

# 'An Indigenous Fucking Blood Revival': Pagan Aesthetics in The US Indigenous Black Metal Scene

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**ENG Abstract:** This article analyzes two different modulations of contemporary Indigenous Black Metal in the United States, specifically focusing on how Indigenous Black Metal appropriates (but also distances itself from) European conceptualizations of this subgenre by adapting its lyrics to decolonial discourses. The text argues that although Pagan Black Metal is inherently connected to European understandings of pre-Christian spirituality, it has nonetheless found an autochthonous place in the American context through an American Indian-minded aesthetic vision of European paganism. The article will first explore how conceptions of local land, ancestry and paganism are intertwined in the configuration of Pagan Black Metal lyrics and then addresses the lyrics of two paradigmatic examples of Native American Black Metal bands: Nechochwen and Pan-Amerikan Native Front. Both bands simultaneously replicate the aggressive sounds and ontological logics of their European counterparts, whilst also eschewing certain thematic aspects of the genre in order to adapt to Pan-Indigenous dialectics.

**Keywords:** Pagan Black Metal; Nechochwen; Pan-Amerikan Native Front; Black Metal Studies; Indigenous Metal

## ES 'An Indigenous Fucking Blood Revival': La estética pagana en la escena de Black Metal Indígena norteamericana

**ES Resumen:** Este artículo analiza dos modulaciones temáticas diferentes en el Black Metal Indígena en el contexto estadounidense actual, centrándose específicamente en cómo el Black Metal indígena se apropia (pero también distancia) de concepciones europeas de este subgénero de Metal. En este proceso, sus letras se adaptan a determinados discursos decoloniales. Así, el texto argumenta que el Black Metal pagano, aunque es un producto musical inherentemente conectado a concepciones europeas de espiritualidad precristiana, ha encontrado una forma autóctona en el escenario norteamericano a través de la adaptación de lógicas indígenas a la estética pagana europea del género. Tras introducir la forma en la que sentidos de genealogía, territorio local y paganismo se interconectan en la formación de la lírica del Black Metal pagano, el artículo aborda la obra de dos ejemplos paradigmáticos de bandas nativoamericanas: Nechochwen y Pan-Amerikan Native Front. Ambas replican la sonoridad agresiva y las lógicas ontológicas de sus contrapartes europeas, eliminando, no obstante, ciertos aspectos temáticos para adaptarse a dialécticas panindigenistas.

**Palabras clave:** Black Metal Pagano; Nechochwen; Estudios de Black Metal; Metal Indígena

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. 2. Black Metal and the Politics of Chthonic Spirituality. 3. Nechochwen and the (Non-Violent) View of Indigenous History. 4. Pan-Amerikan Native Front and Hyperviolence. 5. Conclusion.

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### 1. Introduction

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), philosopher Homi Bhabha argues that colonial, "hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities [...] the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" (159). Cultural hybridity has allowed anti-, post-, and de-colonial

discourses to construct themselves in the public sphere by utilizing the literary, visual, and musical devices of the colonial apparatus to revindicate their political (and thus, philosophical) claims. When looking at Extreme Metal culture (as an extension of Heavy Metal culture), one may see many examples of bands that instrumentalize the musical aesthetics of the genre to generate fiercely anti-colonial discourses. One of these new musical battlefields is Indigenous Black Metal, a relatively new scene that has been slowly growing in the US and Canadian Metal landscape since the late 2010s. Combining the stark and distorted sound of Black Metal with lyrics bathed in American Indian spirituality, bands like Nechochwen, Pan-Amerikan Native Front, Necron, Blackbraid, and many others now represent a movement developing new, culturally-hybrid spaces of decolonial resistance. However, utilizing the master's tools to subvert the logics of power embedded in colonial power may prove to be highly problematic, especially when performing within the codes of Black Metal, a style which has been historically linked to fascist and ethno-nationalist movements in Europe (Beckwith, 2002; Olson, 2012; Fischer, 2022).

This essay explores the lyrics of two prominent US Indigenous Black Metal bands, Nechochwen and Pan-Amerikan Native Front (from now, PANF), focusing on the counter-colonial ways in which these bands adapt some of the fundamental codes and tropes that thematically shape the lyrical aesthetics of European Black Metal. Namely, an embrace of pre-Christian spirituality and a glorification of a genealogical sense of belonging within the local landscapes. Specifically addressing the logics of Euro-Paganist approaches to this music genre, the text considers the way in which land-dependent Pre-Christian spiritualities are used to develop an oppositional binary that both visualizes and glorifies Indigenous spiritual heuristics. Hence, after briefly introducing some of the theoretical ideas surrounding the (European) construction of paganist Black Metal, what is called Pagan Black Metal (specifically Viking Metal in the case of German-Scandinavian bands), the article compares the lyrics of Nechochwen and PANF critically observing the way in which their discourses reproduce and modulate some of the logics of their European matrix, despite being grounded within Indigenous philosophies. In this sense, Nechochwen's and PANF's repositioning of the history of colonization of North-Eastern America and their understanding of Indigenous religions, highlights the stereotypical similarities that both bands attach to Indigenous subjectivities. Although premised in radically different discourses, both bands embrace an essentialist sense of Indigeneity also characteristic of the paganist episteme that typifies non-Indigenous Black Metal.

Prior to the analysis of these bands' main elements, it is necessary to briefly highlight the potentially problematic political interpretations that may arise from this text in order to fully contextualize this essay's intentions. The text aims to rationalize the spiritual, political and ontological similarities (and differences) in two sides of a cultural phenomenon that is often (and not without reason) associated with an open defense of fascism, ethno-nationalism and racism. This last association partly stems from Black Metal's usual misappropriation of Scandinavian mythology, which mirrors certain beliefs akin to those found in ariosophy and the Third Reich, as highlighted by Fischer (2022: 129). In the absence of precise clarification, one could infer that the intention is to draw an equivalence between the aforementioned Indigenous bands and the extreme-right politics propagated by numerous European bands. As a White, Spanish citizen with no attachments to any Indigenous community, I am no authoritative voice allowed to judge whether the intentions and politics of the aforementioned Indigenous bands should be regarded as legitimate or not in the context of Indigenous anti-colonial resistance.<sup>1</sup> That is, in the view of this text's author, for Indigenous scholars (and Indigenous peoples, in general) to deliberate.

## 2. Black Metal and the Politics of Chthonic Spirituality

Black metal music is usually defined as a subgenre of "Extreme Metal," which encompasses others such as Doom, Death or Drone Metal. Widely popularized by Norwegian bands such as Burzum, Mayhem or Darkthrone during the early 1990s,<sup>2</sup> this type of music quickly became an icon of an artistic counterculture that made darkness, the occult and pessimist philosophy their main thematic points. From a musical perspective, Black Metal frequently utilizes the standard ensemble of 'Heavy Metal' instruments, including electric guitars, basses, and drums. Occasionally, keyboards are also incorporated. However, Black Metal distinguishes itself through its intense tempo, 'tremolo' riffs, a distinctively 'trebly' guitar tone, and deliberately straightforward production values." (Kahn Harris 2007: 6). However, its most recognizable aspects are found in the vocals, with singers employing high-pitched and disharmonized shrieks as the main phonic elements in the songs. Although this subgenre explores a great variety of issues, it is traditionally associated with non-Christian (and, more specifically non-ecclesiastic) tropes such as pagan mythology, satanism, gnostic esotericism or atheism, all of them observed through philosophically anti-humanist and aesthetically (hyper) violent perspectives. In the early days of Black Metal, lyrical themes often centered around subverting the cultural symbols prevalent in contemporary Western societies. Frequently, this involved vehemently rejecting Christian paradigms and spaces. Within this context, many paganist bands emerged, critiquing modernity and capitalism as integral parts of their artistic expression.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive exposition of debates on the role of non-Native scholars in Indigenous academia and Indigenous Intellectual Sovereignty see Weaver (2000), Pulitano (2003) and the successive answer to her book by Womack, Weaver and Warrior (2006).

<sup>2</sup> These bands form what is called "the second wave" of Black Metal, being preceded by others like Venom, Hellhammer or Bathory, which were more musically and thematically similar to Death Metal.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Vrzal (2017) for a discussion of paganist ideologies in early Black Metal.

Black Metal transcends mere experimental sound; it thrives on a distinct form of performativity. Particularly during live shows, music videos, and other visual spectacles, bands perceive their performances as divine worship, communion, or magical rituals (Granholt 2013: 6). These performative expressions intertwine with the genre's lyricism, reinforcing its ideological significance. Regarding their usual attire, musicians often adorn themselves with corpse paint: a striking combination of white-face makeup, black lipstick, and eyeshadow. Additionally, they are clad predominantly in black attire, opting in many cases (specially in Pagan Black Metal) for rudimentary garments that enhance the paganistic ambiance.

Today, the genre has expanded in many different ideological directions and the global scene counts with bands openly exploring themes such as feminism (Feminazgul, Matriarkathum), environmentalism (Wolves in the Throne Room, Botanist, Altar of Plagues), LGBTQ+ politics (Violet Cold), and anarchist antifascism (Dawn Rayd, Gravel). Nonetheless, Black Metal has predominantly been explored by sociologists and journalists in relation to its association with Aryanism and (crypto)fascist ideas.<sup>4</sup> The idealized approach to the local land explored in early Black Metal lyricism, its countercultural musical experimentation and a tacit support of Anti-Semitism and xenophobia by many influential early Black Metal bands—such as Burzum, Graveland, Taake—eventually generated today's mainstream understanding of the genre as being synonymous with right-wing extremism. This “natural” link between fascism and Black Metal is reinforced by some of the very bands that uphold it, since they usually depict themselves as the embodiment of “trve” (or “kvlt”)<sup>5</sup> Black Metal, some of them openly embracing rigorous National-Socialist ideas as in the case of the French band Peste Noire.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between Black Metal and right-wing reactionary ideologies is, however, far from arbitrary, since most bands (regardless of their specific ideology) have shared a common lyrical theme that some far-right movements use as an ontological basis: The (assumed) need for humanity's spiritual reconnection to their own local Nature. One of the fundamental interests of Black Metal music is the representation of the natural world, either in a romanticized or apocalyptic terms, and thus many scholars of Black Metal Studies and Theory<sup>7</sup> tend to focus their research on this aspect; with full books entirely dedicated to exploring the genre's connections to ecology and pagan/satanic spirituality.<sup>8</sup> In sum, the anti-modern ethos of Black Metal establishes connections between local ecologies and anti-Christian (or non-Christian) theologies as a way to oppose capitalism's view of Nature as a mere resource. Peste Noire's frontman Ludovic Faure (aka LaSale Famine), claims that:

Black Metal is the musical memory of our bloodthirsty ancestors of blood, it is the marriage of Tradition, of old racial patrimony with fanaticism, with the rage and the rashness of a youth now lost. It is a Chthonian [sic] religion: a cult of the Earth and a return to it, therefore a nationalism; a cult of what is below the earth: Hell—the adjective “chthonian” applies to the Infernal gods as well. BM is a fundamentalism, a music with integrity (from Latin integer, complete) which helps me to remain complete in a dying world, amidst a people in decay, unworthy of its blood. It is the apology of the dark European past. (Faure 2007: n.p.)

Observing pre-Christian paganism or Satanist esotericism as a cult to the Earth invokes a sense of politics that links ethnicity and ancestry remembrance to the protection and reverence of a very specific territory.

This is better expressed in paganist Black Metal projects, since their thematic lyricism, creates a constructive and empowering alternative ideological framework rather than operating as an inverse reflection of Christianity (as with Satanic Black Metal). Here, Judeo-Christian spirituality is theoretically substituted by the religious epistemologies of any of the European pagan religions (generally, but not exclusively, Slavic or Nordic-Germanic ones). According to Eugene Thacker, this approach distances itself from the Satanic dogma in that “whereas Heresy was viewed by the Church primarily as an internal threat, with paganism one finds, in some cases, an entirely different framework [...] In paganism one is always ‘on the side’ of nature’ and its animistic forces” (2010: 184). Thus, Pagan Black Metal aligns itself to a sacred protection of the planet (and thus, the local territory participant in the band's narrative), suggesting the possibility of new heuristics wherein humanity can finally be ascetically connected, and the cultural, ecological, and spiritual dilemmas of Judeo-Christian thought have been abolished. The projected conclusion of Pagan Black Metal's seminal episteme clear: in order to overcome and subvert the chaos of the postmodern world, listeners must align themselves with the telluric forces of the living planet that we inhabit. This subsequently involves a renewed reverence of one's forefathers and their non-Christian spirituality, traditions, and cultural attachment to the land.

This land-ethnicity sense of belonging is characteristic of the openly fascist rhetoric employed by Black Metal bands such as Peste Noire. However, it has also been widely used by less politically involved bands to construct a lyricism that explores their national identity and the history of their native land in either a lamenting or violent tone; mourning the annihilation of a pastoral, connection to Mother Nature. This fall of the Pagan world is usually blamed on Christianization (although, depending on the band, also on industrialization,

<sup>4</sup> See Moynihan and Soderlind (2003), Olson (2012), Taylor (2012), Philipov (2013), Noys (2010)

<sup>5</sup> In the context of Black Metal, the term “trve” (or “kvlt”) signifies an unyielding commitment to the underground, raw, and authentic aspects of the genre. It represents a rejection of commercialism, a cultural identity within the subculture, and an embrace of dark, esoteric themes. Bands associated with trve black metal prioritize artistic integrity over mainstream success.

<sup>6</sup> See Noys (2010) for a detailed analysis of the fascist weltanschauung of this band.

<sup>7</sup> The differences between both should be noted. Black Metal Studies analyze the genre through theory; Black Metal theory is an experimental, para-academic field that aims to use the allegedly unique episteme of Black Metal to construct new philosophical theories (Masciandaro 2015: 404).

<sup>8</sup> See Masciandaro (2010), Wilson (2014), Masciandaro and Connole (2015).

colonization, or globalization). Paradigmatic examples of this approach can be found, for instance, in Sogndalian Black Metal (from the province of Sogndal, Norway). This iteration of the genre developed a prolific local scene, which included bands like Windir, Cor Scorpii or Vreid. These bands composed epic/elegiac lyrical narratives addressing historically determining events of pre-Christianized Medieval Norway through a paganist perspective. These bands make use of an idealized Viking ancestry to revindicate Asatru-based connections to the Scandinavian territory they inhabit. This specific element has inspired a more region-specific variant of Black Metal, usually known as Viking Metal,<sup>9</sup> that praises a unique sense of national identity in Scandinavian countries.<sup>10</sup>

The case of Windir is especially worth highlighting when looking at the way in which European paganist discourses are constructed. In their first album, *Sóknardalr* (1997), the band led by Terje Bakken (AKA Valfar) merged “songs about warriors; harsh Black Metal moments combined with folk elements and epic singing; song titles and lyrics in the Scandinavian dialect of Valfar’s home town; and an album cover that borrows ideas from romantic conservatism” (Spracklen 2020:109).<sup>11</sup> Technically, Viking metal also added certain peculiarities to the traditional sound and performativity of Black Metal:

This meant that the aggressive and underground focus was replaced with a more nuanced approach by including ‘traditional’ Viking instruments such as the fiddle, clean vocals, which were and still are commonly used to invoke a strong, male-dominated choir, as well as clothing and weaponry from the Viking Age. (Sellheim 2018: 2)

Viking Metal employs a mythical imaginary of Scandinavia in which the dissenting subjectivity—that of the male, non-Christian, North-Germanic individual—violently opposes the Abrahamic colonialism of their allegedly ancestral territory (Sellheim 2018: 5). This opposition creates an alternative vision of history told from the religious, political and cultural perspective of the pagan cultures that supposedly lost their power during the Christianization process. In this conflict, the Viking subject is positioned as a “noble savage” (Spracklen 2020: 106) and incarnates the role of a mythical warrior spiritually connected to the land that *he* is determined to defend from modernity at all costs.

These spiritual-political themes have been replicated in an uncountable number of Black Metal projects all through Europe, each of them exploring the local mythologies of the lands in which they are produced (Numen in Basque Country, Graveland in Poland, Saor in Scotland). When comparing American and European varieties of Black Metal, it is important to note that the incorporation of a territory-dependent sense of paganism—and a view of a national history through this pagan perspective—in Black Metal lyrical discourses might make sense just in a European context. Because of the way European state-sponsored national identities are often constructed—that is, based on the ancestral occupation of the territory—the colonial genesis of the United States presents difficulties in rationalizing the land-dependent paganism that characterizes the European genre. Openly fascist or not, Pagan Black Metal’s thematical and aesthetical premises linking human ancestry to the land find themselves in direct contradiction with settler histories. The revindication of ancestry—and thus of (religious) traditions premised upon a ‘divine’ connection to the land—become illogical when the subjectivity that is venerated now unequivocally bears the role of a colonial invader, as in the case of Euro-descendants in American territory. The question that then arises is: how can the cultural subversion expressed through Black Metal’s paganism be translated into a context that inherently repels it?

### 3. Nechochwen and the (Non-Violent) View of Indigenous History

The Black Metal phenomenon in the US is almost as old as Black Metal itself, with early projects such as Grand Belial’s Key, Judas Iscariot, and Absu starting during the early 1990s. Although there is a whole scene replicating the Satanist perspective that has widely been explored in Europe, an autochthonous modulation of the paganist ethos quickly started to flourish during the late 1990s and became one of the dominant models for Pagan Black Metal construction in the country: Cascadian Black Metal. This subgenre includes bands such as Fauna, Agalloch, Skagos, Panopticon, Wolves in the Throne Room, or Alda. Nonetheless, it is dominated by Euro-American voices, and portrays a transcendentalist sense of non-Christian pantheism rather a look at a local Indigenous cosmology to construct their lyrics. According to Sónia Pereira:

this fairly recent American black metal scene has been frequently termed as transcendental, owing its chore ideals to the legacy of authors such as Henry David Thoreau, and in particular his reflections in *Walden* on natural history and man’s relation with the natural elements. [Thus, it is] apparently far removed from the much more hostile Scandinavian scene and its worshipping of battles, pagan gods or Satanism, but still the ideals of transgression and removal from modern civilization lie at the basis of both. (Pereira, 2012: 186-187).

A stricter formula of paganism has been exported into Native American Indigenous adoption of Black Metal as a modes of materializing anti-colonial discourses. The contemporary scene presents several examples of bands whose Indigenous composers explore the European colonization of North America and its

<sup>9</sup> The problematic connotations of this approach and the racist components they inspire must be noted. As Spracklen comments “it is only the men who are part of the nation here, and the “country” of the countrymen is obviously only that people who feel they have the bloodline of the Vikings, that is white Norwegians” (2020: 110)

<sup>10</sup> See Thompson (2013) for a more detailed analysis on the creation of Norwegian national identity through Viking Metal.

<sup>11</sup> For an extensive comment of Norwegian paganism, language and landscape in the music of Windir, see Sol (2021).



most tragic, violent events through an Indigenous sense of spirituality and historicity. Indigenous bands like Gyibaaw, Blackbraid, Pan-Amerikan Native Front, Necron, or Nechochwen take a more conservative approach to Black Metal's use of paganism. These bands utilize the genre's glorification of a territory-dependent spirituality to create an idealized view of their respective territories' pre-Christian past; transforming it into an anti-colonial discourse that centers a specific tribe's mythology, history, traditions and theology. Some examples can be found in Pan-Amerikan Native Front's *Little Turtle's War* (2021), an album exploring the Western Confederacy's victory at the Battle of Wabash during the First Indian War, or in Necron's *Kulus* (2023) on First Nations' decolonial spirituality. Each band has their own distinct tone and politics: Pan-Amerikan Front and Necron are conceived as Pan-Indigenous activist projects, whereas Nechochwen and Ifernach explore American Indian cultures in a more melancholic, tragic, and nostalgic way. In the same way, their musical styles differ, the former two being influenced by crust punk and early Black Metal sound (more aggressive and inharmonic), and the latter leaning to more atmospheric compositions (as in Cascadian Black Metal). However, as will be explored, all of them make use of the counter-cultural elements that European Black Metal culture imposed on paganism, making Indigenous spirituality, reverence to their American Indian ancestry and the protection of the local territory a common driving mechanism in their lyrical narrative.

Among these bands, Nechochwen is one of the oldest and more eclectic projects. Starting as a folk music solo band led by folk musician Aaron Carey (aka Nechochwen),<sup>12</sup> the band originally employed purely neofolk compositions that combine acoustic guitars with instruments associated to a specific American Indian tribe from the Appalachian area. The thematic intention of the band, in this sense, is to explore the local Appalachian cultural and historical legacy of the different tribes that inhabited the area, musicalizing the question of "how did [Appalachian] culture go from nature-based harmony to modern European-style civilization?" (Carey). Although the band's first album, *Algonkian Mythos* (2008), can only be classified as neofolk, the following albums, *Azimuths to the Otherworld* (2008) and *OtO* (2012), present a progression to Black Metal sounds, with both albums moving from calm folk compositions at the beginning to fully black metal riffs and vocals by the end of the LP. In this sense, *Heart of Akamon* (2015) is Nechochwen's first consistent Black Metal album and it presents several musical differences regarding the hybrid tone of previous albums. If previous LPs showed an acoustic folk sound evolving into Black Metal's rage, *Heart of Akamon* presents a conversation/fight between these two genres, with songs quickly shifting from the modern sound of electric guitars and effect pedals to peaceful melodies composed with classical Indigenous instruments.<sup>13</sup> Musically speaking, Nechochwen attempts to represent the conflict between Indigenous cultures and the West, although it does maintain a binarized conceptualization of the colonization process: The settler as modern, electronic and violent while the Indigenous subject is, on the other hand, acoustic, peaceful and traditional.

There is a common theme to all *Heart of Akamon's* tracks, that of recovering (and poeticizing) the hidden history of violence against Indigenous peoples in the Appalachian region during the early years of colonization. In an interview about *Heart of Akamon*, Aaron Carey comments that:

I feel that Woodland Indian culture is vastly underrepresented, misunderstood, and brushed aside in our culture and world culture. We all learned about Sitting Bull, Seattle, Chief Joseph and Geronimo in school, and that's wonderful, but even here in West Virginia, I learned about Tecumseh, Brant, Black Hawk and Half King on my own, not from school or movies. I want to shine a light on the amazing things we never seem to hear about. (Carey 2021: n.p.)

Thus, in the same lyrical guise that characterized Early Norwegian Black Metal, *Heart of Akamon's* songs cover issues such as oral stories, historical events or Pre-Christian poetry specifically dealing with conflicts between White and Native populations, revindicating a past that is mainly invisible in mainstream pop culture, and thus challenging the colonization narrative imposed by the US during its genesis as a country. However, Nechochwen's lyrics do not only operate as a poetical chronicle of the past, but also as a way to denounce contemporary colonial relationships inside the US.

The name of the album imitates Black Metal's traditional approach to the binary Nature/Civilization. As Carey explains:

"Akamon" is a very old word; so old that we're not sure if it's Hitchiti or Yuchi, probably pre-dating the Shawnee and Lenape languages. [...] "Aka" by itself means first. "Akamon" means wilderness, as in Earth in her primal form. What we are saying with the title is "Heart of the Wilderness"—this ancient, primal wilderness where we live that you still see glimpses of here and there even in modern times. (Carey 2021: n.p.)

Although implicit, Nechochwen's proposal subtly connects two problematic binaries: the association of Nature with Indigeneity, and Civilization with European Modernity. In doing so, it inadvertently perpetuates colonial noble savage logics while aiming to critique the colonial history of the US. As problematic as it may be in contemporary debates on American Indian and Indigenous identity, Nechochwen's romantic premises embrace a sense of spiritual and cultural politics clearly in line with European Black Metal paganism. Even though specific references to Christianity are nonexistent in the album, a sense of rejection of the Christian values cryptically embedded in the colonial enterprise pervade *Heart of Akamon's* narrative. If

<sup>12</sup> Later it would also incorporate Andrew D'Cagna (AKA Pohonasin) as drummer and composer.

<sup>13</sup> This combination highly resembles Viking Metal's approach to sonority since both intertwine classical metal instruments with culture-specific acoustic instruments.

European varieties of the genre see Christianity as the main entity dissociating humanity from a Gaian Earth, Nechochwen sees the totality of the colonial machine as the destroyer of an American land-dependent cultural ancestry and spirituality.

Already in the first compositions of the album listeners observe this tone. The album opens with the song “The Serpent Tradition”, which lyricizes Deganawida’s<sup>14</sup> prophecy of “The Two Serpents” in which the Iroquois politician and mystic advances the coming of a white serpent that will cross the Atlantic Ocean and will badly injure a red serpent living in America. The red serpent, nonetheless, will eventually be aided by another black snake from the south, which will drive the white one back into the ocean. Although there are different versions of this prophecy,<sup>15</sup> it has historically been interpreted as an anticipation of European colonization of the American continent and the violence inherent to that conflict (see, i.e. McNellis 2010: 6; Ellison 1983: 45). In Nechochwen’s case, the story is used to set up the tragic and elegiac tone of the album, erasing any reference to the black serpent and focalizing on the Indigenous defeat at the hands of the white invader:

As we’ve learned from the past, as has been foretold  
 A great serpent from the sea arrived on these shores  
 Above the mast of a great ship, like a forked serpent’s tongue  
 The pennant swiftly flapped on the east horizon  
 An omen of disease and great despair, as it was foretold  
 They prophesized a sign of sorrow and ruined lives from a distant land  
 With eyes so wide—They saw them arrive with their eyes so wide  
 Fearful of the warning  
 War is waged—Their sole intent, to pierce the heart of Akamon  
 From east to west, thousands fall to endless war and plagues  
 [...]  
 The wisdom of these ancient men, centuries ago  
 To have known of this prophecy, this serpentine curse  
 Otomien wept as the ships came into view  
 Knowing that serpent tradition was true. (2015d)

In this sense, the reinterpretation of the prophecy is twofold. It not only provides visibility to a Native American tale with (anti)colonial semantics, but it values the epistemology of Indigenous spiritualities.<sup>16</sup> Deganawida’s vision does in fact come true (at least partially), opening a period of ethnical conflict in which American Indian communities will be displaced, eradicated, and culturally debilitated. It is also relevant to notice the way in which Nechochwen also maintains the aforementioned colonial ontological binary. Both the colonizer and the Indigenous subject are depicted in essentialized terms: the white man’s “sole intent [is] to pierce the heart of Akamon” whereas the Native population is doomed to be the victim of “endless war and plagues”.

This representation, indeed, ignores the complexities of colonial relationships during the early stages of Northern American colonization,<sup>17</sup> but it displays a straight-forward anticolonial message aligned with contemporary understanding of Pan-Indigenous politics promoting global (or, at least, continental) intertribal alliances. This is better observed in the last song of the album, “Kišelamakong”, in which Nechochwen references pantribalist alliances and their inherent relationship with the Earth’s well-being:

All the nations of Mother Earth (Tula, Turtle Island) honor each other  
 All the rivers of Akamon strive to heal themselves  
 Bonds of kinship and the insect nations drown the chatter of modern man in the chill of dusk  
 The inner silence that fosters true brotherhood  
 A journey within the great mystery that weaves itself through all things  
 An ancient song inside  
 A journey far and wide  
 A womb that brings rebirth (2015b)

In Nechochwen’s conceptualization of Indigenous ontology, the many tribes and nations in America come forward, as forces of Nature striving to heal the land and expel or destroy “the chatter of modern man,” which can be interpreted as a call to develop a sense of Pan-Indigenous understanding of today’s colonial context in the US. Akamon, as a synonym of Mother Earth, bears a fundamental role in the victory against modernity, since she does not only heal herself from the European menace but is also “a womb that brings rebirth,” the material chthonic deity also present in the European imaginary of Black Metal that fosters the reintegration of the human (environmentally, spiritually, culturally) into the Nature part of the binary.

<sup>14</sup> Also called “The Great Peacemaker,” Deganawida was a pre-contact Iroquois political, mystical leader and one of the three founders of the Iroquois Confederacy.

<sup>15</sup> See i.e. Wilson, Edmund 163-164; Peterson 62- 89.

<sup>16</sup> To a certain degree, since, as Garroullete (2005: 172) and Cordova (2007: 113) claim, native stories are normally seen as symbolic when, in fact, most Indigenous cosmologies tend to see them as material.

<sup>17</sup> See i.e. Chapter 6 in Lisa Brooks’s *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (2008) on the different literacy-based relationships between Northeast Indigenous tribes and the Puritan settler state.

There is, nonetheless, one unique aspect that makes *Heart of Akamon* radically different from the ethos of European Black Metal: the lyrics do not praise violence. If Black Metal is characterized by a pronounced appeal to violence against Christianity (Sellheim 2018: 2), Nechochwen's songs are elegiac, with tracks such as "October 6, 1813" mourning the death of Indigenous leader Tecumseh in the Battle of Thames or "Traversing the Shades of Death," which poetizes The Trail of Tears. Rather than inspiring vicious and bloody scenarios with the Indigenous "noble savage" taking the role of a fierce warrior, Nechochwen depicts American Indian subjectivities as "Starving and sick, tormented by shadows" (2015e). Violence (or rather, its effect) is still very present in the album's lyrics with scenes mentioning the battlefield—"As night subsides a day of slaughter and death rages on/When flint meets steel, when blade meets flesh" (2015c). In this sense, most of the lyrical narrative focuses on the devastating consequences of war and only invoking the need for the Indigenous tribes to rise again (although not necessarily through violence): "Let us not forget our bloodshed/ May we rise and find the strength inside/ May the wounds of our fathers/ Be the flame that guides us in the night" (2015c). Here, the fast and distorted sound characteristic of Black Metal, which evokes the violent ethos of the genre, is subverted when contrasted with the lyrics being sung. The melody reflects the aggressiveness of the colonial conflict but the lyrics, rather than calling for total war against the invader (as in Viking metal), address White dominance as something to eventually overcome through intertribal unity and historical memory (as in "Let us not forget our bloodshed"). Nechochwen lyrics encourage a sense of unity through which, violently or not, Indigenous peoples are meant to regain their pre-Christian way of existence in their lands. The spiritual flame that guides the Indigenous 'noble savage' to their cultural liberation, although determined by the "wounds of [their] fathers," does not point toward a new bloody conflict with the settler.

#### 4. Pan-Amerikan Native Front and Hyperviolence

Pan-Amerikan Native Front (PANF) is a solo Black Metal project based in Chicago, Illinois, and led by an anonymous person going by the name Kurator of War. If the latter, following post-Viking Metal rationalizations of music, employs both elements of Metal and traditional Indigenous instrumentation, PANF's Black Metal echoes the dissonant sound of early European Black Metal. It combines aggressive riffs that flow almost permanently in the songs, melodic compositions that remind audiences of death metal and punk, and the sole use of the basic set of instruments in traditional metal music (leading guitar, rhythm guitar, bass, and drums). The studio albums available at Bandcamp<sup>18</sup> also present the low-quality recording characteristic of underground Black Metal projects. Kurator of War's project, moreover, has maintained a stable evolution in terms of sound. His two EPs, *Tecumseh's War* (2016) and *Little Turtle's War* (2021), as well as the two splits in which he participates, *Native American Black Metal* (2020), and *Immortal Ceremonies* (2021) show little to no musical innovation beyond the incorporation of "Chants, percussion and even some punkish rhythmic melodies speak to a somewhat specific culture at war for their land" (Anonymous 2021: n.p.) in *Little Turtle's War*. Lyrically, however, they resemble Nechochwen only in thematical terms. PANF's poetics, as evidenced in the band's name, call for a great inter-tribal alliance to defend the interests of the different Indigenous tribes inhabiting the continent in the most violent way.

Already in *Tecumseh's War*, audiences may observe the gore and brutal tone with which PANF endows the colonial conflict. If Nechochwen focuses on the tragic effects of the battles against the Eastern invader, PANF sets the action in the middle of the battlefield, pervading the songs' poetics with the savage militarism that characterizes Norwegian Black Metal. In most of the songs in this album, PANF encourages an aggressive reaction against the colonial power, idealizing the heroic components of the Indigenous subject of past and present. This is the case of "Indigenous Blood Revival":

Treaties unjust, an insatiable lust  
 Of our hunting grounds  
 White settlers, deceitful peddlers  
 Push them back away from the old mounds  
 Warriors press on, steal all their guns  
 Swift execution in multiple rounds  
 Divert the factions, united actions  
 Push them back away from the old mounds  
 Movements of the Enemy  
 Defiance and Resistance  
 Supreme command, to retake our land  
 This is more than survival  
 Merciless scalping, intimate revenge  
 An indigenous fucking blood revival!  
 Prepare for War  
 Native Vengeance  
 Summon the War Raid (2016d)

The song represents a clear adaptation of Viking Metal tropes to an anti-colonial context. The Indigenous peoples are defined as warriors who ought not tremble in swiftly executing the invader with their own guns

<sup>18</sup> One of the most popular streaming apps for underground music distribution.

and would scalp their opponents as a moral revenge to the massacres that have taken place during the colonization process.

In this sense, Native American subjectivity is represented mainly through a traditional hyperaggressive stereotype of Indigenous culture, conveniently fitting violent (pagan) masculinity in Black Metal. This aggressive understanding of Indigenous maleness has been widely criticized by Indigenous scholars. According to Daniel Health Justice, in conversation with Sam McKegney:

[These are] the models of [Indian] hypermasculine maleness that we get: if the male body isn't giving harm, it's taking pleasure. It's always extractive. It's either penetrative or extractive—or assaultive or extractive. One or the other, there's nothing else. And that is such a catastrophic failure of imagination, as well as a huge ethical breach. To imagine that the male body is only capable of wounding. (McKegney 2014: 79)

Although PANF does not specifically mention that this revival will be carried out by men, this depiction reproduces colonial visions of 'The Indian', an artificially constructed view of the Indigenous subject as a blood-lust barbarian that was in fact used to justify their violent oppression. PANF reappropriates this colonial view and utilizes it to channel his belligerent anticolonial politics in the same way Viking Black Metal opposes the Christian colonization of Scandinavia.

As with the Norwegian variety, these lyrics are permeated with a sense of chthonic relationship between the Indigenous subject and the local land. In the song "Tenskwatawa," Kurator of War depicts the spiritual connotations of the Pan-Indigenous revolution of his poetics:

Prophetic uprising, a spiritual movement  
 United in the signs and omens of our lore  
 Visions of snakes, birds, lightning, and wind  
 Tempest conditions and incantations  
 "I am the deliverer of my people  
 We are the first creations from the Master of Life  
 We must reject the ways of the Pale Face  
 And return to the ways of the Ancient  
 These lands are ours  
 And no one has the right to remove us  
 Because we're the first owners  
 The Great Spirit above  
 Appointed this place for us  
 In which to light our fires  
 And here we will remain"  
 Council fires perpetually kindled  
 To signal a meeting of unity  
 Across all nations  
 And here we will remain (2016e)

In a subversion of the US Manifest Destiny, PANF appeals to a return to Indigenous traditions as a way to oppose to the settler state. The Master of Life/Great Spirit above has granted the continent to the American Indian population, and, in fact, the deity communicates with them through "visions of snakes, birds, lightning, and wind." Their spiritual practices are tightly linked with the ancestral connection of the collective to the land, an aspect that legitimizes the "ownership" of the territory and thus, justifies the need for expelling the white invader. The union between (the Indigenous) humanity and Earth can only be restored whenever the Western ways of territory rationalization and exploitative economy and culture are abandoned.

The binary created by the band is, in this regard, different from Nechochwen's in *Heart of Akamon*. If Nechochwen compares Indigeneity with modernity, "the chatter of modern man" (Nechochwen 2015b), PANF's *Tecumseh's War* observes whiteness and "Americanness" as the main opposition to both Indigenous culture and spirituality. The invaders are only defined either by their skin color (as "White settlers, deceitful peddlers,") or by their formal nationality ("Americans"), with references to "an American Invasion" (2016b), and the "American horsemen" fighting Tecumseh's troops (2016c). The connotations of the term 'America' in colonial contexts are intriguing. Notably, the name itself originates from the settler state rather than any Indigenous language and so, when considering the use of 'America' to define the mass of land it refers to, it inadvertently serves as a means to validate settler claims to the land. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that PANF's Pan-Tribal politics depict the colonizer as 'American' even if both Indigenous peoples and settlers occupy, live and are born in the same space. Another aspect worth highlighting is the way in which, at least in this album, the settler is *not* clearly defined in religious terms. Although the Native subject is constantly being addressed as spiritually connected to "The Great Spirit" and references to religious ceremonies are omnipresent—the song "Tecumseh's Confederacy", in fact, only deals with inter-tribal peace ceremony that united the different tribes of the confederation—, Christianity is not mentioned at all throughout the album. PANF's representation of the conflict, in this sense, differs also from traditional Black/Viking Metal, which tends to specifically endow their lyrical discourses with aggressive appeals to war on Christianity.



There is nonetheless, a reminiscently Christian aspect within “Tenskwatawa,” the representation of the “Great Spirit above”, that appears to inadvertently present a hybrid space between the two colonial binaries. To add some context, Indigenous scholar Maureen E. Smith comments that

all tribes had a single supreme being; often this divinity was not named due to its inherent sacredness. The deity also had no gender since such a concept would be foreign to an entity that bore no likeness to human beings. In near equal reverence was the whole creation. All elements of the Earth and people’s relationship to them were seen as holy, a sacred relationship which necessitated a sacred responsibility. (2004: 117)

The existence of a supreme, all ruling deity is not alien to many American Indian tribes, and so PANF’s depiction of the Great Spirit may be directly link to a real understanding of an American Indian cosmology. However, it is evidently tainted by some of the components traditionally associated to the Judeo-Christian God. Not only the Great Spirit is defined in masculine terms (as a Master of Life<sup>19</sup>) but he also portrays a sense of the classic European anthropocentric behavior. Indigenous cosmologies, according to Cordova, observe humans as dependent on the divine Nature and not as owners or stewards of the planet (Cordova 2007: 115). PANF’s Great Spirit, however, “appoints this place for [American Indians]” and therefore observe the role of humans as owners of the land (“these lands are ours [...] We are the first owners”). For Vine Deloria, this is a fundamental component of a Christian understanding of the spiritual role of humans and an “attitude that has been adopted wholeheartedly by Western peoples in their economic exploitation of the Earth” (1973: 81). This sense of “ownership” of the land, characteristic of European Black Metal in the end weakens the band’s decolonial subversion of Indigenous spirituality, since it still drags some of the properly Christian assumptions that discursively attempts to criticize.

*Immortal Ceremonies* (2021), PANF’s latest collaboration with Australian Black Metal band Kommodus, specifically explores the issue of Indigenous spirituality and its conflict with the Christian dogma. In the three songs that compose PANF’s part of the album (“Kiva Flames of Rebellion”, “Hasan’owane Breathe of Remonstratation” and “Washani Stones of Resurrection”), Kurator of War focuses on questioning both the assumptions of the Christian faith and confronts the role of the Church in the colonial process. Its approach to Christian theology is surprisingly dialectical and not as aggressive as the general tone of his other albums. The lyrics of “Hasan’owane Breath of Remonstratation” are a good proof of this:

Brothers, you say that you are sent  
To instruct us how to worship the Great Spirit  
Agreeably to his mind  
And if we do not take hold  
We shall be unhappy hereafter  
You say that you are right  
And we are lost  
How do we know this to be true?  
How?!  
We are told that your religion  
Was given to your forefathers  
We also have a religion  
Which was given to our forefathers  
You say there is but one way  
To worship and serve the Great Spirit  
If there is but one religion; why do you white people differ so much about it?  
Why not all agreed? As you can all read the book? (2021b)

Here PANF is far from confrontive (white people are even called “brothers”) and simply questions the authoritative politics of Christian expansion. Not only is God not seen as a different deity from “The Great Spirit” but, additionally, Kurator of War questions the very *autoritas* of the Christian religion to impose as an epistemological *sola scriptura* since so many different branches of Christianity participated in the colonial process. Kurator of War’s will to engage in a theological debate with the very enemy that capitalizes the evilness in his previous albums completely disrupts the coherence between aggressive sound and lyrics inherent to Black Metal music. The song’s sound and melody are as fierce and energetic as it could be expected from a Black Metal piece, but the tone of the lyrics is rather diplomatic.

The almost peaceful theological interrogation of “Hasan’owane Breath of Remonstratation” is quickly dismantled in the next song “Washani Stones of Resurrection”, in which religion-motivated violence is again praised and encouraged:

Return of the drums beating like hearts  
Dreams of the ancient prophet’s dance  
Ceremony from the generations

<sup>19</sup> Although the use of the word “master” is contemporarily used as a gender-neutral form, in other songs, such as “Hasan’owane Breathe of Remonstratation”, Kurator of War uses the masculine pronoun to refer to the Great Spirit.

Washani stones of resurrection  
 Lenape guardian, Waillitpu bound  
 Scourge of conversion, rejection of the plow,  
 Decorated war paint, blood stained breech-clout  
 Tear the Mission walls! Burn it to the ground  
 Refuge! There can be no peace  
 Refuge! Shelter from disease  
 Refuse! The gospel from the East  
 Refuse! The service of the priest  
 Then when we die we can not be taken to rest.  
 Then when we die we can not be born again.  
 To be rich like white men, is not the way.  
 To dare to cut off the hair of the Earth. We shall not! (2021c)

Here, Indigenous spirituality is again related to ancestry but, most importantly, the song aims to attack the power of the Christian church in Native land. Even when depicting a far more violent tone than in the previous song, PANF does not attack the proper theological values of Christianity, rather the way in which colonial relationships are imposed in its name. Thus, the authoritarian scriptures and the priests in charge of spreading them, must be refused. In the end, as in Nechochwen's lyrics (and, indeed, much of Pagan-influenced Black Metal) the power structures developed through the Christianization of the Indigenous territory are finally observed as anti-Chthonic, since the Church, and the greedy, individualist weltanschauung of the world they implant, is seen as a way "to cut off the hair of the Earth." PANF's solution, nonetheless, is not driven by rejection of the Christian theology, but of its political and material consequences.

## 5. Conclusion

US Indigenous Black Metal replicates many of the fundamental components of the Pagan and Viking Black Metal varieties developed in Europe. Apart from the obvious musical connections, both American and European styles attempt to retell history from the perspective of the social sectors disempowered through Christian colonization. In this sense, both praise a territory-dependent sense of spirituality that connects the performers (and anyone who aligns with them) to a divine Nature in absolute opposition to Christian ethics, ontology, and epistemology. As seen in the lyrics of Nechochwen and Pan-Amerikan Native Front, the Indigenous view of the world is glorified as the only possible model of human coexistence with the local land. Sometimes more violent than others, both bands vie for pan-tribal alliances as a way to resist US settler colonialism. Indeed, some elements vary from the European conceptualizations of the genre. Rather than focusing on Christianity, Nechochwen and PANF criticize the xenophobic actions of the invaders, along with the unjust imposition of their economic and political systems. They direct their attack to the power structures that generate colonial injustice, rather than demonizing the bases of Christian spirituality. Nechochwen and PANF take different approaches: The former appeals to a sense of resistance based on community and Indigenous tradition, whereas the latter combines these elements with a far more violent and politically combative attitude.

However, both bands may ironically be criticized for representing American Indigeneity from a very colonial perspective. Nechochwen and PANF inherit the Manichean conventions of Black Metal, ones that articulate their discourse developing an absolute binary between the Pagan and the Christian, and thus, end up portraying the Indigenous subject as a noble savage, and Indigeneity as a reverse inversion of Christianity. In order for their discourses to be encoded in the aggressive and bipolar logics of Black Metal, they sacrifice epistemological and ontological nuisance in order to conform to mainstream/colonial depictions of American Indian culture. Nechochwen utilizes the idea of the American Indian subject as almost biologically connected to the Earth (or to the American continent, more specifically), and PANF reproduces the stereotype of the hyperviolent American Indian—along with a problematic understanding of the core aspects of Indigenous spirituality. Ultimately, both bands portray a significant and unique sense of anticolonial politics in their music, despite being tainted by the cultural logics and assumptions of European Black Metal.

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