goes on to point out that these were both official languages in the past, and that regional languages have the status of national heritage in the French constitution. The petition had only 1430 signatures as of June 2010.

Language is referred to in nearly all of the interviews and media reports concerning Nadau, and is clearly of importance to their identity as a group, however the dialect spoken and sung by Nadau has a unique, if slightly confusing place in this complex picture. In media reports on the group, the terms Occitan, Béarnais and Gascon are often treated separately, or in conjunction, for example Claude Sicre describes Nadau as bringing about an “awakening of a Béarnais, Gascon and Occitan consciousness of their people’ and notes how they align themselves with “diverse sections of the Béarn and Gascon public.” (Esteve, n/d) In another article however, the reporter narrows the audience to one group, describing how Joan de Nadau “tells his stories for the French, but sings them for the Gascons” (Depeche du Midi: 29/11/2006 “*A Passionate Evening with Nadau*”). Nadau themselves provide little clarification, for example, in one interview, Joan de Nadau says “We sing in Occitan” (“*Nadau want to make the Occitan heart beat*” n/d, <http://www.nadau.com>), while his wife Ninon says that “even with my grandchildren, very often I sing, and it is always traditional songs in Occitan, in Béarnais.” (Esteve, n/d) Joan de Nadau seems to imply that the differentiation is not so important, saying “This traditional Occitane, Gascon, Béarn song, whatever you want to call it ...” but later in the same interview says “I am rural, I speak Béarn [sic] with my neighbour every day.” (Esteve, n/d)

Some clarification is given by sociolinguist Bernard Moreux, who notes that the term Béarnais is not based purely on language but on a long and well-established social and cultural history. (Moreux, 2004) Gascon, on the other hand, refers to a group of Romance language variations, of which Béarnais is one. According to Moreux, we can therefore refer to a Gascon-speaking region, in which both Béarnais and Gascon are spoken and taught. Moreux also notes that both Béarnais and Gascon have become the focus of a movement to classify Occitan as a language, including all of its dialects. In a Masters thesis which explores the Gasconist language movement, Beau Brock notes the existence of a separate Béarnist movement (Brock, 2008, p.14) and that the distinction between Gascon and Béarnais, and between the Gascons and the Béarnais, has been a point of contention for centuries. (ibid., p.39) He notes however that the region Gascogne was never a political entity, but comprised of various principalities united often only by language, whereas the Béarn was an independent kingdom in which Basque and Béarn were spoken. According to Brock, the confusion of Gascon and Béarnais arose partly through centralist attitudes in Paris, which resulted in a general ignorance of anything occurring in the Provinces, but also notes that the 16th and 17th century Gascon poets did not differentiate between the two terms. That the future Henry IV, King of France was born in the Béarn, but was known as the Gascon King is perhaps evidence of this.

It is clear that Nadau sing in an Occitan dialect, but is it Gascon or Béarnais? For the purposes of this article, the term Béarnais will be used, as this is the place of origin of the group, but it is important to note that culturally and linguistically, the Pyrenées Atlantiques is an area in which several identities exist, not side by side, but

simultaneously. It is within this context of an identity flavoured by local linguistic and cultural variants, that the music of Nadau is best understood.

Case Study – Nadau

Lyrics are very important because the question of identity is at the centre of who I am... I don't want to make a lecture or a lesson of this famous question of identity, but at the same time I do want to say certain things, simply: we are like that, and it's like that in our culture, and we have come to tell you about it. (Joan de Nadau in (Labes, 2008, p.33)

The group Los de Nadau, which literally means ‘The Christmas Ones’, formed in 1973 in Tarbes, a small town in the department of Pyrénées Atlantiques. It initially consisted of just three members - Michel Maffrand (Joan de Nadau), his wife Ninon Paloumet, and Jacques Roth (who left the group in 1991) – with an instrumental makeup of two acoustic guitars, an accordion and voice. They released their first album in 1975, entitled “Monsur lo Regent” (Mister Director). The songs on the album ranged from love songs to protest songs - culturally-specific songs reclaiming ancestral and territorial rights. This was followed by album releases in 1976, 1978, 1982 and 1986, the last of which was recorded with a choir of 400 vocalists. After this release, five new members joined the group and the group’s name was changed to Nadau. The band line-up now included keyboards, electric guitars, bagpipes and drum kit. The 1990s saw the release of two videos and another five albums, including one for children. Two concerts in Pau, the administrative capital of the

department, attracted an audience of 4500 and 7000 people respectively. In 2002, they were joined by a new member, a violinist, after which time they released two albums and two DVDs, one of which is a recording of a performance in Pau to a crowd of 11 000. In 2000 and 2005 they performed at the Olympia in Paris to sell out crowds and 2008 saw the release of a biography, “Nadau: Memoire Vive” (Labes). In 2010 they performed at the Olympia in Paris for the third time, and during the 2009 summer presented four concerts in conjunction with the Pau Symphony Orchestra, accompanied by 25 musicians and a choir of 50. In 2011 they will perform in New Zealand for the Rugby World Cup. Currently, Nadau perform around 40 concerts a year, ranging from mostly small open-air festivals in villages with populations in the low hundreds, to the large indoor concerts described above.

Nadau has its own website, which contains a brief history, events calendar, press releases and photos, comments page and discography. The press releases give an idea of the public reception of the group, focussing primarily on language, musicality, and emotion. Some articles give a deeper insight, for example, in one article the author claims that “Nadau’s fame today has largely broken the language barriers of the langue d’Oc. From concert to concert, these ardent defenders of Occitan culture sing their songs, sometimes of protest, sometimes of love, and often about the everyday life of the ‘people’. Some of them have become veritable Occitan hymns.” (“Nadau want to make the Occitan heart beat” n/d, <http://www.nadau.com>). Another, from 2005, links Nadau specifically to the Occitan ‘battle’ in its title “Nadau Continues the Battle in Songs,” describing how the “fight for recognition of regional identity has been won, and the engagement to make it live in the heads and hearts has begun. In thirty years, Nadau has never stopped evolving to keep up with their times, with one

intangible constant: their love for the Béarn.” The emotive and evocative language used in many of these articles gives an insight into the public perception of the group, with frequent use of phrases evoking feelings of local cultural pride, however it must be remembered that these are journalistic descriptions, and at the time of writing this article, no other commentary on the group exists. Further, all of the press releases contained on the band’s website are from newspapers published in the south of France, where public sentiment would be sympathetic toward local cultural expression.

A review of Nadau, written by Claude Sicre, one half of the Fabulous Trobadors, can be found on a website dedicated to Occitan culture along with an interview with Nadau and French journalist Jacme Gaudas. (<http://christian.esteve.pagesperso-orange.fr/nadau.htm>) Sicre focuses on the longevity of the group, which he attributes to “the rapport that the group maintains with the awakening of a Béarnais, Gascon and Occitan consciousness of their people.” For Sicre, Nadau’s success has been at least partly due to making the right choices, giving the example of their “political activism for the calandretas [and] of Occitanie, not against, but beyond Gascony.” The centrality of language to Béarn identity should not be under-estimated. The calandretas are schools in which all of the teaching is conducted in Occitan; the first was opened in 1979 in Pau and there are now 50. Calandretas are funded by national, state and local government, but this is often supplemented by private donation: Nadau has provided considerable ongoing financial support for these schools, for example donating half of the profit from their Pau Zenith concerts. (Labes, 2008, p.21) Joan de Nadau notes with pride that “it is astonishing, from a culture they say is rural, for the peasants, to see that these thirty-five [at the time] calandretas, today, are in the cities.”

Sicre points also to Nadau's ability to adapt, describing them as "on the path, patient, persevering, and respectful of a history and its people", drawing on a folklore which constitutes "the anonymous contributions of the people, always changing and current, in their diversity, in the culture." (Esteve, n/d) Emphasising the importance of place and language, Gaudas attributes the longevity of the group to "the fact that they originate in a geographical and linguistic space which is well-defined by this Gascony which they serve so well" but notes that "the echo of their music exceeds the limits of their territory." (ibid.) Their ability to adapt is also reflected in the subtle changes to their musical style, the most obvious of which is the decision to "go electric" in the late 1980s. As Gaudas notes, Nadau draw deeply from their own traditions, but add a contemporary edge, such as in the choice of instruments and in musical references to popular styles. (ibid.)

In all of the online sources, the question of Occitan identity is regularly raised. In the Gaudas interview, Joan de Nadau says "I realize that there are historical realities, identity realities and then sociological realities that constitute that which is Occitanie, that it refers to itself and is present everywhere." (ibid.) Reflecting Bohlman's New Regionalism, Gaudas says that Nadau, along with other "decentralizing proponents . . . have taken on the challenge of putting Occitan culturally opposite Paris and its monoculture and, with all the others, tackling the centralism which rots us in our deepest being." (ibid.) The fact that Nadau sing in Béarnais is one of the main indicators of this commitment, and as such they are part of a much larger musical movement of popular musicians, or musicians combining popular and traditional styles, who sing in an Occitan dialect. Joan describes Nadau as an "agent of culture,"

and explains that while all of their songs are original they “now form part of the Occitan repertoire, are learned in the schools, sung in Churches, for weddings, baptisms, in the stadiums too.” (ibid.) He notes that their “lyrics are regularly chosen for Occitan Studies in high schools.” (ibid.) That language is central to the local identity of the group is obvious, but it is the spoken, or sung, words of that language that reveal the nature of that identity.

Nadau are one of a growing number of groups who sing in an Occitan dialect, and whose style hybridises contemporary popular music genres. Other groups include Massilia Sound System, formed in Marseilles in the 1980s and whose music is a hybrid of reggae and ragamuffin, referred to locally as *trobamuffin*, from the troubadour tradition. The Fabulous Trobadors, a duo founded in Toulouse in 1987, have their own distinctive style which is based on Occitan folk music, but blended with northeastern Brazilian rhythms, rapped lyrics and human beatboxing. Other groups singing in Occitan include La Mal Coiffée, and La Talvera. (George, 2007) Nadau however are one of, if not the only group who blend popular and traditional styles with lyrics in Béarnais. Their music is predominantly folk-sounding but with popular music references such as rock, rap and reggae, and instrumentation such as electric guitar and drum kit. Joan de Nadau explains, “Nadau aren’t like anything else. I wouldn’t know how to define it, that is for you to say, it is not folk, nor variety,” but that they “are inspired by traditional music.” (“Nadau want to make the Occitan heart beat” n/d, <http://www.nadau.com>)

Examples of songs with an overtly traditional sound include “One Day With Grandpa”, which begins with a call and response between a solo singer and male

chorus, reflecting the rich male choral of the Béarn region. It then alternates between these vocals and a more upbeat section accompanied by accordion, the feel of which is more like traditional dance. “Le Saut de Banasse”, in keeping with its theme of celebration of tradition, opens with a solo on the hurdy gurdy which gives an ancient feel. This is eventually accompanied by cello, and then a traditional folk-sounding solo vocal, joined after in a harmonised duet, then transformed into an upbeat folk dance interspersed with the vocal sections. “The Big Wind” has a traditional sounding fiddle opening, then moves into an upbeat folk-like dance, with improvised vocals representing the wind. “We are who we are” opens with an electric guitar solo, but then moves into an upbeat folk-like dance. “The Door with my Foot” is both rapped and sung, with the words “hip hop” appearing in the lyrics. “There were Shadows” is a contemporary sounding ballad, accompanied by guitar and fiddle.

These are but a few examples, however the style of all of the songs analysed for the purpose of this article could be broadly divided into three categories: songs with traditional sounding style, played on traditional sounding instruments (including vocal style); songs with traditional sounding style, played on a combination of traditional sounding and contemporary instruments; songs combining traditional and contemporary popular sounding styles, played on a combination of traditional sounding and contemporary instruments. There are no songs that are entirely contemporary popular in their style – it is in the intersections of styles that meaning is found. Joan de Nadau describes how:

This traditional Occitane, Gascon, Béarn song, whatever you want to call it, we try to make it live today, it has a musicality

much like the legendary blues.... Look at the Black Americans, they used their tradition to make songs and the whole world finds that fabulous... we no longer live at a time when we wore clogs, now everyone has a washing machine and is quite content. We have to do everything we can to evolve and move with the times. (Esteve, n/d)

Regev describes this blending of styles as of vital importance to supporting local identity in contemporary contexts, (1997, p.125) noting how groups such as Nadau “feel, at one and the same time, participants in a specific, contemporary, global-universal form of expression *and* innovators of local, national, ethnic and other identities.” (ibid., p.126) Within these songs, two fields of cultural practice are evident – that of contemporary popular music, and that of local identity. (ibid.) We can hear the intersection of local identity through the lyrics in Béarnais, and authenticity as semiotically communicated through the connotations of folk and rock. The local authenticity groups such as Nadau convey through these hybrid styles is “inscribed in the essence of the sonic texture and affective impact of their music.” (Regev, 1997, p.134) As evidenced in the popularity of the group and the emotive audience responses, this hybrid music is accepted as an authentic representation of Béarn identity. There is therefore no connotative contradiction in the apparent juxtaposition of contemporary and traditional in Nadau’s music, rather, “the music’s semiotic powers may be stabilized through the ways in which they are constituted and reinforced through discourse through consumption practice, and through patterns of use over time.” (Regev & Seroussi, 2004, p.6) The consumption practice of open-air concerts is important here as the locale in which that identity is expressed through a

soundscape of language, music and venue. In a region in which language is such a prominent indicator of identity, it is argued that the primary discourse is in this case the lyrics, not only through being sung in Béarnais, but through their evocation of a local landscape which is central to that identity.

At the start of this article I referred to the New Europe, and argued a place for Nadau in that context. Thinking about Nadau in terms of New Europeanness is a useful way of understanding the position of such musical groups in the broader European context. Thinking about Nadau's music in terms of New European Popular Music as well as through the rock aesthetic gives meaning to their hybridised sound. However, it is through theories of place that we can gain insight into the specific nature of the identity expressed within that context. In the case of Nadau, the lyrics and venues provided the landmarks and soundmarks of that identity and this provides a useful context within which to explore other peripheral identities, especially those expressed through music.

Lyrical Analysis

It is a tribute to the Pyrenées, and not to the Pyrénéistes. The Pyrénéistes are those that explain the Pyrenées to the Pyrénéens without ever knowing the word for their own language or their culture. (Joan de Nadau in SudOuest, June 20, 2007)

The lyrics of the recordings of all of the songs from the Pau (1996) and Paris (2006) concert set lists were analysed (27 songs – 13 from Pau and 20 from Paris), chosen because as the two biggest concerts Nadau have presented, they constitute the

broadest representation of their repertoire. Only six songs were in common with both recordings, however it was not possible to determine how much of the complete set list the recordings represented. Given the emphasis placed on an Occitan or Béarn identity in the media reports of Nadau, it might be expected that this would be a common theme in these songs, however the words Béarn and Gascon never appear, and the word Occitan only once, in the song “Requiem for Little John,” the story of petit Jean, an Occitan peasant, who in 1643 led a rebellion against King Louis XIV, and who was captured and tortured on the wheel. What is striking is that the majority of the songs (72%) refer to place through either references to physical place (56%) or to tradition (18%), and of the former 75% refer specifically to the Pyrenées, hardly surprising, as the Pyrenées mountain chain forms part of the Béarn region, and is visible from all parts within it. The Pyrenées however are more than a picturesque backdrop: they are a “geographical symbol ... a counterpoint to a more dominant, metropolitan world-view.” (Berdoulay and Entrikin, 2005, p.133). Further, the mountain culture - the cheese making, shepherding, haymaking, extremes of weather – informs an identity that is specific to the region. Not surprisingly, much of the mythology of the region is based on stories from the mountains.

The Olympia concert opens with a song that epitomises this connection with the mountains. “Se Canto,” a traditional song, sometimes attributed to Gaston Phebus, Count of Foix and the Béarn in the 14th century, has become somewhat of an anthem in the Occitan speaking region. It was sung at the opening of the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, and is often sung at official events such as Rugby matches. It is essentially a love song, which asks the mountains to lay down so that a long-lost love can be seen: “Those mountains that are so high keep me from seeing where my love

has gone. Lay down, o mountains and rise up, o plains, so I may see where my love has gone”. The lyrics as written belie the emotional intensity with which this song is embraced by the Occitan-speaking population. For a local person, the metaphor is not of a mountain representing lost love, but of a love representing the mountains, and the culture of those mountains.

The song “One Day With Grandpa” tells a story of leaving life “on the slopes” for one on flat ground when Grandpa eventually is put in an aged care home. The song tells how he has a stiff neck from turning around so often to look back at the mountains as he is leaving. One day he escapes and writes a letter to his grandson, the narrator, asking him to return to the mountains with him, to their old home – it is a song about returning to roots. “Vers L’Immortelle”, in English “Towards the Edelweiss”, is on one level a song about looking for edelweiss in the mountains, but the iconography is rich: “Come little Peter, we will walk to the Edelweiss, and there we will find ourselves in the land” (pays) and “after one peak, another peak” . . . “freedom is a pathway.” Here we have the dual symbolism of the mountains, and of the paths that traverse them – in the mountains, the ‘land’, we can find ourselves, and the pathways that take us there are metaphors for freedom.

“I have a Great Sadness” tells a story to the shepherds of never seeing a love again, but that love is again a metaphor for the mountains: “my heart is breaking for the mountains”. Again, the concepts of love and the mountains coincide. “Josephine’s Garden” on the surface tells the story of just that, a woman’s garden, but in which there “are many mountains and valleys, and just as many paths.” Mountains and paths again figure strongly in this song. In other words, the mountains *are* freedom.

“Hymn to Joy” is the most direct of all the songs, and links place and freedom very clearly: “If we want to save our land, we have to join hands and find a new faith to lead us into tomorrow....Where everyone comes together to hold on to freedom, and that they move on, never letting go, towards equality It is there, our duty so let us sing with joy, peace, love and hope.”

Two songs refer specifically to a Pyrenées mountain – “Le Saussat” (the title of the song): “and me, on the mountain, I need no company, my heart in a knot, I look at Saussat”. The song tells the story of someone who may not have done well at school but it was because the call of the land was too strong, again a land of freedom where there are “no barriers, no chains, no barbed wire.” “Le Saut de Banasse” refers to another specific place, this time describing the ‘transhumance’ when the shepherds take their sheep up to the higher mountain pastures each summer, a ritual rich in tradition. Neither of these places – Saussat or Banasse – are well known; they would have specific meaning only to someone from the region

“Where are you Going?” refers to the mountains and also the ‘land’. The song asks “where are you going, you who can’t be taught?” in which the narrator describes his home as “like an island, four houses under the sky [referring to the seasons or directions]; son of the mountain stream, I am a sailor without a boat”. Here, the narrator refers to the *gaves* or *saligues*, the mountain streams which roar with water in spring with melting snow, and on which so much local mythology is based.

Amongst this group of ‘place’ songs are others that refer to land and place in more general terms. “We are who we are” tells of someone loving the land so much his

heart is breaking, believing in it so much it hurts. Terre is a complex word to translate in these songs – it can mean the earth, the land, or soil in their literal senses, but it is also a word rich in cultural connotations, subtle and, paradoxically, immense and local, all at the same time. The song goes on to say “old world, that carries us from yesterday to today, you will never be old, everything begins again, the story never ends” – a clear reference to the importance of tradition, and by association a tradition embedded in the land. The song opens with an electric guitar solo, moving into an upbeat folk-like dance.

In the “The Door with my Foot” the narrator says that “when I have more than a thousand songs in my head I will push the door with my foot and I will say to him, I have never renounced anything, I am from the land, and from the world as well.” Further on the singer says how “Being stubborn, I have copped many blows wanting to make a future with these old stones.” Again, the ‘land’ figures strongly, as well as resistance he has faced for holding on to tradition. “Those who are what they have to be” tells the story of the narrator’s people, who he “will never have enough life, enough songs, to give them what I owe them”, “these people are mine, upright on the earth” [*terre*] “they go slowly on the path, they don’t know the world’s history, they help their children grow up, and at the bottom of their memories, they have everything that came before.” Again, history and the land are strong metaphors.

Songs are about everyday life constituted 18% of the sample, and are all about cycles. Arguably, these cycles are those of rural life, and as such hold their own connection to place “Daylight, Maria”, a slow ballad accompanied by sustained synthesiser chords, talks about cycles in the context of the rising of the sun ending the night; “The Bride’s

Entrance” is about rituals such as marriage and their marking of the passage of life; in other words, they are about rites of passage and natural cycles, and as such are metaphors for the continuation of traditions. “The Big Wind” on the surface is about the nature of wind, but it is a metaphor for accepting change – if you stop the wind you will kill it. In other words, change should be accepted – moving with the times. In “There were Shadows” the narrator reflects on his childhood home, remembering “the stone and earth walls that knew how to hold their stories in the heat of summer and the cold of winter; everything was alive.” It is in the earthy walls that tradition is held.

The obvious context within which to understand Nadau is that of language and place – the Occitan language movement is mirrored in many other peripheral localities: the Basque country, Brittany, Catalonia, Ireland and Cornwall for example. Language is primordial in terms of identity but there is more to the Béarn identity that Nadau express than language alone. While the language these songs are sung in locates them in the south west of France, it is the references to tradition and the land, or place, that makes them truly local. It is the subtleties of place described, as well as the language used, that identify Nadau and their songs as Béarn – although the language would be broadly understood as Occitan, it is the extremely localised, and poetic, sense of place in the songs that makes it so clear that Nadau are Béarn before anything else.

Language plays its own role in forming the Nadau soundscape, but the subjects of the songs – the imagery they portray - place Nadau clearly within its own territory and identity.

The Poetic Image

With Nadau, we make musical photos; we took a photo of you. Look, you are beautiful ... (Joan de Nadau in (Labes, 2008, p.98)

What Bohlman refers to as the New Regionalism describes a trend, arising from the amalgamation of nations into the European Union, to include cultural minorities within the larger constructs of nation. As such, the continental social focus has shifted to integrate those people living ‘at the borders’ of the cultural hegemony. This provides a useful context for understanding the rise in popularity of musical groups singing in Occitan dialects, and incorporating local musical influences into a broader popular style (or vice versa). Zooming out from this localised picture, we can see that such groups are indeed indicative of such a trend, but if we focus more closely, we can see that Nadau exemplify its distillation, through their lyrics sung in Béarnais, and their references to local landmarks and cultural mores. This picture however is troubled when we focus in on Nadau in the context of the Occitan movement, in which the Béarn people increasingly seek a cultural distance from their immediate geographical and cultural context. On the macro level, Nadau stand for the ‘principle’ of language, and therefore cultural preservation, but on a local level they stand for much more, as their audience can identify with the specificities of the culture and landscape Nadau describe in their songs.

In the localisation of the music through language, the lyrics specify the importance of place, expressed through a very specific landscape and soundscape: it is argued here that this is where the essence of Béarn identity lies, and that Nadau’s live

performances encapsulate the essence of that place. Nadau can, and have, filled concert halls in Pau and Paris, yet more often they stage their concerts in out of the way places, in tiny villages, in open fields, or outside of local chateaus. As but one example, in June 2009 they performed in the Haute- Pyrenées mountain village of Troubat, population 53. Walking down the main street of that 2.8 km² village, I encountered only sleepy dogs, troubled more by the buzzing clouds of flies than the unexpected sounds of electric instruments resounding from the cliff faces. That 1000 people would find their way to that out of the way place is evidence of Nadau's popularity, and yet they seem to go out of their way to perform in areas such as that, in open air concerts where the landscape forms the perfect backdrop to their sound. Why do Nadau bring their concerts outdoors, to these difficult to engineer, open spaces framed by mountains? The following discussion attempts to explain this phenomenon through an examination of the above lyrical analysis in the context of Gaston Bachelard's concept of the poetic image.

The Béarn Soundscape

The feeling of belonging to a country, to a land, to a house or to a village is difficult for me to express. This intuition of belonging to a common history, I think that brings to mind landmarks, and that is something that holds on to you. (Joan de Nadau in Labes, 2008, p.135)

Joan de Nadau, the group's songwriter, singer and some would say soul, describes himself as a photographer rather than a songwriter. He describes his words as "snapshots" through which he "tries to capture moments of intimacy", "to penetrate

memory, the intimate, and the depth of people.” (2008, p.19) This understanding of language is perhaps best understood in French philosopher Gaston Bachelard’s concept of the “poetic image” by which he describes imagery that goes beyond language, beyond the conscious, “a concentration of the entire psyche.” (1994, p.viii) Such imagery describes not only the form of its object, but its “specific reality” (ibid., p.xix). Even commonplace objects may become poetic images: “before the interior poetic light was turned upon it, it was a mere object for the mind. But the soul comes and inaugurates the form, dwells in it.” (ibid., p.xxii) Author Christian Labes describes how whereas the poet turns dreams into reality, Joan de Nadau, as ‘photographer’, turns reality into dreams (Labes, 2008, p.29) or, in Bachelard’s terms, object into poetic image.

As seen in the lyrical analysis, history, memory and the land are powerful poetic images in Nadau’s songs. In order to understand the poetic image, the reader looks to its centre or heart, from where the image “derives its source and meaning” (Bachelard, 1994, p.xxi), in Bachelard’s words, its *soul*: “these linguistic impulses ... are miniatures of the vital impulse.” (ibid., p.xxvii) The poetic images in these songs reverberate with a sense of history, memory and place. They go deep beyond descriptions of places, to touch on the soul of what it means to be Béarnais.

Poetic images do not rely on conscious remembrance or memory, but rather, as Bachelard says, they “reverberate” with the distant past. (1994, p. xvi) This is what Deleuze would call an involuntary memory, one which “internalizes the context ... makes the past context inseparable from the present sensation. (2000, p. 39) In other words, the poetic images in these songs are an unconscious expression of involuntary

memory, a more primal recollection, which through reverberation takes on a “sonority of being” (Bachelard, 1994, p. xvi) through which “we are able to experience resonances, sentimental repercussions, reminders of our past.” (ibid., p.xxiii) Although silent, the poetic image is understood in terms of its sonic qualities.

The power of the imagery, of its *reverberation* as Bachelard would say, is enhanced when we consider it in the context of music. There is perhaps little need to argue for the emotional power of music here, but particularly pertinent is Ola Stockfelt’s observation that “music proclaims subcultures and states of consciousness ... [which] translates into territorial politics, promoting unity within homogenous groups and defining difference between separate groups.” (in Järviluoma, 1994, p.24)

If we then try to understand this poetic imagery and music in the context of the concert and its soundscape, another layer of meaning is added because, as Bruce Johnson so clearly describes “the meaning of that "music" is generated by the meanings ... of that context. Apart from meanings, the sensuous appeal of the music is also disclosed more fully within the larger sensuous context of the occasion.” (in Järviluoma, 1994, p.39) That this context – the context of the concert venue – is outdoors, in full view of the Pyrenées mountains, is of vital importance. Edward Casey tells us that to understand poetic images, we need to “find for them a proper locus in the mind or, more exactly, the soul.” (Casey, 1997, p.287) In doing so, Bachelard comes to the conclusion that “if one puts images in their true place in psychic activity - before thoughts (*pensées*) - one cannot help but recognize that the first image of immensity is a terrestrial image” (in Casey, 1997, p.287) – place comes before everything else, and the concert constitutes pure place represented in fixed place.

The poetic images of mountains found in Nadau's lyrics could therefore be understood as 'images of immensity', the study of which Bachelard claims lies in "a phenomenology without phenomena." (1994, p.184) What he means by this is that since immense is an image not an object, to analyse it as phenomena "would refer us directly to our imagining consciousness," showing us "within ourselves the pure being of pure imagination." (ibid.) Bachelard contrasts the images of the forest and the meadow to explain this concept. He explains that regarding the meadow, his "recollections accompany all the different phases of tilling and harvesting" which are "with-me, with-us" whereas the vast, or immense, world of the forest is "before-me, before-us" and "reigns in the past." (1994, p.188) Immensity therefore becomes a primal value, a primal, intimate value." (ibid., p.195) What better mode then to transport these images of immensity than through music, its affect residing in the realms of consciousness and imagination, and therefore also best understood through a phenomenology without phenomena.

Habitus and Topoanalysis

A song has to reveal the poetic force of a language that has always been contained in the cattle shed with the farmhands and the cattle dung, and it has to be popular while taking care to never break the link with those who have spoken it for generations. (Christian Labes, re. Nadau)

The lyrics of Nadau's songs tell us that the Pyrenées mountains are central to Béarn culture and identity— how are these mountains imagined? They are at the same time

primal, intimate and immense in Bachelard's terminology, and central to living in a grazing culture which is governed by the rhythms of seasons and therefore the transhumance as the sheep and cattle make their way between the mountain summer pastures and the hibernal protection of the valley. Cow and sheep bells are one of the soundmarks (Schafer, 1993) - a unique community sound - of this culture and their sound links the mountains to the rhythms of the seasons, especially through the transhumance. They are therefore essential to the relationship between self and place, representing the sound of what Bourdieu would call a habitus. Casey proposes "that habitus is a middle term between place and self - and, in particular, between lived place and the geographical self", that is the habitus that link us to particular places. (Casey, 2001, p.686) The rhythm of the transhumance is one such habitus that links the Béarnais people to the mountains, and their identity to place.

A study of the poetic images in Nadau's songs tells us that the Pyrenées are central to Béarn culture, and that they inform the habitus through which Béarn identity is expressed. Both habitus and poetic image are expressed through sound: habitus in the lived soundscape, poetic image in the performed soundscape. Both soundscapes are what Casey would refer to as "eventmental, something in process, something unconfined to a thing. Or to a simple location." (Casey, 1997, p.337) In other words, they are *omnilocal* places, "not just here or there, but everywhere." (ibid.)

The creation of the concert soundscape represents the interplay of the cultural and the performed soundscapes. This soundscape is one created within the context of a culture which implicitly seeks to preserve its heritage through highlighting the primacy of place. As Casey says, "the primacy of place is ... that of being an event capable of implacing things in many complex manners and to many complex effects. It is an

issue of being in place differently, experiencing its eventfulness otherwise.” (Casey, 1997, p.337) The concert soundscape therefore constitutes an act of conscious remembering, but going back to Bachelard’s unconscious poetic image, it relies on a passivity in its audience that allows for reception of the unconscious remembering implicit in the music.

In his discussion of the poetic image, Bachelard gives the example of the house as the place in which our “memories are housed,” (Bachelard, 1994, p.8) the “localization of our memories.” (ibid.) Topoanalysis is the term he invented to describe this “systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives.” (ibid.) According to this method, a house is “imagined as a vertical being ... as a concentrated being” and as appealing to “our consciousness of reality.” (ibid., p.17) Through a topoanalysis of the intimate sites represented in the poetic images expressed in Nadau’s songs, we can argue that the Pyrenées represent the localisation of the memory of the Béarn people. Casey argues that we keep the past in mind when we keep it in place. (1983, p.94) By presenting memory of Béarn culture in both the songs, and in their context of the mountain landscape, we come to understand that “remembrance is indeed now. It is also *here*, reminding us that remembering begins and ends in place even as it traverses the most distantly located personal past, a past it brings incisively into present place, into the now-and-here of remembrance.” (ibid., p.95) Labes sums this up in his depiction of Nadau’s world as a “society of memory which unites multiple identities and allegiances to its territory and its history.” (2008, p.31)

Conclusion

Emotional truth exists in the universe of the stage; it is the domain of the invisible, which has nothing at all to do with singing well. (Joan de Nadau in Labes, 2008, p.107)

That the one identity can be expressed locally - 'in place' - or in concert halls as far apart as Paris and Pau, is a seeming contradiction between local and location which is best explained as an act of acoustic territorialisation (Stockfelt in Järviluoma, 1994, p.36) in which the sounds of the local are made manifest through music, and through place – but not necessarily physical place. One approach to understanding these complexities and contradictions is to consider Nadau's concerts in the context of the three kinds of place described by geographer and philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan (1977). Firstly, there is the *bounded place* of the venue – a sheep paddock bounded by portable fences covered in black plastic, or a large concert hall. The second is the *distinct place* - the village or city where the venue is located, itself defined by roads, signs and fences. Finally, and most significantly, both of these places are located in the *conceptual place* of the Pyrenées and their culture, or place as identity and memory. Each of these places has its own soundscape and soundmarks: the music of the concert, the sounds of the concert hall, the Béarnais dialect, the cow and sheep bells of the village, which filter into the mountain soundscape, itself distinguished by a special quality of reverberation - yet all are important aural and visual parts of the same identity. Most importantly, this soundscape is implicit in the music, and through the process of acoustic territorialisation, the conceptual place of Béarn identity transcends its physical origins.

The concert I attended in 2009 officially began not within the bounded place of the stage, but within the distinct place of the village, from which the sound of horns appeared behind the audience. Turning our heads we could see a group of men on a rocky outcrop, who proceeded to play their hunting horns, a cultural *soundmark*, as the audience quietened. But the concert began long before even these notes were sounded, even before the tones of the soundcheck reverberated off the cliff faces many hours before. It is within the conceptual place of the Pyrenées that the concert began. More accurately it began at the intersection of these three kinds of places, where a space was created within which a Béarn identity could be remembered, imagined and sung. The concert as a concept, regardless of its locality, therefore becomes an acoustic space invested with meaning through imagination – an acoustic territory which represents these places: their past, present and future experienced as the continuum of *this* place, as told through the poetic images of the songs.

* All French websites, articles, Nadau quotes etc. translated from French by the author.

BACHELARD, G. (1994) *The poetics of space*, Boston, Beacon Press.

BERDOULAY, V. & ENTRIKIN, J. N. (2005) The Pyrenees as place: Lefebvre as guide. *Progress in Human Geography*, 29, 129-147.

BLANCHET, P (2003) *Occitanism and Catalanism: elements for a comparison with special reference to Provençal and Valencian*, Paper read in the II Congress of Valencian language. Valencia City, November 2003.

BOHLMAN, P. V. (2004) *The music of European nationalism : cultural identity and modern history*, Santa Barbara, Calif., ABC-CLIO.

- BOHLMAN, P.V. (2010) *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*, New York, Routledge.
- BROCK, B. (2008) Les origines d'une confusion identitaire : le cas du gascon. *The Faculty of Graduate Studies (French)*. Vancouver, The University of British Columbia.
- CASEY, E. S. (1983) Keeping the past in mind. *Review of Metaphysics*, 37, 77-95.
- CASEY, E. S. (1997) *The Fate of place: A philosophical history*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- CASEY, E. S. (2001) Between geography and philosophy: what does it mean to be in the place-world? *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 91, 683-693.
- DELEUZE, G. (2000) *Proust and signs : the complete text*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- ESTEVE, C. (n/d) Nadau. <http://christian.esteve.pagesperso-orange.fr/nadau.htm>. Accessed July 2010.
- GEORGE, B. (2007) Rapping at the margins: musical constructions of identities in contemporary France. IN BIDDLE, I. D. & KNIGHTS, V. (Eds.) *Music, national identity and the politics of location : between the global and the local*. Aldershot, England, Ashgate.
- JÄRVILUOMA, H. (Ed.) (1994) *Soundscapes : essays on vroom and moo*, Tampere Seinäjoki, Department of Folk Tradition, Institute of Rhythm Music.
- LABES, C. (2008) *Nadau: memoire vive*, Pau, France, Cairn.
- MOREUX, B. (2004) Bearnais and Gascon Today: language behavior and perception. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 169, 25-62.

- REGEV, M. (1997) Rock aesthetics and musics of the World. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 14/3 125-142.
- REGEV, M. & SEROUSSI, E. (2004) *Popular music and national culture in Israel*, Berkeley, Ca., University of California Press.
- SCHAFFER, R. M. (1993) *The soundscape : our sonic environment and the tuning of the world*, Rochester, Vt., Destiny Books
- TUAN, Y.-F. (1977) *Space and place : the perspective of experience*, Minneapolis London, University of Minnesota Press.

Discography

- Nadau, *Nadau a L'Olympia*, DVD & CD (2010)
- Nadau, *Carnet de Chansons*, CD (2006)
- Nadau, *Nadau a L'Olympia*, DVD & CD (2005)
- Nadau, *Saumon*, CD (2003)
- Nadau, *Nadau En Companhia*, VHS (2002)
- Nadau, *Nadau a L'Olympia*, VHS (2000)
- Nadau, *Plumalhon*, CD (1998)
- Nadau, *Nadau En Companhia*, CD (1996)
- Nadau, *S'Avi Sabut*, CD (1995)
- Nadau, *Pengabelot*, CD (1994)
- Nadau, *Nadau En Companhia*, VHS (1993)
- Nadau, *De Cuu au Vent*, CD (1991)
- Los de Nadau, *Qu'em Co Qui Em*, Vinyl LP (1984)
- Los de Nadau, *T'on Vas*, Vinyl LP (1981)
- Los de Nadau, *L'Immortela*, Vinyl LP (1978)

Los de Nadau, *Loteria*, Vinyl LP (1976)

Los de Nadau, *Monsur Lo Regent*, Vinyl LP (1975)

The Fabulous Trobadors, *On the Linha Imaginòt* (1998)

The Fabulous Trobadors, *Duels de Tchatche et Autres Trucs du Folklore Toulousain*
(2003)

Massilia Sound System, *Occitanista* (2002)

Massilia Sound System, *Oai e Libertat* (2007)

La Talvera, *Cants e Musicas del Pais de Lodeva* (2006)

La Talvera, *Sopac e Patac* (2006)