

**“Sehnsucht” for the spiritual pagan homeland in neofolk: a study on
the deviant white subculture**

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ABSTRACT

Emerging from various of roots such as punk rock, folk revival, and industrial music, the concept of neofolk music is complicated from the start. With its subtle ways of musical expression and themes that heavily stranded in the pagan past, Neofolk is one of the genres where European musicians often attempt connect with their roots through remixed mythologies, certainly stirs the water for European paganism music.

The study intends to exam neofolk music as a cultural phenomenon and investigates the foundations that have been observed in the genre. Additionally, extreme metal has presented a similar case in comparison with neofolk, on their roots, musical mentality and transgressiveness. The essential part of the research focuses on the controversial factors of neofolk. Another attempt is to introduce an open concept for enthusiasts to understand the highly elite nature. The study's aim, in the end, is to lengthen the topic to the reception of paganism and relevant bands, in hope of revealing a more wholesome picture of this milieu. Ethnographic interviews under a semi-structured were taken through a selection of people, who were considered to offer valuable insights to this very topic.

The research discovered that neofolk is not progressive music that complies with many modernist values. In general, it is highly nostalgic, and it sometimes builds a dangerous stance that is easily exploitable for real political extremists. The extreme and transgressive ideas that have been developed within the milieu are often not conveying any actual political purposes and by trying to politicize the music, one would lose its artistic aura. As paganism and European mythologies have already been politicalized by extremists, it is important for musicians and critiques to look beyond the European traditional border and bring in different points of views. Hence, in the end, the study suggests that besides criticizing, a revisit of neofolk-alike white pagan subculture is much needed before the political extremists have completely hijacked the narrative.

Keywords: Neofolk, paganism, extreme metal, nationalism, identity, fascism, nationalism, Sehnsucht, subculture, whiteness, musical milieu, Norse mythologies, Europe, elitism.

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1. Introduction & Methodology

1.1 Research Background

Globalization has immersed every corner of modern activities, no regional crisis is ever again just regional crisis, many facts have been presented to the public: Syrian civil war, Brexit, European massive immigration issues, the bailout of Greece and Turkey. Many have been since asking to themselves and to the society they are a part of, about what to gain and what to give up, is the rapidly growing convenience on information, migrating and purchasing persecuting their traditional way of life and identity? Where to put the old when the new comes around?

As common sense, there are two factions of anti-globalization, which conflict each other yet sometimes yearning for the similar outcome: Internationalism and nationalism. Although, without any specific and authentic case, we are not here to bestow a complete negative meaning for any of the terms above, no matter globalization or anti-globalization.

Nationalism, like many other ideologies, went through transformation in different shades, accordingly to the historical background, culture and context: while the contemporary enlightenment of national identities has deeply influenced revolutionist such as Bolivar and Gandhi around the globe, it also cradled and harbored the extremists that had alternative motivations.

Namely, the search for national identity is practically always about timing. The awakened identities of enslaved in Haiti successfully stroke the French colonial government. The same enlightenment thought that has inspired Haitian revolution had also been driving the unification of the identities in Germany in the late 18th century. Thus far we have come, it shows that it is only natural that people intend to connect with their roots, their origins and a sense of belong. The question is how we process this affection in modern days and to what extent, to refrain from being timely inappropriate narrow and limited.

Nowadays, the national identity as an almost default social consciousness worldwide, its common way is through music, the music that re-sings forebears' tunes, re-introducing national epics and sagas, or just simply praising the mountains, rivers, and forests that one feels the closest to. Years gone by some have become timeless classic, as we see in Sibelius's *Finlandia* and Dvorak's *Rusalka*.

After the ear in the Western popular music with the punk, heavy metal, industrial music and their subgenres, neofolk emerged and eventually stood out amongst them as a unique genre and cultural phenomenon that carries a typical strong impression of Nationalism. In its British branch, *Death in June* (1981), *Current 93* (1982), *Sixth comm* (1986) and *Sol Invictus* (1987) are the "first wave" and founding members of the genre, style and the rather bestilling subcultural communities. Almost a decade later, after the *Mauerfall* in Berlin and the downfall of the communist regime of *Deutsche Demokratische Republik*, arts and music received a larger liberty, on the European continent came *Empyrium* (1992), *Foresti* (1997), *Darkwood* (1999), *Belborn* (2000), *Neun Welten* (2001) and *Nebelung* (2005) who carried more or less the similar spirits and mentality with their British initiators but distinguishing features and messages in convey.

The study is built on the assumptions of which, firstly, neofolk is an acknowledged white and working-class rooted genre of music. Secondly, unlike terms such as "folk metal", where the folk elements serve as an add-in or an influence on the main body of metal music, the word "folk" in neofolk is decisive and functional, as in this case, neofolk is studied as a close resembles of folk music, which would be deprived of its ontological self without the defining element of acoustic folk sound. Disregard many similarities in cultural and musical attributes, genres such as industrial music, white noise, martial industrial. Etc, are excluded in this discourse.

The main idea of this research is to approach the music genre neofolk academically, furthermore, by using this case of the actualization of white pagan culture, hopefully to draw the attention to the reconsideration of European heritage in subcultural music. To portray that, the study focusses at first on the question of "what is neofolk": the dissertation also aims not only to cover the grounds that have been previously located in academic research, but also connecting its meaning and symbolism with heavy metal in the context of popular culture, especially extreme metal and black metal

studies, to pinpoint the similarity and differences between these two genres in their cultural position, meaning and influence. After that, the concept of neofolk is broken down in the context of a subculture, as transgressive contradistinction to the mainstream culture, registering the whiteness in neofolk music and its meaning to the milieu. At next, the paper intends to present a discussion of subcultural extreme music in modern society, for example, the concept of “Sehnsucht” and the construction of the spiritual homeland, combing with interview materials from multiple informants. In the end, the thesis studies reconnoiter neofolk as a part of the white European paganism to its cultural reception outside of Europe.

1.2 Interview and Methodology

In this study, as aforementioned, an interview is desired for collecting first-hand data from relevant informants, hence, a qualitative research method is employed.

“In broad terms, qualitative research is an approach that allows you to examine people’s experiences in detail, allows you to identify issues from the perspective of your study participants, and understand the meanings of interpretations of your study participants, and understand the meanings of interpretation that they give to behavior event or objects, it also seeks to embrace and understand the contextual influences on the research issues.” (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2010)

Qu and Dumay (2011,238-264) point out that a semi-structured interview is the most widely used in qualitative research methods. A semi-structured interview “involves prepared questioning guided by identified themes in a consistent and systematic manner interposed with probes designed to elicit more elaborate responses.”, furthermore, introduced by Qu, Alvesson’s “miner” and “traveler” naturally applied to this interview, similar to the theory of qualitative and the quantitative method, a miner is to retrieve the essentials information from the interview and a traveler is rather to locate himself/herself into other’s narratives. Portelli (1991, 1-26) also reveals that “rigidly structured interviews may exclude elements whose existence or relevance was previously unknown to the interviewer and not contemplated in the

question schedule.” As over-leading, the informants to mine out the desired responses would only hurt the integrity of the progress during the research. Hence the interview conducts under a semi-structured form, the interviewer verifies the research questions with the informants, based on the purpose of the study. There are currently 10-13 questions in this interview. The informants are asked questions that were built in moderated differently forms based on their identities, therefore, questions are shaped into serving the purpose of this research: The collecting method includes face-to-face also via email, phone calls, or other possible methods that informants prefer. The purpose of the questions is to address the attributes of neofolk for its complicity in nature, to discover the origins and controversy, cover more grounds than just Sol Invictus and Death in June and old bands as such; to investigate their thoughts on the common ground of neofolk and metal, opening a further discussion on bands who seemed to have influence from both neofolk and metal. The intention of the interview is to confirm those reviewed perspectives and enrich the content of the whole research, hence, the interview subject is musicians and scholars who have been involved in neofolk music creating and scholars who have given this genre of music academic attention.

The interview questions are designed for the identities and positions of the informants accordingly. For community participants or fans, the first part of the interview attempts to enquire that the thoughts of informants towards what neofolk is for them, the fans are free to express their idea of the concept name the bands they consider that would fit into this genre. Then they are asked for what stands out the most amongst the properties and what stereotype is this genre commonly received, in order to introduce the questions for controversial and inappropriate themes/images. When looking for the connection between metal and neofolk, the questions were firstly to pin down the personal interests of the fans, following with their opinions about similar characteristics and controversies both genres could face. In the end, a discussion about White European heritage music and its worldwide reception are introduced to them. As for bands, besides the basic questions for fans, the talks about their national identities and the understanding of concepts such as Sehnsucht, is additionally featured. As for the scholar, the questions were constructed around his existing theories. Additionally, the interview invites the scholar to deliberate the

notion of scene members' concept of Europe and homeland and how paganism would fit into modern day's standard.

The reason why this study found another research method- quantitative research insufficient, is due to the nature of the method: according to Aliaga and Gunderson (1999), quantitative research is usually seen as explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods in particular statistics. This thesis does not conduct any specific numerically based data, instead, the focus is on the ideas, understandings, and behaviors of the informants. The informants of this interview are Anton Shekhotsov, his disciplinary focuses on the critical study of neo-fascism and right-wing phenomena in Russian/European Culture; Norbert Strahl, a musician who was involved in DIES NATALIS, SEELENTHRON and later his solo project STEIN¹, additionally Pablo C. Ursusson from Galician folk band Sangre De Muerdago. Two fans of neofolk who are from different cultural backgrounds: Ilkka S from Finland and Yue Tingting from China. In the end, the study investigates the case of Chinese folk band Bloody Woods with an exclusive interview from its singer Anna.

The reliability in interviews in qualitative research is widely discussed. The arguments stand on whether reliability is relevant to conducting qualitative research. Stenbacka (2001) claims that the concept of reliability is even misleading in qualitative research. If a qualitative study is discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence rather is that the study is no good. Moreover, Golafshani (2003) points out that reliability is irrelevant in qualitative research because it focusses on different purposes than qualitative research.

In the concept of oral history, interview with informants about certain events and ideas are considered as oral sources. Portelli (1991) believes that oral sources are credible but with different credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no "false" oral sources. Yet, "oral source is not objective", the answers that were given by informants are influenced by whom the interviewers are, and at the same time, interviewers are studied by informants.

¹ DIES NATALIS, SEELENTHRON and STEIN are the project Norbert Strahl has been involved or founded, their names are addressed commonly in capital letters.

Furthermore, Portelli reflects that the ultimate result of the interview is “the product of both the narrator and the research”. In the end, there are two ways of result often occur, one that “does not speak in the abstract but speak to the historian (as the interviewer and research conductor), with the historian and through the historian.” Another one that the discourse of the interviewer is proven through “ventriloquizing” the informant’s responses, the interviewer is as a “partner” in the dialogue, often as a “stage director” or an “organizer of the testimony”. As Portelli’s narrative is on listening from the working class about historical events that truly occurred, it was understood that the working class or the class of nonhegemony, in his words, were the right candidates. The interviews that conducted in this research, concern the affair of informants’ cultural identities, at the same time, over their credibility in this certain topic.

Moreover, the thesis attempts to apply discourse analysis to exam subtle messages in bands’ lyrics, in order to reflect and explore the thoughts and stances and give supplement to the thesis. Stubb (1983,1) reveals that discourse analysis defined as “concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance” and “concerned with the interrelationships between language and society”. Griffiths (2003,43) believes that a verbal space exists in popular music, it was addressed as “tonal music’s phrasing creates spaces which the words in performance occupy.” And is the “function of musical phrasing in pop songs”. The discourse analysis here is in assist of being relatable neofolk bands’ lyrical writing and contemporarily thoughts in Western popular culture texts.

2. The discussion of neofolk music

2.1 The Genre and Current Literature

In this chapter, the study brings in the current discussions and the literature, to exam the roots and the characteristics of the genre. Additionally, a comparison with extreme metal music is discussed also in this chapter, in order to draw out neofolk as a white, deviant subculture in modern popular music.

Originated from the Greek word *nèos*, Oxford dictionary defines the usage of *neo-* in English as the combining form of “1. new 2. A new or revived form of.” Hence, neofolk in its literally meaning, could be understood as a combinational concept that suggests a kind of music that draws inspiration from traditional folk music and vernacular culture.

Folk music is the music of people, which was opposed to so-called popular music and classical music that is being performed in a concert hall. Pegg (n.d) suggested that the concept of folk music is constantly defined based on the needs and political environment, at the same time, Pegg pointed out that by Sharp’s idea, folk music contains two significant characteristics: tradition and oral transmission, which later on was developed into “the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission”.(n.d) Through the development of the second folk revivals, “contemporary folk music” and “traditional folk music” started to segregate in their features and performing venues, contemporary songs are “usually accompanied by acoustic guitars” and traditional ones are often played with fiddles, melodeons whistles, and pipes. However, things did not remain still, Pegg revealed that soon after, the contemporary and the traditional folk music began to intervene with each other in performing styles and sounds.

The music aesthetics of neofolk is also rarely being discussed thoroughly. Current studies are mainly focusing on so-called the first bands of the genre, such as Death In June and Sol Invictus that have directly been in touch with the folk revival movement, punk, and protest songs in U.K. Swedish scholar K. Granholm (2011) believes that this genre downplays the role of noise and electronics and instead focuses on traditional European instruments, acoustic instruments, and themes drawn from old European myth and culture- through electronic material such as synthesizers and samples are often used as well. Which could be understood that acoustic is a key element in the sound of neofolk, if not the most significant. Shekhovtsov (2009) acknowledges the influence of second folk revival, left-wing protest folk songs to the genre, additionally, he added the idea that had theory from Peter Webb and Stephane Francois, that neofolk, is “an emanation of industrial music”. Under the same text, on the other hand, Peter Webb in his book “*Exploring the networked Worlds of Popular Music*” (2007), has more directly pointed out and emphasized the influence of folk, along with another music genres in neofolk:

“The sensational and topical influence could be all the way traced back to The Velvet Underground, especially the singer Nico, her melancholic melody singing style was marked out by Darkwood and Andrew King. and lyrical work, which deals with Germanic mythology could clearly be noticed as Darkwood’s major topic. ; Scott Walker as a pop music impact in lyrics and vocal style; The American band Love, which was active around late 1960s and 1970s was an example on musical variety for the musicians; Shirley and Dorothy Collins is sourced as an inspiration from their version of the English folk that has been reflected in straight vocal style and accompaniments; the 1970s industrial noise band Throbbing Gristle has left a significant marker to what later became Death in June’s Douglas P, who has stressed about how important the album Heathen earth was for him. The Aura and the style could be easily seen in DIJ’s works; Webb at last linked Joy Division’s imagery. Joy Division inspired Douglas P to start his punk band Crisis. Other gestures of Joy Division could be examined from Band Blood Axis had done a cover of They Walked in Line.” (Webb, 2007)

All those features have given a sight of the complicity and fluid nature of this genre, unlike other transcended musical genres, punk and industrial influence is still rather obvious in bands like Sol Invictus and Blood Axis. A great share of artists in the same period would identify themselves multiple types of music (post-industrial, material, noise rock. Etc.) instead of just solitary identification of neofolk, again, this raises questions that if the “pure form” of neofolk, no matter through sound or culture, is easily or possibly to receive a solid definition.

Widely held existing studies have landed on the musical culture and political-cultural aspects of neofolk music, presumably due to the contemporary hyper-political social environment. By focusing on the first bands in the genre, Granholm (2011) considers that artists in neofolk scene are “devoted to the themes of romanticism and old Germanic and Scandinavian mythology and culture and are often aligned with radical traditionalism”. Although without further discussions of the musical connection between black metal and neofolk, Granholm explains that they are closely interweaved in culture: they are both able to serve as “complex cultural systems”, the dynamic structure and ritual resemble highly with religious practice; this system is dominated by heathenism is because of the “discursive trait of rebellion” and he continued his analysis to discover the roots of such rebellion, which lays in the Left-

Hand Path cultic Milieu. Eventually, Granholm pinpointed that such rebellious discourse fits easily with the same mentality in rock music, providing the fact that punk and folk rock has played a major role in the birth of Neofolk, so it naturally applies to it as well. Webb (2007) confirms that similar heathenism topics are appreciated by scene members. His research suggests that organizations such as The Ring of Troth and The Rune Guild have cast their influence on musicians like Michael Moynihan (of Blood Axis), so much so, Moynihan was once an editor of a paganism magazine named *Tyr*, which featured a great amount of the pioneer bands of the scene.

Another major point on the attributes of neofolk, which has nearly not been excluded by anyone who took an interest in this culture, is the controversy and ambiguity. With strong roots in traditionalism and heathenism that serve as portals as the artistic inspiration for many musicians and songwriters, soaking themselves in the (forged and imagined) glory of the old years, it comes with certain overwhelming side social effects. Webb (2007) confirms, that heathenism could easily lead to provoking “more conservative and traditional thoughts” and certain ideas within this milieu “can be interpreted as anti-humanist, nihilistic, traditionalist, and even fascist or racist.” Shekhovtsov considers that the spirit of *Waldgang* by Ernst Junger is a part of the neofolk mechanism to express their rejection to the modern world. *Waldgang* is interpreted “retreat into the forest” while “stay on shipboard (to use technological progress to their advantage)”. Heathenism and traditionalism here also play the part of rejecting modern society, and by Junger, the forest was “a symbol of supratemporal being” and *Waldgänger* “could resist the corruption of the interregnum.” (Shekhovtsov, 2009). Shekhovtsov (2009) points out further that this idea behind neofolk and “Apoliteic” music although is to rebel both modern world and perhaps Christianity, it does not represent their will to simply return to the “mythologized past”, instead, what this traditionalism leads to, is “alternative modernity” of their imagination. When describing a similar musical cultural phenomenon-heavy metal, Scott (2013,228-243) has offered that the term of apolitical:

“[It] can be understood in a range of ways, all of which need to be made sense of in the context of human social being. It can mean that one stands outside the political, but that is dependent on defining the political in a particular way. It can mean that one is apathetic towards politics; that one does not accept it as a binding feature of

human relations, denying the power of the term over oneself and as a description of certain kinds of human relations, when the apolitical becomes a sort of political stance itself.” (Scott,2013)

For the purpose of this research, it is essential to know that art is almost inseparable with politics, as “art is the fountainhead from which political discourse, beliefs about politics and consequent actions ultimately spring”(Edelman, 1996, 2), as people who were born into a certain political environment, regardless protest or embrace, the art is always connected in a way with politics contemporarily nor serve the only function of entertainment like folk music used to be in vernacular culture. To neofolk scene members in majority, as exhibited above although many are attempting to detach with current politics by denouncing and denying any sorts of links with the extremists, in a way, such statement has now also foraged its own political stance.

In order to partake to the understanding of this milieu better, one needs to place oneself in a different setting by familiarizing the texts where most of the reference comes from, in other words, particular part of the history, contemporarily political and social environment, moreover, to investigate and classify the fandom under this (sub) culture. Shekhovtsov (2009,439) suggests that apolitical music carries “its own cultural manifestation in the domain of sound” and explained that “this is a type of music in which the ideological message contains obvious or veiled references to the core elements of fascism but is simultaneously detached from any practical attempt to implement that message through political activity”. Because apolitical music is characterized by highly elitism stances and disdain from “banal petty materialism”, which confirms that scene members and “conscientious” fans’ overwhelming characteristic of elitism that their imaginary utopia never stopped ceasing to be a fantasy. Taking the aforementioned discourse of Waldgang into consideration, or perhaps that the most of “aristocrats of the soul”(Shekovtsov, 2009) needs to know themselves that no matter the message was obscure or transgressive, a fantasy is eventually a fantasy: Harry Porter fanatics realize that they would never receive the invitation to Hogwarts, however, it seems to matter very little to them for being conscientious.

2.2 “Acoustic extreme metal”-the neofolk Connection with extreme metal music as a similar musical cultural phenomenon

Kennet Granholm (2011) acknowledges certain connection lies between extreme black metal and neofolk music. He suggested that black metal is more than just a music style: “it can provide sets of ideology, meanings, and practices for its adherents and in essence function as a ‘complex cultural system’”, which shares high similarities with neofolk. Fellow researcher Karraker (2012) verifies furthermore in his master’s thesis about Polish black metal scene by quoting from a former member of Behemoth Baal Ravenlock: “I hail Poland as the land of Slavs, as the territory of the Pagan culture and the sanctuary of nature. I hate today’s face of this country...” Members in the same scene presented strong rebellion of the so-called “new world order”- European unification under Brussels and global capitalism, which in coherence with the strong presence of anti-modernism in neofolk. Although the selectivity in this common path is obvious, what Karraker pointed out that with this traditionalism-nationalism in Poland’s extreme black metal culture, many members proceed their fantasy on anti-Semitism and white superiority, while on the other hand, in neofolk milieus, instead of more direct aggression as in extreme black metal, musicians show little to none direct racial agenda, instead, more of an obscure rejection to modernity and their connection to the Romanticism and Naturism. Romantic folk band Nebelung’s Stefan Otto states: “These moments in nature are also the moments from which Nebelung drew its primary inspiration. Somehow, we always tried to reproduce this feeling, capture it in music and verses. As this feeling was by experience mainly connected to nature, also the imagery we used to recreate this feeling upon were elemental or naturalistic. With the new album, we wanted to take the first step in disconnecting this feeling from nature, and trace it back to where it actually resides, back to the subconscious.” (Interview with Heathenharvest.org, 2014)

Forseti’s Andreas Ritter approves that: “Thus I am certain that I too, possess of some romantic motives: The connection of nature and spirit, nature mysticism in general or even the recommence to pagan cults, sagas and folk poetry and so on. However, I am well aware of the time I live in, I do not dream about those excessively days of the

past, days of the grand, but of course I look forward to them.” (Interview with ikonmagazin.de, date unknown)

Evidentially, these two scenes share a thought-provoking past, Danish band *Of the Wand and the Moon*'s mastermind Kim Larsen has previously been involved in Doom and Death Metal scene (Black Wreath); (Use-to-be) Black Metal band Ulver released a famous acoustic album- *kveldssanger* that has been listed as inspiration for many scene members both in black metal and neofolk, such as Kim Larsen (Peekapoo magazine, 2018) and Stefan Otto (themidlandsrocks.com, 2014) and German “dark folk” band Empyrium, which took off their musical career as a Doom Metal band. (Death metal underground, 2013)

With these being noted, it is rather vibrant for one might approach the milieu and its culture under the similar light or extreme metal culture studies in terms of deviant subcultures, of course, at the same time, one should also be acknowledging their existing differences.

There is no doubt that early neofolk bands present controversial images, and so-called controversies can be defined as the activities of individuals or groups making public claims about conditions that are perceived as threat to certain cherished values and/or material and status interests. (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, LeVine, 2013). In the same article, controversies are also described with four elements: materialistic, public, discursive-symbolic and subjective. Along with this analysis, it is possible to discover that the music is, firstly, controversially artificial constructed. Secondly, ANTIFA the public activists' group, have claimed on their website that bands such as Death in June are fascistic and disfavored by them, hence constitutes the controversy. (antifascistfront, 2015) Thirdly, the fact of “signature” bands from the early 80s are facing censorship in many countries, for instance, in Germany and Israel due to the hyper-sensitive social and justice vigilance of any suspicion of far-right images. Hjelm, Kahn-Harris and LeVine (2013) deliberated that controversies are subjective as the last element, furthermore, its perception to inappropriateness, deviance, and threat can be independent of the actual conditions, but they could also be triggered and create concern. The differences are: dissimilar with heavy metal culture, neofolk has always been intentionally or non-intentionally ambiguous in its topic, in its feature, presenting a lot more complication than heavy metal also. Aforementioned early

British neofolk demonstrates usually many contradictory factors within, they are politically radical but bidding to dislocate from the actual political events; it is occasionally extremely provocative but also one can easily see that most of the bands attempt remain a low-profile, as it is connected with both metal and neofolk's nature to stand outside of the modern society and politics. The occasions are even rarer for mainstream media to cite neofolk as its existence is not as obvious as heavy metal. So far there is not a massive on-going public debate yet known focus on neofolk and its relevant genres when one of a few times mainstream media do mention the music, it is associated the murder case of German radical right-wing party NPD along with gothic culture (Hooper,2002). Interestingly, based on the nature of these two genres, metal music seems to be suffering from "collateral damage" once it is somehow associated with neofolk, for example, black metal band Agalloch (along with their *Jewish* booking agent) was called out as a "neo-fascist supporters/sympathizers" by Antifa Rose City while being on tour with Austrian band Allerseelen. (Pitzl-Waters, 2010). Of course, it does not mean that there were no scandals in this matter, Sol Invictus' Tony Wakeford issued renouncement of his connection with Britain's national front:

"Many years ago, I was once a member of the National Front. It was probably the worst decision of my life and one I very much regret. However, I have no connection with, sympathy for, or interest in those ideas nor have I had for 20 years.

A number of friends and musicians whom I work with (including my wife of 8 years), my bass player, my percussionist, and engineer/producer, would be at best discriminated against or at worse dead if a far-right party took power.

None of the artists I work with hold such views either, and I doubt they would want to work with me if they thought I did." (Webb,2007)

Webb reports that also Wakeford seemed to abandon his old points of views as his wife and producer is Jewish and Sol Invictus' bass player is openly homosexual.

As many scene members, Larsen directly denies association with any right-wing ideologies:

"To be honest I have seen very few artists in the neo-folk scene that has a right-wing agenda. But I can only speak for myself. Of The Wand & The Moon is not

a political project. Neither do I have/or had any interest in making it so. Be that right-wing or left-wing. I know there are a lot of accusations flying around these days. Or rather I guess it has always been like this. I'm getting a bit weary of this, to be honest. I bet these people's grandparents were appalled by Elvis Presley's moving hips and his devil's music. And their parents were probably in terror of David Bowie's, Throbbing Gristle's, Marilyn Manson's use of Oswald Mosley's lightning bolt logo. And the punks use of the swastika. It's like saying 'Schindlers List' is a Nazi movie because it portrays that period in time. Or listening to Wagner makes you a Nazi. People are so thin skinned. They should try to relax a bit in my opinion."
(M.S, 2017)

When the perception of two genres is resembled as such, perhaps that the music styles as the carriers of the culture could be temporarily overlooked while analyzing two identical subcultures. Simply put, to view neofolk music, or European folk bands as a subculture similar with heavy metal, musicians would prefer a varies of different alias to somehow deprived far away from the frame of neofolk. Granholm (2011) cited that the similarities between black metal and neofolk. He claimed that many so-called neofolk musicians have had a black metal background, the two genres of music, at the same time, they do share the same audience, venues, online communities, and media.

“Acoustic black metal” is a term to attract the attention, in order to recognize the two mind-liked subcultures and in order to discuss more on how we should perceive extreme subcultures per se in today's world.

It was understood that in the article “heavy metal as controversy and counterculture”, the talks of controversies in the metal subculture are an explanation of a cultural collision between mainstream and a subculture. Hebdige (1979) considered that a subculture, once became recognized by the mainstream, it begins to die. The article of Hjelm ended with “metal is going to be their whether you like it or not”. Hereafter, conceivably that subcultures could carry transgressive attitude to mainstream culture as part of its own identity, although given different national context, the transgressive degrees might vary. Agreeably, being mentioned by both Scott (2013) and Keith-Kahn Harris (2004) that metal (especially extreme metal) would do whatever it takes to stay as metal, one could perhaps comply the same with neofolk: it would take

whatever it takes to stay as neofolk, additionally, it would try as hard as to look like that it is *not* trying at all.

3. Neofolk music as a subculture.

3.1 The deviant subculture

This chapter explores neofolk as a subculture element in popular music. The focus is to highlight how neofolk serves as a deviant anti-establishment subculture with overwhelming whiteness, to discuss the phenomenon and reason behind the controversies.

The subculture is distinguished from the mainstream culture by denouncing or rejecting a certain common value that is being promoted the majority mass culture. Middleton (1990), quoted from David Riesman, illustrated that “subculture sought a minority style and interpreted it in accordance with subversive values”. As a result of the 1960s, folk revival and 1970s punk movement in England, the early neofolk music is naturally afflicted with and started as a subculture from its roots. To Shekhovtsov (2009), the idea of traditional or folk music revival was seen as counterpoint to popular (commercial) music. The controversial idea of “Europe is dead” in the example of Douglas.P- one of the initial definers of the scene in England, embedded with the idea of “excluding oneself from mainstream” subcultural context. Furthermore, in early neofolk music culture there was a group of musicians who associated their music with conservative ideology and images while the European Union was vigorously forging its political power, at here, to those musicians, they likely viewed the rapidly changing society and erecting new powers as the part of the culture they would throw themselves against to. Wakeford in the interview with Peter Webb, when asked about promoting the pre-modern Britain and traditionalism, answered: “That, I think, would be true of a lot of the earlier work but more recently I... I mean I would like to say that there are great themes that I return to, lack of originality being one of them.” He went on and concede the shifting of his own version of traditionalism:” with the traditionalism, that is very different because now

if you say you are a traditionalist with the new right and stuff it is immediately a tag for stuff I'm not interested in at all.”(Webb, 2007). Andreas Ritter from Forseti, on the other hand, expressed his loathsomeness to the modern world although somewhat euphemistically: “The changes in values, which have occurred in the last few years or perhaps (even) decades or centuries are explained by many as a decline in values. One can decide for himself what he thinks of that.” (ikonenmagazin.de, 2012)

Corresponded to the “Waldgang” (retreat to the forest) correlation of *apoliteia* that Shekhovtsov (2009) has initially pointed out, bands which the study tried to include also the present substantial impression of naturism. Ritter's Forseti has delivered this message clearly by bestowing upon the lyrics with a vast amount of natural and pagan element (Forseti the name itself is a pre-Christian Norse god of justice):

Schattenhafte Nebel steigen,
Die aus feuchtem Boden dringen,
Hüllen diesen Tag in Schweigen
Und am Horizont, mit Schwingen,
Blutbetaut, zur Nacht gereift,
Baldurs Traum die Erde streift.

(Shadowy mist arises
From the moist ground
Shroud this day in silence
And on the horizon,
the night grew with wings with bloody dews
Baldur's dream touches the Earth.)
(English translation by the author)

Osgerby (2014) cited from Howard Becker that “deviant” subculture is the production of social forces and relationships, and “deviant” for Becker, pointed out also by Osgerby, “was not a quality inherent to particular behavior, but was a socially constructed category, a pejorative label applied to the actions of certain individuals who then come to identify with the negative categorization.” Hedbige (1979) considered that subculture is margined, it is “in the expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups- the teddy boys and mods and rockers, the skinheads and the punks-who are alternately dismissed, denounced and canonized”, where he also implied a semiology transformation of how the subculture is viewed by public: “treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons.”

Douglas.P at an interview confirmed his will of being excluded of mainstream culture in his upbringing:

“There was emptiness...There was a vacuum. You have gone through the 60s, then you had the glam rock period for a while in Britain, but there was nothing really outside Davie Bowie and rock scene music you could have acquainted to...nor there was any sort of chance to being involved in the real way rather than just being a spectator.” (Douglas P, 2004)

Regardless the perception of the scholarly or personal approach of the music, if one is to generalize this genre, it is undeniable that neofolk carries or shares many deviant subcultural elements in music, such as gothic, industrial, punk and folk.

The ideology of early neofolk is also a working-class struggle. Granholm suggested that neofolk as to its early definition is a strong-rooted working-class radical traditionalism combined with a romanticism that longing for old times, has transcended to a level of collectively denying the new Europe under the new order after WWII. In this way, this ambiguous mentality that eliminates Europe’s or Britain’s modernity and rediscovers the mythology of old times, aided scene members to construct their own imaginary utopia in the form of subculture. Osgerby (2014) has noted that the underprivileged social position of working-class youths excluded them from the mainstream culture and its avenues to status and success is a vital reason for the birth of the subculture.

Undoubtedly, the acknowledgment here is not to defend the usage of controversial images nor toying with the fringe of extremism, merely to point out that this unique musical and cultural phenomenon is a concussion and aftermath of vast social change. Since the music is heavily associated to white European heritages, the existence and development neofolk is inappropriate and questionable for the thoughts and ideologies that are being kept in mainstream culture, it is caused by both the attributes of neofolk and the unavoidable characteristic of as a subculture.

The whiteness in this subculture is obvious and, on the surface, the genre looks indeed very much like a group of frustrated white men who have picked up the guitar and started to call for the glory of ancient times, but since the topic is about subculture here, the study suggests a more thorough examination of how whiteness affects this milieu.

3.2 Whiteness and European identity as the controversies

Dyer (1997) mentioned that when Western classic artwork portrays white in both painting and literature and proverbs, vocabulary such as “innocence, purity” and “triumph, light, innocence, joy, divine power...” etc. had always raised. Then, the conflict and the dull anguish at here is obvious: the obsession of Norse and other European pagan gods amongst scene members have in a way promoted the image of the white gods, who are relatable and effortlessly could be potentially associated with paintings such as *Cleopatra's Arrival in Cilicia*² by William Etty³, in another way indirectly deepens the issue of Dyer's notion on Otherness- everyone has ethnicity except the whites. For instance, in *Death in June* and *Sol Invictus*' Roman complex and Foresti's Germanic pagan themes, even without knowing the artworks of Romanticist painters such as Mårten Eskil Winge⁴ and Emil Doepler⁵, in popular culture, the portrays of Norse gods and goddesses are naturally white (even though

² See: <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/cleopatras-arrival-in-cilicia-102500>

³ William Etty (1787-1849). A British artist from Royal Academy of Arts, who is best known for figures of nuditities.

⁴ Mårten Eskil Winge (1825-1896). A Swedish artist who was highly influenced by the Norse mythology.

⁵ Emil Doepler (1855-1922). A German Art Nouveau illustrator. The designer of German eagle.

Ragnarok gods in different skin hues in Marvell's Thor movies as a cultural mash-up is recently brought to the eyes of the public).

To deconstruct European whiteness and receive a better picture of it in the music, we must venture into an unavoidable dark past of Europe-colonialism. Since Columbus' "discovery" of the American continent, the gains of colonialism had driven European whites into the socially construction and stratification of narratives on their favor: European male dominance in colonial lands, conjunct inferiorities of other races and female through building theories of craniology, comparative anatomy and phrenology (Fee,1979) (Fausto-Sterling, 2001) (Stepan,1993), as a result ,pseudo-racial and sexual studies that originated from colonialism still pounding the society we live in nowadays; because "the Other or Otherness is the process of creating a separate entity to persons or groups who are balled as different or non-normal due to the repetition of characteristics" (Mountz,2009,332-333).

As one of the important sermons of many different kinds of racism, especially inegalitarian racism, which also came from the colonial period and promoted by colonialist Europeans. Besides white colonialism, white christianity is also a topic worth mentioning when it comes to comprehending whiteness in the western narrative in general, religious prejudice served the same function alongside the Otherness in colonial times. Melvin and Sonnenburg (2003, 496) noted that Catholicism and Protestantism were the religions of the European colonial powers, it could be understood as a reinforcement or an attribute of the certain hegemony at the time.

If the advanced sailing ships, cannons, and rifles opened the physical border of the colonized lands, Christianity was the weapon of the mind that "introduced" European values: ways of life and social standard upon in the indigenous groups with a sense of superiority and God-playing. Falola (2001, 33) applied a quotation from Jan H.Boer from Sudan United Mission, describes: "...by sharing the blessings of the Christ-inspired civilization of the West with a people suffering under satanic oppression, ignorance and disease, affected by a combination of political, economic and religious forces that cooperate under a regime seeking the benefit of both ruler and ruled".

Moreover, Christianity marched further in colonial times to whereas the major force of colonialism had not reached, a treaty between the Second French Empires and China's Qing empire after the fall of Tianjin along with British empire, at the year of

1858 regulated that French missions could be spread out in-land of China where France did not have colonial power, and the local government officials had to protect and host the missionaries with hospitalities (Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China, n.d).

Based on these, the study assesses the key concept of many bands in the scene-so called “Organic Europa” (Shekhotsov, 2009), to register the idea that causes the most controversy. Traditionally, Europe is an already idealized concept and its definition keeps change or expand. In the time of *Alexander the Great* and later on the *Roman empire*, Europe was merely concentrated in highly civilized Greece and Italy. Then again, Norsemen and Germanic tributes were commonly considered as a part of the original European identity, especially on their polytheistic paganism beliefs and glorified masculinity. BOTH were highly mythologized and canonized through paintings, arts, fictions and recently via the complex of popular cultures and modern technologies.

What obvious here, is that the concept of Europe also differs, highly depending on different bands and the influences that scene members have received. That is to say, in neofolk, the idea of Europe is not consistent, nor it was organized. Although one thing that could be said is that many scene members did fancy of look for their personal concepts of Europe. Anton Shekhotsov (2009) prompts that many scene members (whom he calls “Eurofascists”) indeed were struggling with the image of “new order” after Second World War such as the imaginary united Europe of Martial industrial band *Folkstorm* and *Toroidh*’s Björkk. The theme of “woe was Europe” also applies to the case of Germany’s Darkwood’s trilogy albums by rather less oblique connection to the suffering that was upon the continent during the war.

We can confirm that certain kind of extremist image has been rooted in and haunted this scene and obviously creates shocking reactions and controversy when brought up to the general public. However, in Shekhotsov’s article, although the clue of “Europe in interregnum” (2009) reminded us that Junger’s legacy will most likely keep influencing neofolk/martial Industrial bands. For bands that focus on more on naturalistic themes, usually take place with the frequent presence of pre-Christian gods and historical mythological references, their Europe or imaginary homeland perhaps stranded somewhere else.

When Forseti addressed this issue, the image of Europe was (partially) romanticized into the Greek myth goodness, *Europa*:

Europa, Europa

Wir können nur wandern und bluten dabei.

Im Schlachthof Europa:

Nur sterben macht frei

Ein Heil dir Europa, ein Heil in den Tod.

Wirst niemals erwachen,

Wirst bringen nur Not.

(Europa, Europa,

We can only wonder and bleed, in the slaughterhouse Europa:

Only perishing breaks (you) free,

A blessing to you Europa, A salvation in death,

You will never wake up.

You will only bring distress)

(Translation by the the author)

It could be quite possible that the lyrics above concern the modern “Europe has dead” in Shekhotov’s term, however, alternatively, there is the direct reference to the scene of “Rape of Europa” in mythology, where Europa the goddess was tricked into having a relation with Zeus, she ended up waking up in remorse and regrets and wished to use death to wash her shame. There are many details are open to interpretation: the calling for Europa’s death and slumber would be in a huge contradiction if the “Europa” indeed falls into the Eurofascistic terms to have a “palingenesis” of the identity: *Au contraire*, the actualization of Europa as a slaughterhouse brings a sense sympathy of what Europe has suffered through in his ideas, or what people in this land have agonized by stronger leading political powers such as the Third Reich. Compared to DIJ’s “Mother Europe

was slaughtered”, one may find challenging to pin down an organized or reasonable frame for such yearning of Europe in their illustration.

It is fair to assume that Forseti’s “Organic Europe” (Shekhotsov, 2009) stands explicitly in the old and mythological times, which itself is suggestable that perhaps it is separated from all modern touches including Colonialism and Capitalism. By setting the art aura and environment distant from many current concepts, especially in the time frame of the misconduct and agonizing that was built on other group’s suffering, Forseti closeted their work up in a Euro-centered, pre-colonial imagery homeland to locate their “Sehnsucht” and that is what perchance the term of apolitca justly means to the band. The dilemma here, for this blending subcultural concept of Europe is, that pursuing the identity of the past could be easily manipulated into a subtle message of the hate to the forging new European identity. Although the concept of such white paganism itself is rather race-less, or at least racial purity or ethnical identity was not the foremost agenda. In pre-colonial times and before the global awakening of the national identity, the concept race was considered non-existing, until the 1600s, people identified themselves with languages and religions (Williams, 1999, 211-230). Therefore, from its roots, if the paganism concept was to be exploited for political reasons would damage the so-called authenticity itself, at the legitimacy, it is questionable that such exploitation essentially concerns to the pagan cultures that are stated here.

In the different case of German band Darkwood, they presented their longing for the pre-Christian influence, although with an elusive twist: in their song “*Wittekind*” from the album *Flammende Welt* (2001), several of Nordic mythology characters was featured:

*Ich will den Gott im grünen Eichenkleid,
ich will den Gott, der dumpf im Donner schreit,
ich will den Gott, der lichten Lenz mir bürgt
Und will den Eisgott, der die Sonne würgt,
ich will den Gott, der Blitzes Peitsche schwingt,
der meines heil'gen Waldes Sturmlied singt!”*

(I wish for a god in the green oak dress,

I wish for a god who cries in thunder,
I wish for a god who grants me the spring of light,
And I wish for a god of ice, that strangles the sun,
I wish for a god who swings a lightning whip,
My holy forest sings the song of the storm!)

(Translation by the the author)

Written by Robert Hohlbaum, the reference is dated back to Germanic fictional figures such as Ēostre, Goddess of Spring, Thor, Odin and Ice giants. DW does not shy away from citing from this Austrian librarian and his fantasy. Differently, while both romanticizing paganisms, and the theme at first, seems to be detached from political contents, however, the hidden and obscure messages echo the connection with the Third Reich and the war. It appears that R.H had written the poem with no clear political agenda from just his words, however, as a cultural bureaucrat under the Nazi regime, R.H has had a clearly favorable stance on anti-Semitism (Dennis, 2012, 99-100). Thus, it is fair to assume that by quoting from Hohlbaum, DW would have beforehand learnt that the Wittekind theme was appropriated by Nazis as a propaganda tool although the focus of this character differs: in the time of the fascism: many plays that have been written on this romanticized pagan hero was emphasizing his unification with other Germanic tribes. However, to Hohlbaum, the theme of this poem is absorbed on Eurocentric paganism and anti-Christianity and that fits what Darkwood presents. In the end, the figure of Wittekind matters little in this case since it raises many questions for the inwardness of the band. DW's Vogel in his interview with heimdallr.ch expressed vaguely about what did cripple Europe in his idea- Americanization and American intervention to traditional German culture:

“So ‘Flammende Welt’ rather deals with the end of WWII and the American influence on the German self-confidence thereafter. And after 11th September, a new period of devotion and submission to the American omnipotence and infallibility has started. Now everybody seems to be backing up America in a war against Afghanistan though they cannot even give a single reliable proof for the truly responsible people. To me, the terrorist attacks are the predictable result of American politics throughout the

last 50 years. The title "Flammende Welt" - which means 'World in Flames' and 'The Inner Enthusiastic World' at the same time - was meant to invoke a strong feeling for our cultural and historical heritage regardless of any anti-German propaganda. "

(Interview with Heimdallr.ch, 2002).

As a band with rather controversial topics, DW's "organic Europe" is alarmingly placed abstractly before Marshall's plan for Germany and before Germany became a fortress for Americans to defend the Soviet Union, when Germany has already lost the war. He especially emphasized that he has given out a "warning" to Europe about the downside of Americanization by using Japan as an example, in his eyes, Japan had gone through "cultural genocide" with the occupation of the U.S. Vogel naturally denies any glorification of war and claimed that the DW project focuses on the "dark side of the war, if there is another (side)". DW's music is indeed obsessed with war and death, while playing an Eulogy for their idea of Europe, Vogel at the same time offers his passion and longing towards the homeland in his concept as he thinks that he stands on the land of Nibelungen ("*rings um mich ist Nibelungenland*") and accuses those who forgot their roots ("*Verachte den, der Heimweh nie gekannt*" - I loathe those who do not know the pain of homesick) in a bittersweet tune. Disregard the intention, this representing Eurocentric Sehnsucht that appears to be lodged in many neofolk bands. (Darkwood, 2006)

3.3 "Sehnsucht" in the subculture of neofolk

Linguistics has yet located a proper translation for the German word "Sehnsucht", Doktorchik (2011,2) insists that the breaking of the compound word "Das Sehn"- Longing or yearning and "Die Sucht"-addiction still fails to explain the whole meaning of the word. Scheibe,Freund and Baltes (2007,780-786) cited the feeling of Sehnsucht as "a high degree of intense (recurring), and often painful desire for something, particularly if there is no hope to attain the desired, or when its attainment is uncertain, still far away", within this definition " utopian conception of ideal development" and "ambivalent emotions "are the two of most important core characteristics when it comes to the milieu. Regardless the way how the word "folk" in "neofolk" is

interpreted, or how musicians address the nature of their work, the music this study pays attention to is all connected through certain nature of nostalgia: some woe for a fictional golden era of Europe; some long for a firmly grown forest, others simply express their sense of loss and desire of the far away land.

The feeling of Sehnsucht has always been intertwined with music historically, as “this deep emotional state has been expressed throughout the Romantic era in literature, music and art and is the quintessential emotion of the 1800’s”(Scheibe, Freund ,Baltes,2007),which happen to coordinate with the era of forging German national identity , also the global movement of national identities forging. Particularly, in the genre as such in “Waldgang” music, the feature of Sehnsucht is straightforwardly dominating: identical within the romantic literature, many scene members have become “resistance to change” that corresponds with aforementioned discussions of how representative musicians dwell on modernity, their work of arts represent a “desire to return to an ideal but unattainable place.”(Scheibe, Freund ,Baltes,2007). The concept of “unattainable” is considered critically important to understand the spirit of the music, it needs to be a common sense for romantic writers and audience, as well as to post-modernist music critiques-this unrealistic longing is forged based on the *different* experiences that lodged in life and personal philosophy. Furthermore, the aura of Sehnsucht is placed on its detachment with reality, much like Walter Benjamin’s idea of the aura in “mechanical reproduction” arts, it would disappear in the progress of individual’s or collective’s Sehnsucht is entered the mass reality, or found its way into actualized politicization, no matter voluntarily or not. (Benjamin,1968)

Because the highly-elitist nature, when regarding to the ever-changing political-social climate, and fast developing technology and information society, scene members who are bearing the feeling of Sehnsucht in arts and music is likely to face (in Doktorchik’s words) “harsh reality of the world” and try to locate their inner peace in romanticized ways. As to what exactly this harsh reality could be, it is a common conception that it could be the multiculturalism and migration, especially for some right wing rock bands who convey the similar music patterns with neofolk, in the example of Finland’s *Pyhä Kuolema*, which initially marked itself with radical political entitlement. The solo project had a split with the Finnish *Oi!* rock band *Vapaudenristi*, which was a rarely precedent in the neofolk realm. PK also openly associated and supported an NSBM band, Goatmoon, in an interview (Pöyhönen, 2015). In this case, there is no denying

that how effortlessly this sense of the abstract lost and yearning for the traditional way of life could be concomitant with actual politic agenda, providing the musician does not initially avoid it. Moreover, according to Mikko Pöyhönen from PK, he searches for a “mythical Finland-not something that has been lost, but rather something that is yet to be found”, compared with similar sounding bands’ nostalgia sensations, PK’s yearning seems to beget in the future, with a rather questionable and unspeakable plot. By stepping a foot out of “Wald” and openly takes a rather political stance, the band breaks its aura of essentially relevant to neofolk music, which is “apolitical”, music for such bands simply reduces to a tool of propaganda, a goal to chase for. Yearning as such is in equivalent with what Shekhovtsov (2009) reveals about “Metapolitical Fascism” which in its concept “focuses—almost exclusively—on the battle for hearts and minds rather than for immediate political power.” At the same time, a direct construction to Jünger’s “stay on shipboard”.

Certainly, the concept of Sehnsucht in this music does not conflict with the mentality of “Metapolitical Fascism”, the relationship between them is rather delicate; fascism could be well hidden behind the name of Sehnsucht as “biological racism became totally discredited in the post-war period, and it was ‘no longer possible to speak publicly of perceived difference through the language of ‘old racism’” (Shekhovtsov, 2009, 438) and yet Sehnsucht for dreams of individual in life, for pagan nature and for the unknown future could also be evidentially expressed with nothing adhesive to Fascism. Whether expressing discontentment to the harsh reality ticks all the boxes of Fascism and Nazism, ground researching and attempting to understand the world of the subculture is always favorable before pursuing further reckless social vigilance.

For some bands, obviously the inner peace is their imagery homeland “Europa”, which did not comply with historical accuracy nor would it likely exist in the near foreseeable future. For others, this concept could be varied, in Foresti’s “Müder Wanderer- An exhausted wanderer” (2004) had a grasp of such romanticized peace with countless natural elements:

All mein Sehnen weicht entwirrt

Hin zum Abendgold, versinkt

Jeder Schatten länger wird

Und verlockend winkt

Leise schlieÙe meinen Kreis

Sternenlos und mütterlich

Nacht, die nichts vom Morgen weiß;

Komm, umarme mich!

(All my longing and desires yield to untangle

and sink into the golden light of the night

Every shadow lengthens,

and temptingly beckons.

It gently fastens my arms

Like a mother.

The night, that knows nothing about the day

Come, put your arms around me!)

Longing for nature has been extensively dealt in Romanticism since the time of *Enlightenment*. Many natural-themed bands such as Forseti and Nebelung leave a clear trait of such influence that was originated two centuries ago. Following Ud-din Sofi's elucidation (2013,81) that: "These [Romantic] writers all make appeals to nature as if it is some kind of living entity calls made for nature rescue the struggling and carrying his ideas to the world. Romantic poets love nature and celebrate in its various dimensions." The connections of using forest or nature as a getaway of "Metapolitical Fascism" are there amongst the scene members, but solely from deep romanticized nature scenes, some of the bands are at least presented more impressions of romantic poets than hardcore ultranationalists, or as Shekhotsov justified that while some of them may be synchronized with the "legacy of Jünger", other might "simply like forest" (2009).

Jünger however likely did not invent the concept of retreat into the forest and nature, other than remixing and transcending it into a different narrative. Oosthoek (2015) advocates that “back to nature” complex in Romanticism could result from the impersonal productive machine which turns people and nature into objectives and commodities. Therefore, hypothetically with notions of Nationalism and conceivably initiated with hints of Eurocentrism, some scene members presumably felt the need to rediscover themselves and their homeland again.

At the next chapter, the study exams the thoughts and ideas of the informants, who either played significant roles in their field of study, music or have been passionately interested in neofolk for a reasonable amount of the time. Coalescing with the current knowledge that was acquired into this study, discussions are followed by their answer to venture further into the characteristics, spirits, and thoughts behind this genre.

4. Perspectives for neofolk from the inside of the scene.

4.1 Discussion from scene members and community members.

This chapter brings the studied literature and phenomenon into verification with the informants, to discover their thoughts as the community with first-hand information and closer experiences. At the same time, here it attempts to combine literature findings and collected knowledge from the informants, endeavors to answer research questions.

It was familiarized that the origin of neofolk, at least, for the earlier initiators, could be traced back to a great amount of the variations on their inspirations. Listed out influences arrived from folk music, folk revival, punk, industrial, post-rock etc. The study designed questions to informants differently based on their identities, with the intention of presenting concepts and views of their version.

Norbert Strahl, a German musician who was previously the founder of the German neofolk DIES NATALIS and SEELENTHRON, now on his journey of exploring his

new solo project STEIN, gladly accepted my interview request through with passion and great friendliness.

DIES NATALIS's name comes from an ancient Roman pagan group that worshipped the God of the Sun and Dies Natalis Invicti Solis was their day of celebration of the immortality of the Sun (Sol). Seelenthron (Throne of Soul) has been recognized as DIES NATALIS's side project or Strahl's another persona in music creation. However, in this study, the spotlight focuses on Strahl's personal experience as a European rooted musician, instead of analyzing his projects.

Strahl at first, acknowledges the multiple influences of his music, both from the great minds of the rock music and origin of the neofolk scene, moreover, like many other earlier scene members, he highlights punk/post-punk music as one of his earlier inspiration:

“When I began creating DIES NATALIS with my cousin, we were certainly influenced by these bands. Predominantly SOL INVICTUS, DEATH IN JUNE as well. However, the influences for me can be traced back to my youth, which was marked by Niel Young, John Lennon, and Leonard Cohen. And also Punk Bands from former East Germany (DDR). Mostly DIE ART, SANDOW, KALTFRONT and DIE FIRMA. Bands, who put a large emphasis on their lyrics. Lyrics were not simply written down thoughtlessly but were full of hints, metaphors, and content making sense. An outstanding performer of the time, GERHARD GUNDERMANN was also an inspiration. Mostly known in eastern parts of Germany, he is now gaining notoriety by a movie”

(Norbert Strahl, interview by the author, October 30th, 2018)

From above, the thread of his musical journey is seen to be extraordinarily clear: it waves from initiators of neofolk music, punk rock under DDR. What worth noticing here is that the mention of Gerhard Gundermann, who lived a life of rock/folk musician and an attempted left-wing politician (Der Spiegel, 1998). At early years, Strahl's experience had a rather high resemblance with, for example, aforesaid Douglas P and Tony Wakeford, who have gone through the similar influence in the taste of music, and assumingly even on the spectrum of political points of view at a premature stage.

One of the informants from the fan community, Tingting Yue, is an active audience and members in certain part of German neofolk scene. Since she has moved to Germany

from China for study, she has befriended scene members of different kinds, including Seelenthron. While acquainting with the musicians, her fluent German language skills have also assisted her to receive vast insight into the scene. Like many fans in Asia, she discovered the music genre through the internet and located her connection to this music, given these backgrounds, the study places trust that she is capable of providing valuable information from a different angular.

Yue firstly made comments on how she perceives this genre:

“Before I answer this question, I would like to emphasize the difference between darkfolk and neofolk (for me there is a difference). Neofolk is more like a music genre based on traditional folk elements combined more or less with some kind of political orientation, while darkfolk focuses more on nature. Representative neofolk bands, in my opinion, are for example darkwood, orplid, belborn, sol Invictus.”

(Yue Tingting, interview by the author, August 11th, 2018)

Yue attempts to separate bands that are less political and label them with the title of darkfolk. In a way, it reflects the ambiguous attitude of the community, knowing that there are some bands are stranded with a transgressive attitude even without stepping into actual politics. Fans are of course, free to interpret the music according to their own identity and experiences and it is happening subconsciously either way without being even immensely acknowledged by oneself. She later went on and explain why:

“As I said before, I have the impression that neofolk has some kind of political orientation, usually it’s conservative, but it doesn’t need to be extreme. Darkwood’s music, for example, has a strong patriotic vision. Some bands do express their ideologies in their works, but it depends on the artists.”

(Yue Tingting, interview by the author, August 11th, 2018)

Her point is valued on the notion of stereotypes and misconception that have been labeled to this genre, the study has gone through and at least partially proven that some bands are tending to have more affliction on active politics, some tend to have little or none. It is not certain that if the genre is evolving, given the short history and the long span of album producing gaps. Some musicians have clear hesitation when it comes to being labeled, Pablo C. Ursusson as the lead singer and mastermind of Spanish folk

band Sangre De Muerdago denied his connection with neofolk during the request of the interview, he described:

“I don't come from neofolk music, and was never involved in that scene, yet I like something like 2 or 3 bands... with this I just want to say, that I'm not sure if I'm the right person for this, it all seems very "neofolk" for most of it, let me know if I'm mistaken.”

(Pablo.C Ursusson. Email message to the the author, October 10th, 2018)

It is highly debatable that if SDM could be, or willing to be included in the milieu, and the study highly regards the opinions of all informants, thus the approach comes from a European background acoustic band that detached from all the aforementioned neofolk influences, in the end, Ursusson has kindly agreed and answered the interview selectively.

The third informant, Ilkka S, as a member of a small scaled fan base in Finland for neofolk, also a general alternative/underground enthusiastic, provided his ideas as a fan who was brought up in Europe:

“I see neofolk as a kind of a strange fusion of industrial aesthetics and '60s / '70s (and to a varying extent traditional) folk music. The industrial aspect of neofolk is most noticeable in the more 'avant-garde' sections of the recordings such as samples (often martial), noise, provocative themes and the overall image of neofolk bands/artists. The song structures and the instruments used in neofolk arrangements are often rather minimal and are for the most part inherited from contemporary folk. Besides folk and industrial music, neofolk sometimes has some post-punk influences too, audible e.g. on early Death in June albums.”

(Ilkka S, interview by the author, August 8th, 2018)

When it concerns about the attribute, said by Ilkka S:

“Neofolk arrangements are usually somewhat minimalistic. Most common instruments are acoustic guitar, drums, sometimes synths, horns, samples etc. The ambiance of neofolk music is almost always somber and melancholic. Neofolk album art largely revolves around themes that are historical or somehow mysterious in nature. Common subjects are statues (with connotations of ruin and past glory), ritualistic

arrangements and poses, religious symbols and figures, old photographs (often of soldiers) etc. The common feature of these subjects is in their gesturing to the past or else to something unseen or unreachable, evoking a tragic feeling and enhancing the sense of mystery in the music.”

(Ilkka S, interview by the author, August 8th, 2018)

Dr. Anton Shekhovtsov as one of the very few scholars who paid knowledgeable attention to this phenomenon, provided a brand-new perspective about neofolk, during the phone interview, he claimed that:

“Neofolk is not folk music, it is a completely innervated tradition, has very little to do with folk music as such, they use some folk elements, as neofolk is much closer to industrial and post-punk, it is just sometimes they use very simple instrument, but it has very little to do with folk music...”

One of the first terms for this kind of music is apocalyptic folk but in this sense, [the word] folk is rather played with words because folk also means people.”

(Anton Shekhovtsov, interview by the author, October 3rd, 2018)

To understand the “folk” as people instead of the music is indeed compatible with the spirit of the music. The discussions about the *palingenesis* of their homeland(s) could be the voice that originated from a group of people with revived Europeans, the folk of elitist that applies music to against modernity, even the meaning variates to them individually. Unlike other informants, for Shekhovtsov, the form of neofolk is not just limited to the melody and instrument, instead, is the “metapolitical fascism” mentality that channels these “folks”:

“There are people who address the scenes and represent the scenes or manifested in neofolk music, but they may choose many different genres to play, it is not only you can just through neofolk and martial industrial music, you can manifest your ideas through different types of music obviously.”

(Anton Shekhovtsov, interview by the author, October 3rd, 2018)

It is palpable that Shekhovtsov experienced differently about neofolk, as a scholar who focuses on Russian ultranationalist and fascist studies, he ventured into the music with a

diverse perspective and in the published research he has indeed provided thorough opinions, yet he acknowledged himself that he has not been following the scene for a while. Here is another example of the ambiguity of the thousand faces of neofolk, certainly, all information is regarded equally and favorably, and after all, the intention is here broaden the insight of the subculture instead of debating the authenticity of the music.

Many factors have pointed to that the ambiguous nature of this milieu lodged from vastly different life experience, and it plays a vital part that varies to difference themes, topics that a musician would choose to accost , consequently, neofolk transmits certain notion that is rather challenging to grips and that is precious why sub-groups as “doom folk” “pagan folk” or “apocalyptic folk” emerged. For Strahl, this personal and family “Sehnsucht” or nostalgia is the main theme of his music: in Stein’s album at 2010. The cover is a black and white picture of a small child, who was Strahl’s son- Lorenz Klinger. This solo project was also meant to dedicate Strahl’s grandfather, Geogry Thom and his poems from 1911-1936 (Coldspring record, date unknown). In a way, the neofolk band Stein, unlike his any previous bands or any other, was based on the memories and trauma of family, that serves as a nostalgia element. As himself explained:

“My inspiration has always been based on my experience, my family, my life. The surroundings in which I grew up. Perhaps the differences [with bands like darkwood or sol invictus] are not that severe.”

(Norbert Strahl, interview by the author, October 30th, 2018)

It is worth noticing that different experiences, cultural backgrounds, positions they are in for this music are different, the concepts and perspectives that informants provide hence diverge. However, it seems that there are some highly synchronized recognitions, which also confirms with the literate findings: neofolk indeed has multiple sources of the influence, from rock’n roll, punk, post-punk, post-rock and folk revival. The disagreements stand on the later stage of metamorphoses within the genre.

4.2 Europa calling...into the woods! -The characteristics of neofolk.

Oxford Dictionaries define that “distinctive traditions, culture, language, and politics” are the representation of one’s national identity. Compared with the Norse saga and the time of Nibelungen, day to day language of their life is in no doubt, closer to the scene members and the inspiration of their yearning. The informant suggests that the authenticity which connects more unswerving to himself in music is his native language:

“I can, however, only write honestly in my mother tongue. My English texts are full of clichés and mistakes, they are missing my passion.”

(Norbert Strahl, interview by the author, October 30th, 2018)

In the original interview in German language, Strahl employed his own word “(die) Heimatsprache”- the language of the homeland, instead of the more common “die Muttersprache”- the mother tongue. Given the proper consideration, this language of the homeland is unlikely *only* pointing at the pride of the German language, instead, it is Strahl’s own dialect, a dialect that plaited with personal memories of joy and feeling of lost in time, a monologue that not even other German speakers would necessarily understand. Similar patterns are vastly prevailing in other bands in this milieu, especially in the cases of provocative images, quotation, and lyrics. Strahl’s example could have given a picture of the reason for ambiguity in neofolk, without acquiring enough information, the misconception is easily taking place in this high contextual subculture, even so called “conscientious fans”. For instance, in one of Nebelung’s fan upload in YouTube, a user praised Germany for both wars on the comment session, and the fact was that the lyrics of the song “Die Roder” was cited from a female Jewish poet, Gertrud Kolmar, who was arrested and sent to Auschwitz and murdered there. (Krick-Aigner, 2009)

Shekhotshov informs and re-elaborates that the strong presence of elitism in this culture, which could explain the high contextual fact that was mentioned above:

“Yes, sometimes they are singing about the past, it is not about folk music. neofolk musicians, those [who] manifested apolitical music, and they tend to be elitists and anti-egalitarian.”

(Anton Shekhovtsov, interview by the author, October 3rd, 2018)

With many other scene members alike, Strahl shares highly romanticized emotions towards his homeland/hometown. Although to him, this concept is a lot more specific than, for example, a glorified Europe:

“(The German identity) It's everything. When I see the landscape of my homeland, where I grew up, I can feel that the music, the melodies, and texts could have only come from there. For this, SEELENTHRON has a higher emphasis. For DIES NATALIS I was only one part and couldn't contribute much to the texts. My own content has only been apparent during the journey of STEIN.”

(Norbert Strahl, interview by the author, October 30th, 2018)

Ursusson has similar highly romanized approaches of identity in music, at the same time, he emphasizes that while connecting with his own identity, alienating others are disapproving:

“I've been born in Galicia, I grew up there, I feel it is home, I feel rooted in its soil when I'm there. Yet, I don't know if I'd call it Galician identity, that's not really our case. Nowadays the words nation and state are often mixed for one another, and I think it is as well often used as an evil weapon against peoples not sharing that identity.

I believe it is important to know where home is, to know your background, history, cultural heritage, etc... I think I could maybe say my “Galician identity” is in the mountains, rivers, fauna, shores, sunsets, fiords, music, poems or peoples of the lands where I was born and where I grew up, and these have actually inspired a huge amount of music I've written, either for SdM or other musical, lyrical or plastic arts.”

(Pablo C, Ursusson. Interview by the the author, December 12th, 2018)

Romantic Nationalism within music is unquestionably another challenging topic to bring in. It is acknowledgeable that it is unfortunately often recognized as a pathway to the extreme right, this research here is not to offer any sympathy to any sorts of extremism and fundamentalism that would surface to the public realm, as previously stated, the intention of the research is to put this element under the spotlight, exposing it to post-modern humanistic values. Obviously, Ursusson has drawn the line with such type of romantic ideology, yet, it would be unfair to use the label of any kind of radical

idea of “Nationalist” or “Anti-egalitarian” to Strahl limited to the content of this research. According to him, his fondness for his homeland was originated in the scenic nature rather than urban environment or online sphere. Seelenthron’s entire album “Heimkehr” was dedicated to a love story in the theme of returning to a home of his childhood dream. Perhaps the words of Johann Gottfried Herder of “Strum und Drang” movement would illustrate better:

“Everyone loves his country, his manners, his language, his wife, his children; not because they are the best in the world, but because they are absolutely his own, and he loves himself and his own labors in them.” (Johnson, 1803)

Yue provided her perception according to her own experiences in the German scene and her background as a Chinese:

“I think it’s fully understandable [for Europeans to pursuit their heritage in music], although in extreme cases it could become a kind of Eurocentrism. Expressing one culture in artistic works does not mean discrimination of others. Patriotism would usually be described as an honorable thing in Chinese propaganda, while in Europe it could easily be interpreted as ‘far-right’. Actually, the neofolk artists I have met so far appear [to be] quite open to other cultures. So, it’s very different between countries, depending on how people get educated.”

(Yue Tingting, interview by the author, August 11th, 2018)

However, indeed within the spectrum of neofolk, there are features that highly resemble ultra-nationalism according to Roger Griffin’s (Blamires, 2006,452) concept of “through deeply mythicized narratives of past cultural or political periods of historical greatness or of old scores to settle against alleged enemies”. On the other hand, the study believes that Griffin referred to a motion of ultra-nationalist propaganda and the vital point is to earn political favors and public support, which has not yet been perceived in this subculture. Additionally, as stated in the previous chapter, the words of Shekhotsov (2009) - “metapolitical”, neofolk’s contour of fascism or “ultra-nationalism” is very much out of the practice of the actual political arena. Therefore, at least during this research, I have failed to discover any direct evidence of any artists associating with any type of strong political leadership. Additionally, Griffin (1991)

stated that ultra-nationalism is often “will be one great leader who battles the representatives of the old system with grassroots support.”

For Stein or Seelenthron and bands alike that did not intend to politicalize their creation and quotation, unquestionably made a strong case of the vastness of the topic could be brought into this genre. Strahl himself made a decisive disclaimer between his music and any political intention:

“I cannot and will not politicize my texts. The chasm between poetry and current day-to-day politics seems too large to me. Also, this is not the purpose of art in my opinion. We carry our heritage within ourselves and bring it further by text, music, art and our way of life. To be honest, I hate politics, as it destroys the mind and soul.”

(Norbert Strahl, interview by the author, October 30th, 2018)

Anti-modernity is one of the most essential spirits for many scene members, different with the spirit of anti-establishment in many other genres, Shekhotsov confirmed in the interview that this scene is anti-establishment, and modernity is, sometimes the Americanization of Europe, similar to aforementioned the interview of Darkwood has stated:

“For them, Americanism is sorts of an embodiment of liberal ideology, although it is not entirely true because being a capitalist and at the same time egalitarian...these are very different things... still at least in terms of human rights and all humans are equal. This is what they oppose because they are being elitist, not all of them but many. So, I think this is how the anti-capital sentiment and anti-Americanism sentiment can be explained.”

(Anton Shekhovtsov, interview by the author, October 3rd, 2018)

Ilkka S verifies his finding of radical traditionalism to be applied as a tool against conceptual modernity, he threaded carefully and told that this information came from only a few bands he has taken interests in:

“I know that at least Fire + Ice frontman Ian Read is interested in radical traditionalism, though whether that is a strong political agenda, I couldn't say. At least it involves values that are in opposition with some of the liberal values of today's

society. He doesn't seem to use the band to actively promote the practice of that ideology, but the music and lyrics of Fire + Ice are often compatible with the ideology.”

(Ilkka S, interview by the author, August 8th, 2018)

When inquired about the idea of the “Waldgang”, as a key concept in the genre by Anton Shekhotsov, Strahl asserts that he does feel the strong connection between the nature/forest and himself, it is again with the hefty impact of personal experiences and memories:

“I've only started late to contemplate Jünger. The forest has been a temple for me since the experiences of my youth. My luck allowed me to grow up in the countryside as part of a village. The forest was our playground, haven and hiding spot... a friend. Later in my life when I struggled to overcome insurmountable obstacles, I went into the woods, looked for those places and became well. Found healing. This energy is not comparable to anything else. In the song "Abendgedanken" by SEELENTHRON I describe a place just like that.”

(Norbert Strahl, interview by the author, October 30th, 2018)

The misanthropic attitudes towards the Waldgang differentiate apolitical artists with right-wing fascist activities, at least given the case of Norbert Strahl. Amongst the words that he expresses the resentment to modern politics and admiration of the nature in his hometown, at the same time, it seems that his intention was to find inner peace and heal instead of a symbolism, this actual physical and spiritual contact with the forest is reflected on the song “Abendgedanke”-Thought of the evening:

<i>“Sitze hier an</i>	Here I sit
<i>dieser Stelle, die ich schon</i>	on this place that I already knew
<i>als Kind gekannt.</i>	As a child
<i>Warte auf des Morgens Helle,</i>	Awaits the morning,
<i>die für den Tag das Dunkel bannt.</i>	To banish the dark for the day.”

(Translated by the the author)

These sorts of natural worshipping lyrics often lead to the talk of paganism, which is another vibrant notion in neofolk. It intertwines often with the concept of “Waldgang”, as the forest is the place of ritual for many pagan naturalists. All informants during the interviews have established the link directly or indirectly between neofolk and paganism, which is in alliance with works of Granholm and A.S in literature finding part of this article.

Yue believes that neofolk provides a mentality for people to connect with themselves, and to nature. She emphasized multiple times during the interview that neofolk has a strong theme of naturalism:

“[neofolk] It shows us an ancient or a modern world of nature and culture. A lot of Neofolk bands use not only romantic poems for their lyrics but also a lot of elements of legends and [Pagan] folklore, which could make people think about their own nature and culture...”

I would define most bands I like as darkfolk, so usually in their music, there is less political agenda but more feeling of nature. The German neofolk/darkfolk band nebelung, for example, created a world of the forest. It feels like walking in a European forest in deep autumn while listening to their music. This darkfolk music cures wounds. It's like a balsam for the soul.”

(Yue Tingting, interview by the author, August 11th, 2018)

Ilkka S validated such personal experience to an extended detail, which complies with Strahl and Yue's words:

“Lyrical themes in neofolk are varied, but more common ones include history (mostly European), literature, philosophy, ideology, religion (most often christianity or some kind of European paganism), nature, emotions and personal struggles etc. Often more personal subjects are juxtaposed with the historical.”

(Ilkka S, interview by the author, August 8th, 2018)

As the informant stated above, in neofolk, just like much other musics, there is not one united and set the theme about history, the same band is likely to address different topics in different songs/albums. Being highly personal is another feature that has been pointed out (again) by both interviewed musician and fans, and obviously this does not

apply only to this subculture, exploring neofolk is sometimes to connect with music as itself, as Sociologist John Blackling (1990, 146) claimed that “Music is essentially about aesthetic experiences and the creative expression of individual human beings in community, about the sharing of feelings and ideas.”

Shekhotsov recognized that paganism is essentially an anti-establishment notion under European narrative, both in neofolk and in much other alternative music:

“Pagan beliefs and heathen beliefs very often rooted in alternative music, not necessary Neofolk or black metal, because alt music by definition is anti-establishment, concerning religious beliefs, in Europe would be Christianity, if you go with alternative religious, that would be either a varies form of satanism or paganism, as a bit more positive religious beliefs, in contrast with satanism, in any ways it is just a rejection of Christianity.”

(Anton Shekhovtsov, interview by the author, October 3rd, 2018)

Along with previously listed lyrics and Webb’s description of his discovery of paganism and occultism, it is to say that paganism in neofolk is more closely to the rejection of Christianity or Christian states as one of the modern realities or establishment they view unfavorably. Given the nature of this genre, which presents strong interests on lingering on selective historical topics, therefore, it does not seem so remarkable that some scene members see Christian states or political power as an obstacle on the way to connect with their authentic roots.

In contrast with Christian white power groups such as “Christian identity” in the United States, which is initiated with a political orientation and based on an interpretation of strong racial prejudice (Barkun, 1997, 202). We must acknowledge that the paganism in cited reference would likely reject all types Christianity, both fundamental and moderate, either apolitical or political.

Also, compared with black metal musicians who wear corpsepaint with blood and bullet belts on stage, burning anti-cross or churches in their lyrics, the study fails to find any direct connection between neofolk music in this series of references with satanism of any level. With minimalistic mellow tunes that rid of the industrial sounds and highly contextual lyrics. If so, according to Keith Kahn-Harris, that metal is “transgressive”, perhaps neofolk is entitled to be “passive-transgressive”.

All informants except Shekhotsov have confirmed the association with metal, especially on extreme metal.

Ilkka S considered that the links between these two genres are “natural” and he went on building the connection through numerical different points:

“There are few things in common between black metal and neofolk, for one thing, both are essentially underground subcultures with no hope of (nor, in many cases, the aspiration to) rising to the mainstream or even close to it. In comparison with for example more commercial style of heavy metal, both black metal and neofolk are very obscure genres. I also think that both black metal and neofolk share the idea of embracing that obscurity, that there is even something to be proud about in it. In this way, black metal and neofolk are similarly ‘elitist’ genres... both black metal and neofolk explore themes of paganism, occultism, nature mysticism (and more generally non-christian spirituality). There is also a common tendency to shock or provoke, though black metal bands are often more straightforward about it. neofolk provocation is subtler; even when infamous and “dangerous” symbols are used, there is no aggression present – they are contrasted with melodic, mellow strumming of acoustic guitar and calm singing. The lyrics contain no message of hate, at least not on the surface. In a way, this contrast might be more startling than the in-your-face approach of black metal.”

(Ilkka S, interview by the author, August 8th, 2018)

Ilkka S here stated a few imperative perspectives: with no desire to emerge to the mainstream musical realm, it raises the question to the level of the impact on the society. For subcultures as such, the spectacle of elitism is beyond the style of music itself and possesses a deep loathsomeness to mainstream popular culture is exactly what reinforced this elitism. Members from both extreme metal, neofolk scenes and their fanatic audiences are elitist in their own ways, this has been confirmed by A.S as well in his interview. This is due to that metal is considered also as apolitical music, and as an underground based subculture, members usually do not participate in aim for the financial rewards or the fame. From topic wise, these two genres strike shocking resemblance, this as well confirms what Gronholm claimed that the radical traditionalism exists amongst genres.

Strahl directly articulated his relationship to metal music and pointed out something else that is common between these two genres:

“Metal has always been and will be a part of my musical career. With black metal, I do have some issues, however. The satanic or pagan alignment definitely overlaps with neofolk.”

Unfortunately, also the sometimes with extreme national socialistic tendencies, which I personally despise, and which sometimes make me despair. Since everybody within the scene is pigeonholed and has to suffer from stereotyped thinking, it is a constant battle to not fall prey to.”

(Norbert Strahl, interview by the author, October 30th, 2018)

As he established, besides the paganism association, because sometimes the extremist ideology that has implemented into the genre, both two genres are experiencing from stereotypes. These two genres both present a complicated and murky image, as some of the criticism indeed is credible. The rest of them are again, highly depending on the background and the intention of the interpreters. As thorny as the situation goes, it is debatable whether musicians in apolitical music should involve themselves in a “constant battle” to fight so-called stereotyping, like Olson (2012) already clarified that “[black metal] seeks to create transgressive identities removed from both the modern world and constrictive notions of self and other”.

Yue believes that there are some bands located between metal and neofolk:

“There are some bands like Empyrium and October Falls [are] trying to combine black metal and neofolk/darkfolk, and the music sounds really harmonic. A lot of black metal and neofolk bands express their love to nature, but apparently black metal focuses more on ‘metal’, so more electric instruments would be used.”

(Yue Tingting, interview by the author, August 11th, 2018)

Anton Shekhotsov in his interview suggested an opposite point of view:

“Empyrium is a [kind of] music with acoustic guitars, they are not coming from the neofolk scene, they are coming from the metal scene. For me, Neofolk as a musical genre is not just what people are playing and how are they playing...You cannot just

come from metal and start to play neofolk, this is not really possible. Neofolk is originated from post-punk, from industrial, not from metal... and empyrium is a metal band, it has its roots. So, I don't consider them as neofolk."

(Anton Shekhovtsov, interview by the author, October 3rd, 2018)

With these opinions, he, however, did not completely deny the connection of the immanence:

"With black metal or extreme metal, there are maybe some political connections or apolitical or apolitica connections, sometimes you see in black metal music, sorts of hints to the same scenes being employed or represented by some Neofolk musicians, I will not be able to come with particular names now. There are some overlaps between some scenes in black metal or extreme metal and neofolk, not many. The thing is, there are people who address the scenes and represent the scenes or manifested in Neofolk music but they may choose many different genres to play, it is not only you can just through Neofolk and Martial Industrial music, you can manifest your ideas through different types of music obviously."

(Anton Shekhovtsov, interview by the author, October 3rd, 2018)

As a scholar who specializes in the study of right-wing ideologies, it is understandable for Shekhotsov to see that music is merely a carrier of the spirit behind the message. Music style and the manifested messages are a different topic that needed to be reviewed thoroughly, as the focus of the study is not on the composing materials, but a cultural assessment, Shekhotsov's idea is essentially suggesting that neofolk and metal could convey very similar messages. This association is still debatable between genres, but there are some structural frameworks which strongly suggest that they are in fact identical in terms of musical subcultures: There are indeed correspondences between broadly extreme metal music and neofolk music, both of them shows strong representative of paganism and anti-establishment (in terms of anti-modernity), coalescing with both of the subcultures are deeply rooted in self-determined elitism. At the same time, with these features, certain transgressive extremism is often spotted and criticized.

4.3 Neofolk- the controversy of fascism and traditionalism

From the ground that was previously established, it is known that the working-class roots of neofolk originated from punk and post-rock music. Along with it, the predominant whiteness and derivative talks with fascism have been almost always where the spotlight focused on.

When addressing this issue, Ilkka S, as a fan with European heritage stated the reasons of Whiteness from his points of view:

“There are three main reasons why I think that Neofolk is mostly ‘white’. First, because it began in Europe and is a very obscure genre without much potential for a wider audience, which virtually precludes it from gaining much following outside of Europe. Second, because it has some of its roots in traditional European folk music and European contemporary folk, both of which are for the most part rather ‘white’ music. Third, because the themes and subjects of neofolk are often concerned with rather ‘European’ themes, such as European history, European philosophy, and literature etc.”

(Ilkka S, interview by the author, August 8th, 2018)

With its disdain for mainstream and no desire to achieve major commercial success, many bands have limited themselves to similar topics and even musically there has little variation to be seen. The topics they approach require a vast amount of knowledge or special background to spark one’s interests, from the perspective of growing a fan base or being commercially sustainable, neofolk is nowhere near to be compared with its comrade-metal music.

Anchored in the middle of the storm of the sea of constantly waving cultural warfare naturally causes rattles. Currently, targeting only limited scaled of a white audience, no matter they are political or not, raises many questions. Spracklen (2013) presented a debate on English folk music, some renounce it because of the traditionalism of Englishness and some passive link between a musician and British right-wing party BPN, and others argue that English Folk music “was the product of multiculturalism and left-wing revivalism in the 1960s, exactly the modern trends Griffin and the BNP

rejected.” Hence, it is neither abnormal nor exaggerating to see sparkling comments on the debate of fascism when this particular genre was brought up.

The notorious employment of controversial images and references from Death in June, Darkwood etc. initiated a series of reaction from governments (DIJ’s ban in Germany), scene members, and social vigilantes to even fanatic audiences. Ilkka S provided his insight of the glimpse at this controversy:

“They deliberately create a mysterious atmosphere making it difficult to fix a meaning to the use of the provocative material (and I think that this is certainly an attribute inherited from industrial music). Neofolk artists seem to sometimes link provocative images or expressions to introspective subjects in an almost solipsistic way: for example, the infamous song ”Rose clouds of the holocaust” by Death in June is supposedly about some kind of personal hardships experienced by Douglas Pearce of Death in June (or something like that). The song title doesn't refer to the Shoah (says Pearce), but uses the original meaning of the word in the sense of a burnt offering (though I do believe that the song title is deliberately sinister-sounding with its connotations).”

(Ilkka S, interview by the author, August 8th, 2018)

This finding confirms the discussion in the literature review, that the controversy in the music is originated from the oblique and ambiguous attitude, and the provocation to modern society. Hence, at least two streams of neofolk’s anti-establishment could be spotted clearly: besides the “Walgang” –retire from the world, there is the oblique provocation. Since certain subjects are highly sensitive, or to hold vital as the cornerstone of the moralized, civilized society, provocation towards these topics comes naturally as the tool of opposition. This spirit is essentially the same with other more favored anti-establishment music although the difference lies on the concept of “establishment”, and this establishment change depends on one’s country of origin, education background, and social class. We have established that neofolk is a white working class rooted music, from this perspective, the establishment is likely to be the “liberal” and “Americanized” Europe (of course, they are both highly debatable concepts themselves), and likely an anarchist punk band would nowadays see European institutions or local government as the agents of establishment but in a completely different light, and the definition of the establishment is perhaps one of the biggest

conflict now impacting people's point of view on the evolution of popular culture (and more).

From an outsider (of European politics) point of view, Yue advanced on the segregation of dark folk and neofolk, with the intention to draw a line between the adhesive of Europe and others:

"I would say [that] Neofolk won't be able to, but darkfolk could be [to carry themselves further than Europe]. Neofolk music has always been conservative, people think Neofolk bands are right-winged or even far-right. But since darkfolk focuses more on nature and human beings, it can be accepted by more people and be played everywhere. Every country has its own special natural and cultural landscape."

(Yue Tingting, interview by the author, August 11th, 2018)

What I understood from Yue was that she tries to distill naturalistic bands out from neofolk, in order to provide more rooms for a vaster range of topics for more unconventional bands such as Nebelung and Empyrium. Her opinion reflects directly at what Strahl has referred about the stereotype that first few bands have brought into this genre.

Unlike the traditional English folk music that Spracklen (2013) referenced to, neofolk has a space for maneuver in terms of topics to a certain degree. According to Ilkka S:

"Even in the early Neofolk albums, there were some (rather superficial) non-European influences, for example, a song about the book 'Hagakure' on a Death in June album. Douglas Pearce of Death in June has also been largely influenced by the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima. While the non-European influences have been so far few and selective, they're still there, and I don't see why they couldn't be expanded."

(Ilkka S, interview by the author, August 8th, 2018)

In a way, it is indeed possible that Douglas P alike had cherry-picked the topic that fits into the theme of music, especially the case with Yukio Mishima, a romanticist /militarist Japanese the author who staged a failed coup d'état in 1970, intended to drive the post-war Americanization out of Japan and restore the power back to the Emperor. It is difficult to tell that if DIJ was truly into Japanese culture, however, Yukio Mishima was favored by Douglas P not only because of his extremist attitude, also because of his

sexuality: “[Yukio Mishima and Jean Genet] not only because their work was brilliant but that they were also gay. It adds so much” (Interview with Occidental Congress, 2006). In the other way, given the nature of neofolk, it is highly unlikely that a band would include non-European influences into its music for the sake of correctness and diversity, as clearly, for musicians like Douglas P, political correctness is usually not something they would consider at first when it comes to their themes or topics.

Neofolk music is, no doubt, proven to be easier to be exploited by extremists. The talk concerning fascism and correspondingly, racism has been there since the beginning when Death in June’s Totenkopf rainbow was in the sight of the public. The study acknowledges Shekhotsov’s concept of “metapolitical fascism”, however, also it is worth reminding that fascism is not solely a European thing. In some cases, it could be a colonial result in a certain country, but it vastly and obviously existed and still thriving strong today in many parts of the world. Considering DIJ’s appreciation of Mishima, it is fair to point out that Japan has gone through its way of its own characterized fascism until the end of the Second World War, known as Shōwa nationalism (Tansman, 2009). American Scholar B. R. Myers (2010) suggests that the leading ideology of North Korea is racial based nationalism instead of communism, which is closer to European fascism (Lankov, 2009). Interestingly, an avant-garde band, Laibach started to feature North Korean propaganda images in their music and artwork since their visit to the country in 2015. Thus, the connection between fascism or neofolk “metapolitical fascism” and racism is there, but whether if it is so absolute is still highly debatable. That is to say that apolitical music is capable of hunting down extreme and eccentric around the world and remix them into their own contents, just like many other genres at this day and age.

Strahl has expressed to me his disdain towards musicians who direct their topics to fascism and Nazism:

“The glorification of the Third Reich and fascism is impossible to comprehend for me and I will never support it. There are so many other topics, why do people keep going back to this particular time? I don't know...”

(Norbert Strahl, interview by the author, October 30th, 2018)

He has then helped to emphasize that when it comes to addressing the topics in the music, the glorification of the *Third Reich* or playing with extremism even causes controversies within the scene for sensible musicians.

Pablo C. Ursusson on the other hand took a toll of apolitical musicians by questioning the limit of this concept would reach:

“In my humble opinion, I think things are often not black and white in that sense and I think it is perfectly valid to be provocative or approach your art however you want,

But at one point, or at a human level, you have to position yourself, maybe not as a band but as a human being, and even if you call yourself apolitical, what do you think about gay people being beaten to death for their homosexuality?? or what do you think about climate change? or sexual slavery in the 21st century? or consuming meat from slaughterhouses? What do you think of the prison system? The war over oil/resources? or drugs? Or beating your own children?? At one point, you cannot shut up and lurk behind a slogan as ‘I’m apolitical’.”

(Pablo C, Ursusson. Interview by the the author, December 12th, 2018)

Besides fascism, Eurocentrism is another obvious theme in neofolk, the term is provided also by Shekhotsov in his article and confirmed by our informant Ms. Yue that “[Neofolk] in extreme cases it could become a kind of *Eurocentrism*.” Unlike European exceptionalism “where presenting idealized and often exaggeratedly masculine Western heroes, who conquered 'savage' peoples in the remaining 'dark spaces' of the globe” (Iwerks, 1995, 69-90). Eurocentrism in this milieu is rather an unavoidable side effect from the “Waldgang” and “Sehnsucht”, and its on-ground implication also highly depends on the individual theme. The study is not aware of any straight-forwarded elements of Eurocentric superiority in most of the bands that have been included in the essay. With the roots and passion towards romanticism and traditionalism, neofolk is unfortunately always enlaced with certain level of Eurocentrism, which are rather dissimilar with Samir Admin’s (2011, 154) inkling of postcolonial Eurocentrism where he stated: “Eurocentrism is thus in effect an ideology that enables its defenders to conclude that ‘modernity’ (or/and capitalism) could only have been born in Europe, which subsequently offered it to other peoples (‘the civilizing mission’)”. Yet, this

concept of modernity is largely liable to one's view, for what has been presented in this scene, the modernity is Americanized globalism and capitalism. With the Western civilization took the lead since the beginning of 18th century, Eurocentrism has implemented into many elements of our modern world, from the perspectives of generations of Chinese intellectuals to the universal accepted Gregory calendar, and even to the formal attire of the Japanese emperor⁶. In other words, that criticism towards Eurocentric topics could be amplified and minified indefinitely to fits one's agenda, if one wishes so. When it comes to the matter whether to keep or trim out a certain part of traditional local culture, it is solely up to modern Europeans of *all kinds* themselves through (hopefully) progressive advancements of the development in the society.

After putting neofolk and apolitical music alike into a more stable frame, and most of the attributes are on the table. The way we perceive subcultural music in this age of information was another topic the study has been trying to focus. Viewing what might cause controversy at online and academic spheres, paganism was one of matter that has been directly addressed (in the context of folk metal): "the [Pagan] myths that are celebrated are generally myths of masculine prowess and the warrior's search for glory in a world without the insecurity of neo-liberalism, globalization and the need to ask girls out nicely". The next in line was folk culture that some European bands often trying to connect with, this particular scholar presented his point: "That folk culture is not the precedent of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural culture of nations now; these folk in the past are pure white peoples, monocultural and monoracial, who have supposedly preserved ways of thinking and being that have been transferred in bloodlines down the ages to the present day." (Spracklen, 2015)

Spracklen as a representing scholar on heavy metal studies, did offer valuable and critical points, such as some pagan cultures are indeed more masculine than feminine, monocultural instead of initial and immediate tolerance of different cultures. It was restrained by the world of the view and the power of the production back then, which is outdated at this age we live in. At the same time, it is surprised that a neo-liberal scholar such as Karl Spracklen listed out pro-capitalistic terms like globalization in a positive tone as it was the gain of modernity without further explanation.

⁶ See: <https://deployant.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/akihito-db.jpg>

Because paganism in most of the music texts is not organized religious beliefs, instead, during this study, it was interpreted that it is more of a flexible and fluidic term that swings according to the musicians' wills; a band (that is to say, if without any actualization of a political agenda) could likely be inspired by Norse mythology in a certain album, then move on (or start a side project) to the next for Shamanism or other kinds pre-Christian religion.. It is in slight of generalization to label all pagan themes with unhealthy masculinity without a further and thorough research in relevant topics, such as the figure of Hindu heathen goddess Maha Kali has been widely featured in pagan rock/metal bands (in examples of Dissection, Cult of Fire and Grave Pleasures). Furthermore, it is doubtful that if pagan music is received vastly different in other parts of the world, bands with strong folk traditions, such as Finntroll and Empyrium, have gained large popularity in Asia, especially China and Japan. (Finntroll official Facebook page, 2015) (Empyrium's official Facebook page, 2018). Although the intention of favoring a multicultural modern Europe is well understood and highly appreciable, and there is indeed the necessity of continuing reflecting and structuring Eurocentrism is imminent in many contemporary societies, however, the study suggests here, that the condemnation towards certain European rooted music is rather inutile: at this age of the information, perhaps criticizing a popular culture sitting in a welfare country in Europe, without bringing a bit of global perspective itself is rather Eurocentric.

For this matter, Ilkka S argues that connecting with one's European heritage is acceptable while the aggression of the "whiteness" is not highlighted:

"I don't see anything wrong with such an interest in local culture, history, traditions or mythology and I think that extreme music such as metal is a good way to express the understanding gained by pursuing that interest. Neither do I see any reason why especially people of European background should have to turn away from the aforementioned topics. On the other hand, I don't appreciate pursuing some kind of "white European culture" or some such misguided idea. Neither should local traditional culture or mythology be perverted by representing it as in some way containing contemporary values or (far right) politics. An example of the misguided way can be found in e.g. NSBM, in which local pagan traditions are often disrespectfully represented in a way to suit the artists' worldview. As long as the local traditional culture is considered with critical realism (well, as much as is possible with extreme music such as metal) and respect, it is in my opinion fine."

(Ilkka S, interview by the author, August 8th, 2018)

He has presented another factor in this arena, that the whiteness in pagan music is principally a paradox for the time being. As Europe was or still is dominantly white, any fragment in the past is a heritage of white culture. Therefore, it is high delicacy, awkward and challenging concept for musicians to handle. His idea of remaining critical realism is vibrant, intentionally using images that were created in a pre-colonial, pre-capitalism time, when information was remixed in a different pace, to fit a certain revived racially biased agenda or any extremely political ideology is fundamentally a twist and disrespect to one's own past and heritage.

Strahl did not address the conflict between modernity and paganism directly, instead, he approached from a philosophical manner:

"I don't think natural religious beliefs ever faded entirely. Traditions and festivities have survived, despite Christianity and Enlightenment. When people sit around fires and peak into the flames, no matter if young or old, they become quiet. That says it all. Whatever the gods may be, what god may be, has been created by experiences with nature. We sometimes are able to feel it in small gestures, events and everybody feels it for example when witnessing a sunrise. With all its inexplicable magical beauty."

(Norbert Strahl, interview by the author, October 30th, 2018)

For him, perhaps paganism does not only limit to the masculine figure of Nordic gods. My perception towards his idea was that naturalistic paganism in within our subconscious and primal instincts. Strahl has reminded us that paganism is not all about the heritage of certain ethnicity but a spirit that lives inside in many of us; there is little necessity to amplify all the time from paganism into a sort of retrospective if one is to feel and find in small details of our nature.

Romanticized paganism assorts with radical traditionalism which sometimes results in a vicious blend that might dismay many who carry good intentions to the society. Bands like DIJ has already faced a level of censorship in Germany (deathinjune.org, 2010), at the same time, social vigilance has also been actively employed upon on neofolk, especially when it comes to living performances. The study is with the principle against any sorts of politically intended music performance that might harbor extreme

ideologies, encouraged informants to speak out their minds about governmental and socially censorship.

Yue spoke from her point of view, addressing her idea of a tolerant society:

“If a society is really tolerant, it should also be able to accept conservative (I’m not saying extremely) opinions. Therefore, it depends on what and how the artists want to express their views. It can be some experiment from the artists or some aggressive expression of their ideologies.”

(Yue Tingting, interview by the author, August 11th, 2018)

Amongst her words, she carried out that social tolerance should be relying on individual topics, as long as it is not extreme, the society should offer space to the artists if not understanding. By digging into her view of tolerance, especially as a person who was born and educated mostly in China and has no prior contact with Western politics, the understanding she offered to conservative ideas are a direct retort on the freedom of speech situation in China, instead of in favor of a general conservatism. (I later confirmed with her.) Although it is visible that the level and control of the concept “extreme” are highly depending on the status of society, and the situation of the social narrative.

Shekhotsov described that the artistic freedom from a different direction, which according to him if the local law is not broken, the lawful censorship is essentially no needed:

“You see, there are laws in each country that regulates hate speech, even in the US, with the first amendment with the constitution that provides huge space for basically hate speech, still there are laws that regulate this, they cannot be any threat towards a particular ethnic group or particular people some minorities. There is the law, if you do not break it, then you cannot be censored. That is very clear for me, the same goes with the European states or western countries; if the band is not breaking the law then they cannot be censored. I must be very clear on this, I am against censorship myself, but there are laws, some laws are stricter, but in every country you (should) have that law, if a text a film or whatever is violating the regulation on hate speech, they can be legally censored, so there is no middle ground, so if you break the law, you are punished, if you don’t then you are free to say whatever you want.”

(Anton Shekhovtsov, interview by the author, October 3rd, 2018)

It is to say that criticism towards a genre of music which a social group might view unfavorably for various reasons, is the consequence for musicians and artists to indulge as they cannot escape the boundary of publishing their work in a modern era of information. This applies not only to neofolk and pagan musicians but also many others. Conversely, simply replacing law enforcement with poetic justice in most of the situation is as transgressive as the music that often being protested to, in that case, it would be a deprivation of the rights of gathering and performing in public before any solid conviction, not even mentioning some unconventional and extreme methods such as harassment and invasion of the privacy (Pitzl-Waters, 2010). As now perhaps we could confirm that neofolk has an anti-establishment mentality in its nature, but by using illegal and intrusive ways to prevent the music from being made, performed or even listened, is not different than provocation itself. Such goading would be exactly what some bands might be looking for from the “modernity” in order to feed their hatred, subsequently, it likely results counterproductive martyrizing effects.

According to Shekhovtsov, the result of social censorship has updated with the change of this era of information technology:

“It is not possible to censor bands as successfully as you could do it before, with the internet, with loads of alternative social networking platforms, with various anonymous types of payment for music, it is not possible maybe to censor music totally. Maybe through the organization of gigs, some clubs would not host bands that could be accused of racism, fascists [and] nationalists. But again, some of the bands they organize their private concerts and still can sell their music on the internet, it is a nuisance, it is not very pleasant for that one who are being accused, but it is not an essential problem, this is not the reason why some of the bands would break up.”

(Anton Shekhovtsov, interview by the author, October 3rd, 2018)

Seemingly, neofolk artists are aware of the controversy and it is no news that this kind of problematic attention is also, what thrives some bands. Strahl offered his counter mechanism:

“Censorship never helps. It is essentially intolerance. I would punish these [extreme ideology] bands by ignoring them. My worldview is multifaceted. I probably carry left, right and liberal ideas.”

(Norbert Strahl, interview by the author, October 30th, 2018)

As a scene member, Strahl recognizes that if anyone were to have any political agenda in the music, controversy is the way for them to draw attention from the public and gather mind-liked groups. Ignoring might indeed sound not as progressive or radical as other popular boycotting methods but in this world of attention seekers, creating little to no attention essentially blocks the spreading of disapproved messages.

4.4 Neofolk and paganism in contemporary society.

The so-called neofolk in this part of the study merely serves a function of an example of most of the avant-grade apolítica music. The censorship issue gained supports from informants from different angular; it shows that participants can naturally possess more benevolence towards their own subculture community. The study concludes that it is musicians and fans’ duty also to tolerant constructive criticism because it is unrealistic not expecting any criticism at this age when the work is published. However, the amplification of topics such as paganism and occultism should always be questioned and challenged, as it is proven that those elements could be misleading in the wrong hands. Yet, we could image this: if it was to say, legal censorship was issued within a sensible democratic system towards a certain artist(s), at this age of information, it is likely impossible to forbid people from listening to a genre just because one of them was banned in certain area for live shows. High profile boycotting through internet is highly likely to raise fame for the band/genre instead of having more people stop being interested in. That is to say, when the discussion is not open amongst people who actually know the culture for matters of equivocal, censorship from official nor self-organized parties simply will not work.

Neofolk and other pagan music is an effortless target to critiques of many kinds, and the reasons are there: Germanic occultism as one of the alternative forms of paganism was

notoriously hijacked by Nazism during the regime of the Third Reich (Goodrick-Clarke, 1985), and it is yet exploitable for neo-Nazism and radical right-wingers politically, cited from Strmiska, Petrusėvičiūtė (2010, 82) confirms:

“Rosenberg and others in the Nazi Party also attempted to foster a distinctly nazified version of German paganism as ideological support for the Third Reich. In this way, too Nazism has cast a shadow over modern paganism, with the result that even pagans who proclaim their total rejection of Nazi ideology and interpretations of ancient mythology are still sometimes tarred with the brush of Nazism.”

These are undeniable facts and are more than reasonable for concerned individuals to question the concept of European paganism, however, through this study; I have discovered that much criticism in cultural and musical studies towards this legacy seems to build on the perception that the extremists have completely claimed the major properties of paganism and it is now inseparable from them. Furthermore, it is that anyone dares to approach this topic in art and music nowadays would be under condemn of endorsing evil ideologies. Following Spracklen and his citation (2015) from Hoad, Kolb Spracklen, Spracklen, and Henderson, Von Helden, (pagan) folk culture was nailed to the board of over masculinity, anti-multiculturalist: “But the folk in folk metal is a problematic ideology, a form of instrumental rationality about authenticity, nation and nationalism”.

Paganism in Europe is white and promoting the idea of the mythical past is identical to suffering have been brought upon the peoples of the world. What we come together here is that the dominantly white past of Europe has already been written, many countries have whites as native peoples, which was resulted and limited to the time, technology and knowledge advancement. Condemning “these folk in the past are pure white peoples, monocultural and monoracial, who have supposedly preserved ways of thinking and being that have been transferred in bloodlines down the ages to the present day” (Spracklen,2015), and constantly emphasizing pagan ways of life is white could give an impression of using “God’s perspective” to read into history and yet offers little to none social solution, this motivation is simultaneously placing moral obstacles for progressive, none racial biased Europeans of all kinds and none-whites to participant European paganism in nowadays’ society: To say, if the problem of European history, paganism and folklore is too white, then a way to deconstruct it would be encouraging

and allowing more different interpretations, to listen, read and understand what happens when this content is put outside of European cultural settings.

Scholar Dennis R. Herschbach (1995, 31) confirms the unique relationship between knowledge and technology: “‘Technology constitutes knowledge, and that all technologies are embodiments of some form of human knowledge’”. When we address the legacy in arts, it is processed commonly with modern human knowledge, such embodied knowledge is a product of technology and should be considered as a part of technology. This reminds us that it is important to consider of the limited contemporary social environment, scientific progression that is behind the cultural legacy, in many cases, whether some pseudo-interpretation and implementation of the extremists defines the legacy itself, are highly debatable.

When encounters the issues of masculinity, to open the interpretation is also one of the ways encourage more women to participant in the pagan and folklore cultural productions, as in many forms of paganism, the figures of the powerful female goddess and female warriors are largely presented. At the same time, the attention needs to pay more to modern paganism movements such as *Wicca* that renounces conventional gender roles in ritual and religion presented the example of remixing ancient rituals and modern concept as they claimed the worship is “One identity- without gender” (White, 2016, 93).

Besides the initialed remixing that is occurring in paganism, it must be brought to our consideration that the old “not-so-progressive” bands and their contents are now exposed in different social settings and newly reproduced cultures, under the wave of global technological advancement, on both the way of performing and the speedy access to previously unimaginable information. As Simon Frith (1996, 115) reminded us with words from Paul Gilroy:

“‘The aesthetic rules that govern it are premised on a dialect of rescuing appropriation and recombination that creates special pleasures. Pleasures in which 'aesthetic stress are laid upon the sheer social and cultural distance that formerly separated the diverse elements now dislocated into novel meanings by their provocative aural juxtaposition’”.

Such change is happening so fast under the enormous freedom in arts and music with the assistance of the worldwide internet. Both musicians, fans and the most important critiques need to investigate this matter and phenomenon: when the popular music is made and published nowadays, even the in the most marginalized and underground genres, it faces not only European records' charts and live houses in Paris or London. There are Spotify, Bandcamp and other globally accessible platforms that bring the spectacles- as they are more or fewer commodities in different forms and the most importantly, they are available to fans in outside of the traditional European physical and ideological borders.

While the concept of Europe is shifting within the conventional geopolitical definition of *Europa*, the ideas of Europe are also extending its border and exchanging influence for different culture through the information flow that contains arts and music, along with their subculture. It should not be a surprise for Europeans any longer to learn about a Black Metal project from Vietnam and or the existing of a Brazilian folk metal scene. Matters as such cannot be simplified *only* as an invasion and any new form of colonialism before a larger amount of the data and research are collected and conducted by the scholars with expertise in different areal cultures conduct relevant researches. Because cultural remixing is happening vastly also outside of West, developing and less privileged countries can digest and absorb what was once brought upon them, examples are obvious from mainstream perspectives: South Korea's entertainment industry gave birth to K-pop, Moroccan's electronic dance music scene (Needham, 2017). It is only belittling to classify or image people simply as oppressed minorities by Western white liberals. When the criticism (even though in many situations, morally legitimate) is about the certain globally existing genre, ignoring the phenomena that are occurring outside of European borders would have given the false impression that their opinions do not matter or they are lack of the ability to think independently. John Tomlinson (1991) shares the same concern about the passivity of receiving of the Western culture, for him that cultural transmitting between countries "always involves translation, mutation, adaptation, and the creation of hybridity."

What could be worse is that if harsh criticism kept demonizing subcultures such as metal and neofolk without an attitude to open-interpretation, eventually successfully archived large-scaled social or even legal censorship: in one hand, it would seal all the components-no matter good or foul of pagan subcultures to the marginalized and small

group with extreme agendas, or simply put, give it all to the extreme right: on the other hand, it would deprive the passion and enthusiasm around the globe for European culture remixing as the legacy or not just whites but for us all.

At next, the study includes a case of Neofolk band and the scene in China, to discuss further of how European culture is reflected and received in a different setting.

4.5 A European *love story*⁷ - the interview case with Chinese folk band Bloody Woods

The thesis presents the case of Chinese folk band *Bloody Woods*, with an exclusive interview from the band's singer Anna. Interview topic concerns to neofolk as an imported but aspiring music in China, additionally with her personal opinions as a female musician, on issues concern for cultural heritage and Europe as a received concept in Chinese underground music subculture.

The band announced their biography on their Facebook page:

“Bloody Woods was a Neo-folk project formed by Sichuan-based composer Baishui and guitarist Gudao in 2005. Then Ytian and Lamia joined it as guest vocals. They explored low-key in European folk and medieval music carefully whose "Women In The Hole" (2006) "Apocalypse Of The Sound" (2007) two EP and the full-length album "Colour" (2009) were released on the midnight productions label in Nanchang, China influenced by European Neo-folk and dark ambient strains.

After the "Colour", Baishui focused on his personal music project and left in spring 2010. Gudao went to Beijing alone and restructured the new Bloody Woods consisted of Anna (vocal), Chen Biao (keyboard and flute), Tianran (guitar), Huan Feng (bass), Jasmine(drums) and Kunming-based electronic artist Luo Keju (guitar). The new line-up of Bloody Woods worked actively in various stages full of enthusiasm and energy in the capital. They are living underground and performing with different forms, playing guitars, blowing the whistles, and singing beautiful songs about love and nature

⁷ “A Love song” is a track in the band’s album “Romanzen”

serenade which was more diversified than Baishui's time. Luo left in 2013 to America. The Singer Ytian is sometimes also included in Bloody Woods as guest vocal.

Today, Bloody Woods is one of the representative Chinese Neo-folk band. Their new work "Romanzen" will come out in summer 2014." (Bloody Woods' Facebook page, 2014)

At the beginning of the interview, to establish the connection between the band and their Western counterparts in the scene, the question directed to their thoughts about the more commonly known artists:

Q: "When it comes to this genre, including the so-called dark folk, folk noir, apocalyptic folk, bands such as death in June, current 93 and of the wand and the moon. Etc. seem always come to people's mind first. In what way do you think these bands have influenced BW? If not, which musicians you would say that have bestowed the greatest influence upon you?"

A: *"We certainly received influence from these bands, the homeland of our hearing aesthetics belongs to their branch. There are many traditional instruments employed in neofolk, later it has been developed into a style of rather fitting and melodic, however, I still find the harsh sound under the influence of industrial music quite appealing.*

Speaking of influential bands to us, BW members have attended the live concert of Empyrium in Beijing, it was like listening to our youth of bygone, as falling into dreams and being lost there."

(Anna, interview by the author, September 1st, 2018)

Western cultures are imported products in general for Asian countries, a sentiment of acceptance and breaking free exists always at the same time. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, while the Western gigantic warships and advanced fire-arms gutted the beast of the old empire open and slowly bled it out, the intellectuals saw the driven power behind these formidable technologies- Western civilization, their history, their frame of society. Hence Chinese intellectuals since had a complex towards the West, to "might be turned to use for subduing them." (Hao/Wang, 1980,148). It is fair to say, even with the later and further enlightenment, the intellectuals nowadays, when they take a

glimpse of the West, they try to look for themselves, or moreover, what beholds for China-this gaze comes with more or less a hint of nationalism and certain looming tights to the homeland. If one should take a careful look into Japanese popular culture after WW2, the discovery of a similar pattern of the Western complex with countless examples in music, arts, and video games, is an easy task. Unlike China, Japan went through their own cultural digesting with little to no censorship or massive political movements such as the cultural revolution in the 1960s and the radical nationalistic education to the youth. This complex is still striving and being remixed into their own concepts. Ironically, after a certain period, now it is rather common to encounter Western youth who is fanatic about this already remixed Japanese modern culture. For instance, the game series published by Square Co., Ltd- Final Fantasy, which have left a significant mark for a whole generation's memories in the West since the age of information began. The meaning of these complicated and ambiguous feelings towards the West is likely worth more investigating, depends on where one takes a stand on the connectivity of post-modern Western values with the current Asian popular cultures.

The topic was naturally led to Anna about such a “cultural malposition” and their approach in their music:

Q: An abstract German word “Sehnsucht” sometimes represents a yearning for the distant land, and this land could be material and immaterial at the same time, it is nostalgia for a spiritual homeland. As a band of “cultural malposition” (although the authenticity of this so-called cultural malposition in this modern age of information is highly debatable), would you like to share your understanding of the word?

A: “The intellectuals in China who have received proper education, in fact, all have this kind of cultural malposition in their mentality. We have been influenced by North West Europe/Germany into our cores. I think that we could all be related to the destiny and feeling of tragedy in the old continent-(where) the pain is far more real than the happiness. We all know that the homeland, no matter in our songs nor in theirs, has ceased to exist. I think that is Sehnsucht.”

(Anna, interview by the author, September 1st, 2018)

Anna, as an active Christian in China, provided a different perspective here: as she sees Asia and Europe both a part of the “old continent” in her own religious concept, it was

this connection she and her bandmates located from the start that motivated them. Furthermore, she understands the concept and the aura of Sehnsucht is out of the touch with reality, both as an educated intellectual (she was awarded a degree in comparative literature) and a musician, which is rather essential to the talk of Sehnsucht in Neofolk music in this study. Anna is clear about her band's position and narrative of a storyteller, instead of an exponent of certain actualization.

She went on and explained why a European folk group has risen in China:

“At the very beginning, this project carries certain tribute features, we also did covers of medieval folk bands, processed topics of comparisons in our original songs. I think (at the time) that we have all been moved and touched by certain thoughts of a gloomy journey that connect all in the old continent, we did not consider too much about the possibility to transplant such feeling from a foreign culture. But after more than a decade, we are all old, naturally, we directed our thoughts to the land we stand on, to the people of this land.”

(Anna, interview by the author, September 1st, 2018)

At least back to the null of internet age blooming in 2006 in the country, a group of young native Chinese did not find themselves being stranded between different culture and able to locate their “Sehnsucht” in a far-away, merely conceptual land, and yet it is, their version of Europe. For BW or Anna personally, neofolk music is about:

“Nature, beauty and affection also sorrow profundity and the poems of the north in certain restraints which encompasses a certain driven power to preserve the ‘organic’ of Europe”.

(Anna, interview by the author, September 1st, 2018)

Even though being “misallocated” outside of the geopolitical border of Europe, the band draws profoundly from European romanticism, which could be seen from their most representing albums.

The band stretches their longing for the spiritual home in the distant foreign land into the work of literature although compared with their comrades in Europe/West, the theme of their music is often focused on certain folklore, romanticized stories or a direct citation of well-known poem/artists. When being inquired about the peculiar fond of

German poet Heinrich Heine, the informant insists that it was only because Heine's poems are within the control of her language skills, although she felt a much stronger connection with J.C.Hölderlin, his work was yet beyond her ability to govern.

Bloody Woods in their album "Romanzen" (2015) featured a few poems from Heinrich Heine and composed melody correspondingly from their reading of the artistic conception:

Der Wunde Ritter

Ich weiß eine alte Kunde,

Die hallet dumpf und trüb;

Ein Ritter liegt liebeswunde,

Doch treulos ist sein Lieb.

Als treulos muß er verachten

Die eigne Herzliebste sein

Als shimpflich muß er betrachten

Die eigne Liebespein

Er möcht in die Schranken reiten

Und rufen die Ritter zum Streit:

"Der mag sich zum Kampfe bereiten,

Wer mein Lieb eines Makels zeih!"

Da würden wohl alle schweigen,

Nur nicht sein eigener Schmerz;

Da müßt er die Lanze neigen

Wider's eigne klagende Herz.

(I know a story of anguish,

A tale of the times of old;

A knight with love doth languish,

His mistress is faithless and cold.

As faithless must he esteem now

Her whom in his heart he adored;

His loving pangs must he deem now

Disgraceful and abhorr'd.

In vain in the lists would he wander,

And the challenge to battle each knight;

Let him who my mistress dares slander

Make ready at once for the fight!"

But all are silent, save only

His grief, that so fiercely doth burn;

His lance he against his own lonely

Accusing bosom must turn.)

(English translation by E. Bowring, d.n)

As the appearance of Bloody Woods' theme is obviously highly romanticized and European, I later reconnoitered her ideas, as a musician who has no actual physical nor political affiliation with modern Europe, about the collective controversial theme of neofolk music:

Q: What neofolk expresses creates a lot of controversy in the West, as someone who dwells from a different society, what are your comments about certain conservative and traditionalist thoughts? (Such as forseti's worship towards Norse gods and Death in June's militarism in their lyrics and arts)

A: *European neofolk bands do convey a great number of messages with them. For all these tides to the right-wing and nationalism that have been debated, I consider that it is a kind of desire for the time of idyll. Some people are bonded to be restrained in the past, soak themselves in somnolence, such as yours truly.*

(Anna, interview by the author, September 1st, 2018)

She also confirms that this milieu is highly contextual. She offers her own interpretation of the phenomenon, that is, the time of old is merely somnolence for people who are incapable to move on and accepting new orders. The time of idyll has always been for her, the fantasy of intellectuals. As foreign as European society for her is, her original tone in Chinese drips a hint of negativity and helplessness as she recognized that the connection with people who hung in regressively in the past, which refrain her from rooting against, yet knowing that this is just a fact that we must bear.

She replenishes following the last question:

“These artists acknowledge that Europe still shines its own gleam although it is fading away. I have read a book last year named ‘The history of Post-war Europe’, after that I have had a better understanding of the collective unconscious that neofolk/pan-dark music is trying to deliver. In a civilization, the boundary between an artist and a prophet is often in a haze.”

(Anna, interview by the author, September 1st, 2018)

It is clear that her reflections do not exactly cohere with many post-modernist values, however, as a natural outsider of the conflicts that occurred here in Europe, also an outlander in a completely different (or perhaps severely outdated) sphere, she could only offer her own understanding to fellow musicians, without exceedingly considering skirmish of culture, ethnicities, left or right. From Anna's answer, it is fair to point out that China/ East Asia is indeed placing Western post-modernist ideology in a predicament, unlike the on-going revolutionary discourse of reflecting Europe's past,

generations of intellectuals have considered the West as the beacon of civilization. In China, while condemning the bad deeds of the colonialist, many have considered that the West blasted China out of its dream of “The Kingdom of Heaven” or “the Center of the world”, the example of similar mentality in Japan is placed as Matthew Perry’s statue in the Bay of Tokyo. Certainly, like in many circumstances, depends on the message receiver’s intention, her approbation to neofolk’s Europe could be perceived in either way: if the band had stopped on purely a storyteller’s perspective and kept drawing influence from European culture, it would have no doubt, for some, on promoting Eurocentrism. Nevertheless, as aforementioned, the mentality for many to mimic or copy from the West was eventually to localize and actualize into the nationalistic attitude they were born to. Long before the album “The Lament” attempt of localization in Chinese texts in 2014, the original founder of the band, Baishui, already started his journey on collecting and reproducing the folklore and folk songs around his hometown, Yibin, Sichuan with his default solo project. (“Shijian- Time” published by Midnight Productions in 2007).

When indicating their album with Chinese cultural characteristics, Anna illustrated:

“To address our own national history issues through neofolk, the example could be found in our album “the Lament”, you may see it as an attempt of genre’s localization. I cannot agree with the idea of nowadays BW being very European in music, perhaps we have some Celtic melodies. I am not a nationalist and I ‘regressively’ consider that there is a difference in ranks when it comes to the achievement of civilization. What European culture has achieved in-depth and transcendence will always have my respect. While we were writing for the Lament, I listened to Takemitsu Toru often, from his experience, I remembered as such: ‘After many a year’s struggles, Takemitsu Toru had never found the way out from he was looking for. Since he moved away from Japan and settled down in Europe, with the great distance he realized that his music would be unlikely rid of Japanese cultural influence.’ Chinese composer Chen Qigang also expressed the same idea, that musicians, especially composers have no real way to escape from their mother tongue and the methodology of their ethnicities, this is what limits them but also what supports them.”

(Anna, interview by the author, September 1st, 2018)

Dissimilar with proudly presenting their ideal spiritual homeland, given her background and ethnicity, the informant emphasizes the difference and the struggle when looking for the roots of oneself, and perhaps that is the greatest difference comparing a band to adapt and find their narrative in Western popular culture, to that, if one is hoping to be more than just mimicry:

“The problem is, speaking as an East Asian, when you dig into your roots, there are going to be things you found unacceptable [for others]. [Such as] nihilistic aesthetics, the worship of death [in Japanese culture], a mal-developed [cultural] system... maybe only as a master, you could find adjustment and harmony. Some choose to embrace total westernization, some lives in distress mentally because of these.”

There is to say that, the admiration for European culture could be based on the incompleteness of Chinese traditional culture where it is not unprecedented for the new dominant power to torch everything that was in before, hence people were restrained to talk or relive in it. Latham (2007, 344) scrutinizes that there is a cultural vacuum left as the aftermath of the communist cultural revolution, as for generations that were born after the political movement, the detachment with the roots of their own, authentic culture is enormous. The collective confusion and memory loss are still fusing and brewing in the society.

With the conducting of this interview, Bloody Woods presented an image of rather non-biased aesthetic value on European culture, also the fact that neofolk music is able to be rightly apolitical as long as it is in the right hands, as their Sehnsucht for European love poems would not directly shine into the political sphere, in contrast, given the ever-worsening political situation, it is not rare to see independent bands in China to eventually face censorship, as long as the authority decides that things are unfit for the socialist (with Chinese characteristics) values. In this way, BW also stands out for expressing their artistic freedom under hegemony, additionally Anna as a remarking female musician, who is being highly involved in their music production, design and promotion.

Additionally, as a Chinese neofolk band, Bloody Woods reminded us that as a receiver of a foreign subculture, their acceptance to it was not passively absorbing and brainlessly mimic, instead, it was rather a critical thinking progress of creation. This has evidentially proven that conventional receiver outside of European geopolitical

borders are indeed capable of digesting foreign culture and remix them into their own content, the so-called cultural Imperialism is fading out on its influence and the how European vernacular culture is received through the internet is vastly being reshaped and in dire needs of new academical perspectives.

BW have been inspired by the colorfulness of the folk tales and tunes around the world (one of their first recorded songs was a traditional Hebrew folk song “Orange Blossom Ring” from the album “Apocalypse of the Sound” in 2007). Through the internet, this band studied then successfully transferred their “Sehnsucht” from a foreign conception into actualization of native experiences, moreover, by co-existing with a few other neofolk projects in China such as Vergissmeinnicht and Ralfum, together they have brought their own narrative as the sound from Eastern distant land into the realm of neofolk music.

Conclusion

As a subcultural phenomenon, this brief study truly only covered limited ground, especially the angle here has not yet touched the composing and instrumental elements. I observe from presented and analyzed facts that neofolk is a rather vague concept itself to start with. Douglas P has defined musically what neofolk is at the early 80s, however, like all music that is available for consumption at this age, neofolk has also passively adopted the change. Many recent bands or artists that on the edge or brink of this genre of marginalization needed a supplementary thorough study. At least, sensible musicians, fans or academic critiques should have the knowledge that the social environment and technology advancement is heavily sharpening what it means to a scene in popular music.

Socially speaking, neofolk was born and developed in controversies and ambiguities, these attributes partially but rightly reflected what the Western society has gone through after the WWII in transformation, which could be a test stone for the current society. Obviously, images such as Totenkopf and lyrics contain phrases of “Holocaust” that were associating to the Nazis was transgressive beyond any boundaries and European or any society is rightful not to offer any sympathy to it, or at there has just not been

enough time nor chance for the symbolism to disengage with the history of abusing and misusing. However, a certain minor stereotype is also established and overshadowed to many other attributes in this milieu. The outstanding one is paganism. The study also confirmed that the social judgment in symbolism is extended to the whole concept of European pagan heritage. The topic of paganism in subculture music is written alongside the connection with extreme metal music, who seems to face a very similar predicament. Although the paganism in neofolk never is that simple as in folk metal that was allegedly alienating multicultural society by promoting white male warrior figures. (Spracklen, 2015)

Entangled with traditionalism and Eurocentrism, for some other bands even “metapolitical fascism”, the concept of paganism in neofolk / extreme metal eventually complicates. After investigating a considerable amount of representative artists and their ideas in the music, neofolk in a genre, which sometimes being aliased with dark folk, folk noir, apocalyptic folk, presents such impressions: it is not a genre of socially progressive music; it marches on its own drumbeats and does not necessarily provide positive values to the society. It is an extremely complicated and fluid system of personal experience, the theme, tune, and adhesives that could be highly hinging on to the individual musicians. There are some bands who have no political agenda and there are others who like to play with fire. As to those politically obscure bands, the degrees of the “political schema” varies: some glorifies the imagery mythological past, some takes influence from conservative literature, a minority of them use repulsive images directly with different foul intentions. In the end, the research is on the same page with Dr. Shekhotsov’s (2009) conclusion that metapolitical fascism still possesses the capability to be harmful to the society.

When it comes to the censorship, it is noticeable that playing metapolitical fascism and relevant images are also an extreme spectacle in arts, or perhaps even a fetish for some. These artists usually lack a key link to actual political fascists- to call for unification under a strong leader to acquire political or military power. Per my introduction in literature review have conferred that the ideas of Europe in these scene members’ minds are in highly poetic incoherence, there is not a collectively picture for even the very same musician, and hence the appeal of such disordered concept is in question. Shekhotsov described the concept of Europe in Neofolk in the interview:

“We should not really take serious of these differences on how Europe is imaged by varies of musicians and poets, this is not really important, they are not politicians. They are not here to coherence a version of Europe that they can actually be real, they are romanticizing Europe, they are inventing their own images of Europe because they just show that there was some golden age a long time ago, and neither it is possible to restore this golden age or maybe just feel nostalgic about it. We do not need to take this seriously; again, they are not philosophers. These people, they may maximum be poets, we cannot expect them to be coherence or to be logical all the time and they would compare with their images and the images from other poets, it just simply does not make sense.”

(Anton Shekhovtsov, interview by the author, October 3rd, 2018)

At this stage, what this thesis has to offer is to; spark more discussion before paganism utterly falls into the abyss of symbolism of *Swastika* or *Totenkopf*. On a more personal note, as an active audience/ fieldworker (I studied to work in the music industry in my bachelor’s degree and operated my own mini booking agency in Finland) that once engaged in Finnish metal scene, not matter in pagan folk metal, black metal or neofolk, I did not feel left out by most of the artists I have encountered nor any racial hostile the fan community. At least simply not because I am not a white European, instead, it was the vicious competition in live music and record business that most scene members must indulge. In my individual case, by blending in this subculture (s), it has helped me as an immigrant to integrate with a part of the Finnish society and acquired necessary language skills, as to the racism/prejudice I have faced here is doubtfully direct originated from the pagan subculture.

The reason for this personal experience could very likely be the technology. Although musically, some recent neofolk bands have presented even more minimalistic features by removing the influence of industrial music and returned to the acoustic and traditional instruments of all sorts. The technology advancement benefits and possibly reshapes the pagan culture music and its community by making it available to all interested parties with internet access, broken the limitation of geography. As much as some musicians would deny their interests to the internet as it is a modern thing, the fact is that even the most radical, traditionalist bands would likely upload their work online for better distribution, thus paradoxically that is a hitchhike from the modernity itself.

This vast freedom that internet provides hence changed the subculture communities in music permanently, *non-Western* fans have the instant access to locate the music of their likings and *judge it by themselves*, participating on-going discussion or providing their points of view on something that was not possible before. The communities are forming online across geopolitical limitation and culture remixing is happening in the growing scale. Unlike commonly defined mainstream music, subcultural music fans' group tend to show more consciousness- they choose and filter what to listen by themselves, hence it raises questions that in many cases if European pagan culture in music functions as aggressive as it was before.

By bringing perspectives that are more international into the commentary of extreme music with paganism characteristics make the whole narrative more wholesome, which correspondingly helps to dislocate and liberate the European folklore, mythologies from white cultural extremists. For Marxist critiques who had the intention to fight the regressiveness in the society, people who initially identify themselves initially with European culture would also likely provide them with more fresh points of view, help to promote the understanding how European pagan culture or culture is received and remixed there, eventually avoid the trap of Eurocentrism in different forms.

Naturally, there is still going to be a battle about European heritage in music: European musicians of all kinds are going to keep producing them and the critiques about paganism and cultural heritage are soon to follow. This research attempts to bring some new perspectives into these series of commentaries and it is in favor of healthy debates. The study has demonstrated that it is hard to scale one individual band's ambivalent intention and the important thing is spotting multiple sides of this milieu to academics. When pursuing controversial and extremist contents in such a deviant, anti-establishment subculture, one finds and interprets the elements that were intended to. That is both the charisma and problem of neofolk- up to almost all subcultures in marginalization, as Friedrich Nietzsche once said: "If thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee." (Hollingdale, 2003)

Appendix

The interview questions are presented below, the questions were tailor-made for each individual informant based on their background, however, the core of the interview is limited to the questions that this research aims to answer.

Interview Questions for Anton Shekhovtsov

1. The political environment we are facing at the West has taken a few turns since the time you wrote about Neofolk, what new challenges do you think that Neofolk is going through, as music that Europeans connect with their heritage? What has changed?
2. As apolitical as Neofolk goes, what is your opinion of artists like Sangre de muerdago, Empyrium, Nebelung.etc, who clearly have little or no political message conveyed in their music or perhaps they are entirely in a different dimension?
3. Given your understanding, what do you view the connection between Neofolk and Black metal?
4. In your point of view, Would Neofolk (or other terms such as darkfolk, folk noir) be Neofolk if to be separated with Metapolitical fascism?
5. In terms of connecting with the past and nostalgia, what would you comment if this pattern of music is happening somewhere else other than the West? Or is the original sin of Neofolk whiteness?
6. What do you see Anti-capitalism and Anti-Americanization in different counter-cultures? What are the fundamental differences and connection between anarchist punk and Neofolk in such spirit?
7. It seems to me that, most of the neofolk bands have their own version of Europe instead of an organized, unified concept of it: Some longs for a pre-Christian Nordic world of Fantasy and mythologies, some ponders the time of 18th century Germanic poetry, some appears to be presenting an alternative history from their imagination, and others seek for Rome. What interests me is that if their version of Europe meets, it would most likely collide, hence, I would question that it is rather as “a Europe of otherness” or Euro-centric view, what do you think of it?
8. I consider the concept of Paganism in many subculture music is deprived away from the times of colonialism and capitalism, or perhaps even modern Racism, what is your point of view on this? Or in what way should artists concern paganism in order to differentiate themselves from the flock of Nazism and fascism?
9. I agree that extreme music could be a convey of radicalism and hateful messages, however, counter-cultures seem to have this pattern of thriving under oppression since censorship sometimes martyrize extremists, and most importantly, not ALL neofolk bands were delivering such foul intended ideas, where do we find the balance here? Between not passively providing a space for hate and the integrity of artistic freedom? (I do not support

the 'no platform' as everyone should get a chance to express themselves)

Interview Questions for Norbert Strahl (In English)

1. Nowadays, when encountering people with some knowledge in music, as Neofolk (Dark Folk, Forest Folk, Folk Noir, Apocalyptic Folk) is mentioned, bands like Death in June and Current 93 would likely be the first ones come to minds. Would you say that your work is influenced somehow by these early 80s' bands or the inspiration comes from somewhere else?
2. As a folk musician that deals with the nostalgia of your origins and the past, or more precisely "Sehnsucht" or "Saudade", what are the biggest differences amongst you and Eastern Germany's Darkwood or Britain's Sol Invictus?
3. What does the German identity mean to you and your music? (Stein, Seelenthron)
4. The story of the album "Heimkehr" is about returning to the homeland for lost love and filled with a romanticized description of natural scenes. What does this vocation of return mean to you as a musician?
5. Are you familiar with Ernst Jünger's concept of "Waldgang"- retreat to the forest and against modernity? If so, would you care to comment?
6. How do you see the initial or passive connection between current politics and music that deals with European cultural heritage?
7. Does Pagan nostalgia find its place in the everchanging modern world? How? If not, why so?
8. Some connection has been seen and established between Nostalgia folk and Black metal? How do you comment on such a phenomenon? Have you personally been involved with metal music?
9. How would you comment those "Neofolk" apolitical bands that flirt with fascistic images and ideologies? Should certain artistic freedom be allowed or complete no platform for them? Would vigilante censorship help, in the long term to suppress "inappropriate" in music?
10. If this pattern of nostalgia folk is to be deprived of its European roots, would it work in other parts of the world? (connecting with one's cultural heritage through reproducing old poems and mythologies and applying traditional instruments)
11. Are you aware of Chinese folk band Bloody Woods? If so, how would you comment on their "European style" of music? / How do you see the Neofolk band Sonnekind's reach out to Asian folk cultures? (pick one that is best to your knowledge)
12. According to my knowledge, European Nostalgia music is (better) well received in the East (China, for example) including some controversial bands, which brings the question to this narrative, why do you think that this phenomenon exists?

Interview Questions for Pablo C. Ursusson

1. Nowadays, when encountering people with some knowledge in music, as Neofolk (Dark Folk, Forest Folk, Folk Noir, Apocalyptic Folk) is mentioned, bands like Death in June and Current 93 would likely be the first ones come to minds. Would you say that your work is influenced somehow by these early 80s' bands or the inspiration comes from somewhere else?
2. As an acoustic folk band that deals with the nostalgia of your origins and the past, or more precisely "Sehnsucht" or "Saudade", what are the biggest differences amongst you and Eastern Germany's Darkwood or Britain's Sol Invictus?
3. What does the Galician identity mean to you and SdM's music?
4. Where does your personal Saudade lie as a musician? Where is your spiritual homeland and how would you describe it?
5. Are you familiar with Ernst Jünger's concept of "Waldgang"- retreat to the forest and against modernity? If so, would you care to comment?
6. How do you see the initial or passive connection between current politics and music that deals with European cultural heritage?
7. Does Pagan nostalgia find its place in the everchanging modern world? How? If not, why so?

8. SdM shares a common member with German Black Metal band Coldworld, how do you see the connection between your current music style and Black Metal/extreme metal in general? Have you personally been involved with metal music?
9. How would you comment those “Neofolk” apolitical bands that flirt with fascistic images and ideologies? Should certain artistic freedom be allowed or complete no platform for them? Would vigilante censorship help, in the long term to suppress “inappropriate” in music?
10. If this pattern of nostalgia folk is to be deprived of its European roots, would it work in other parts of the world? (connecting with one’s cultural heritage through reproducing old poems and mythologies and applying traditional instruments)
11. Are you aware of Chinese folk band Bloody Woods? If so, how would you comment on their “European style” of music?
12. According to my knowledge, European Nostalgia music is (better) well received in the East (China, for example) including some controversial bands, which brings the question to this narrative, why do you think that this phenomenon exists?

Interview Questions for Neofolk fans

1. What is Neofolk Music from your point of view? Would you name a few bands that you find the most representative for the genre?
2. Do you think that Neofolk has a certain significant feature in sounds and album arts? What are they?
3. According to your knowledge, what impression do you think this genre of music has left to people and why do you think so?
4. How would you comment about the connection between some Neofolk bands and certain extreme ideologies? Such as Nazism or Fascism?
5. What would be your favorite music (bands) besides this genre?
6. How would you build a connection between Black Metal (or other extreme music) and Neofolk music? (Where lays the similarity and difference that you have found?)
7. What do you think of the usage of “shock” or “controversial” images and lyrics in Neofolk and Black Metal? How would you review the resemblance between them? How should they be read and interpreted?
8. Neofolk music has been always quite “white”, Do you think that this pattern of music could be played in a different cultural setting? Why so?
9. Do you think that the Neofolk musicians that you listen to, have any strong political agenda with their music? What sorts of information that you have received from their music, lyrics or album cover?
10. What do you think of people with White European heritage pursuing their own culture in extreme music? What is the difference than for example Chinese and Japanese? (or any other case that you found familiar)

Interview questions for Anna from Bloody Woods

1. Bloody woods is a Chinese Neofolk band, what does this word mean to the band?
2. What do you think that makes Neofolk and its relevant art stand out?
3. When it comes to this genre, including so-called Dark Folk, Folk Noir, Apocalyptic Folk, bands such as Death In June, Current 93 and Of the wand and the Moon. Etc seem always come to people’s mind first. In what way do you think these bands have influenced BW? If not, which musicians you would say that have bestowed the greatest influence upon BW?
4. What musical genre do you think it is connected closely with Neofolk?
5. According to your knowledge, Is Neofolk in a way connected with Extreme metal, if so, what kind of relationship do you think they have?

6. What Neofolk expresses draw a lot of controversy in the West, as someone who dwells from a different society, what are your comments about certain conservative and traditionalist thoughts? (Such as Forseti's worship towards Norse gods and Death in June's militarism in their lyrics and arts)
7. Do you think that in this genre, the sense of parsing nature and being nostalgic towards the past, is necessarily related to the resentment of contemporary society and politics?
8. Some of your songs such as Love story, Doch Sie, Die mich am Meisten and I'm Tollen Wahn have employed the poems from German poet Heinrich Heine, Could you elaborate the reason and motive behind it? (Why Heine instead of others, does it have anything to do with the time he lived in and his country of origin)
9. It appears that many similar bands in Europe are dealing with the issue of their own national history and "the preservation of European culture", what are BW's ideas on this matter? As a band with relatively European style of music, what do you think of the topic on "the preservation of European culture"?
10. What is the essential difference between BW and Western Neofolk bands? And where to draw the difference?
11. An abstract German word "Sehnsucht" sometimes represents a yearning for the distant land, and this land could be material and immaterial at the same time, it is a nostalgia for a spiritual homeland. As a band of "cultural malposition" (Although the authenticity of this so-called cultural malposition in this modern age of information is highly debatable), would you like to share your understanding of the word?
12. BW has founded by an independent musician from Sichuan named Baishui, he later started to collect, digest and re-produce the folklore and oral traditions in his place of birth. Do you think that this style has been inspired by the BW project?
13. If I remember correctly, you are a person with religious believes. As the lead singer of a Neofolk band, if you don't mind, would you like to talk about what kind of role does this identity play in your musical creation and performance. (Do you find the pagan theme conflicting?)

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