

# Authenticity and the Subcultural Network of the Estonian Pagan Metal Scene

Polina Holitsyna

## Abstract

The article demonstrates how authenticity is constructed, negotiated and “reproduced” (Larsson 2013) within the subcultural space of the Estonian pagan metal subculture. The author discusses the vision of subcultural authenticity from both emic and etic perspectives and bases her analysis on fieldwork conducted between November 2021 and April 2023.

The article examines the given community using “Estonian pagan metal subculture” as a methodological construct for the research analysis. Specifically, the author’s attention is aimed at the first-order zone of the subcultural network (Williams 2011) – musicians and people who possess the most subcultural knowledge and experience.

The fieldwork was done in Tartu, Tallinn, Vana-Vigala (Hard Rock Laager 2022, 2023) and online. The author’s fieldwork methods included in-person and online interviews, online questionnaires, participant observation and netnography. The fieldwork data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis.

The main findings revealed the density and encapsulation of the first-order zone network, which results in a quite homogenous understanding of subcultural authenticity within the network. The author claims that the etic characteristics of subcultural authenticity in this case can be described as devotion, presence and knowledge.

Keywords: subculture, authenticity, pagan metal, information transmission

## Introduction

Pagan metal is a subgenre of extreme metal music that musically derives from black metal and may or may not collide with some elements of folk metal (like the incorporation of folk instruments or traditional singing elements in music). Lyrically, its main interest lies in the – often poeticised – representation of pre-Christian historical times, frequently with an emphasis on praising pre-Christian religions or gods; diverse historical events mostly related to national history; nature and native landscapes.

The research participants I united under the umbrella of the “pagan metal subculture” share a common thematic orientation in their bands: drawing inspiration from the history and the natural landscapes of their homeland. The musicians in the subculture infuse their creations with historical narratives and cultural traditions, shaping a subcultural identity deeply rooted in Estonia’s rich heritage and history. Despite the global reach of metal fandom, the Estonian metal communities, particularly the pagan metal scene, remain relatively unexplored in academic research. This article stands as a pioneering attempt to comprehensively explore the

network of the Estonian pagan metal subculture and its members’ perception of subcultural authenticity. The article examines how the subcultural authenticity of Estonian pagan metal is perceived, negotiated and reproduced by the members of the subculture from both individual and collective perspectives. I first investigate the subcultural network and present my understanding of it in the form of three zones: first-order zone (the musicians and most active subculturists in the scene), second-order zone (many of the fans) and liminal zone (non-permanent subcultural participators).

According to J. Patrick Williams (2011: 39), “subcultures refer to culturally bounded, but not closed, networks of people who come to share the meaning of specific ideas, material objects, and practices through interaction”. In the dimension of the Estonian pagan metal subculture lies a diversity of social units interwoven into a subcultural network. To explore and explain this network, I used the concept of subcultural network developed by J. Patrick Williams (2011) and Dorothy Noyes’ (1995) concept of network, which allowed me to develop the above-mentioned division. The first-order zone involves the

subculturists who possess the most subcultural capital, meaning the musicians, label owners, merch designers, i.e. subculturists who are actively involved in subcultural processes in their everydayness. The second-order zone, in turn, is a far larger network that mainly includes fans. Then, there are also liminal members, who do not perform any subcultural roles on a regular basis but, for example, occasionally attend metal music events. The article focuses on the first-order zone, which is why I chose musicians as my research participants.

Between the zones, the transmission of subcultural information takes place, shaping the subcultural identity and subcultural sense of authenticity. In order to investigate how subcultural authenticity is generated, perceived and reproduced, I used the “reproducing authenticity” concept designed by Susanna Larsson (2013). The manner of the interplay between creating and reproducing subcultural authenticity and the transmission of subcultural knowledge is based on the level of subcultural capital a subculturist possesses (knowledge, practices and symbols that individuals accumulate within a particular subculture – see Thornton 1995). The choice to focus on the musicians in this research is based on the wish to obtain the perspective of those who are actively and immediately involved in creating and shaping the subculture, rather than merely observing it from the outside. Band members, in particular, play a crucial role in the subculture as they are the ones who create the music and lyrics that embody the subcultural values and ideas.

To explore these topics, I conducted fieldwork between November 2021 and April 2023. Through the course of my fieldwork in Estonia, I have become a part of the community of my research interest and obtained a somewhat insider position that became valuable in my interpreting the community as I could understand the details: symbolism, meanings, merchandise, memes, jokes, etc. All these subcultural details are not used solely in performative contexts, but they construct the subculturists’ “everydayness” (see del Negro and Berger 2004). The analysis of fieldwork rests upon the foundations of thematic

analysis, which identified and analysed themes and patterns within the collected data.

The terminology of the article involves such terms as subculture, scene, community, cluster and network. The terms “subculture” and “scene” are used interchangeably. Scene, however, refers to a more closed, localised version of the broader subculture (e.g. “Tartu scene”, “Tallinn scene” etc.). As for the “community”, this refers to a group of people who share common interests, values, goals or identity and interact with one another within a particular social context. Not every community is a scene or a subculture but every scene and subculture are communities. “Cluster”, in turn, is a smaller group of people who share particularly strong bonds or connections within a larger scene. Finally, “network” emphasises the interconnectedness of relationships, interactions and affiliations among individuals within a particular subculture.

I will present the above-mentioned thematic threads starting from an explanation of what pagan metal is and presenting the Estonian pagan metal subculture. After that, I will discuss the methods of data collection in terms of my fieldwork and, finally, will delve into the subcultural network of the pagan metal scene in Estonia and explore subcultural authenticity formation and reproduction.

The article is largely based on the findings from my master’s thesis, defended at the University of Tartu in June 2023.<sup>1</sup>

### **Pagan Metal as a Subgenre of Extreme Metal**

The history of metal music is long and varied, dating back to the late 1960s and early-mid 1970s, when the first heavy metal bands started emerging from blues rock, psychedelic rock and hard rock genres. Extreme metal, in turn, grew out of late heavy metal bands, who had been progressing in the direction of heavier sounds, motives and meanings. Extreme metal is an umbrella term for the group of metal subgenres that can be characterised as harsh and aggressive, most usually technical, fast and hugely transgressive in terms of violating the social order morality and sense of aesthetics

<sup>1</sup> *Estonian Pagan Metal Subculture: Community and Authenticity* (see Holitsyna 2023), online: <https://hdl.handle.net/10062/91206> (last access 21.06.2024).

(Kahn-Harris 2007). The subgenres united under the term include black metal, death metal, thrash metal and sometimes doom metal.

Pagan metal, consequently, appeared as one of the subgenres of black metal. While musically it lies within the black metal soundscape and can often be identified as such (since metal genres can be perceived as a continuum of transitions between them rather than as clearly distinct systems of sounds), it might incorporate some elements of folk metal such as folk or orchestral musical instruments or traditional folk singing (as the leading vocals are typically extreme, i.e. growl). Lyrically, pagan metal refers to representations – often poeticised – of pre-Christian historical times, commonly with an emphasis on praising pre-Christian religions or gods as opposed to imposed alien religions (especially Christianity). Not infrequently, pagan metal bands delve into the exploration of the historical past of their countries, which is also represented in their lyrical themes in the form of glorifying or grieving about events related to national history and prominent historical figures. The other common and important topic for the bands in the genre is nature and native landscapes.

Hence, pagan metal is a subgenre that functions around a certain idea, or rather a set of closely interrelated ideas. This form of the genre in metal history can first be traced back to the iconic *Blood Fire Death* (1988) – an album of the Swedish band Bathory, which started out in their first albums as a “Satanism”-focused black metal band, but which slowly shifted to topics of Scandinavian history and Norse mythology. Some of the well-known modern pagan metal bands include, for example, Enslaved, Moonsorrow, Kampfar or Havukruunu. As for the Baltic States, the most well-known bands associated with pagan metal are Obtest from Lithuania (1992–present), Skyforger from Latvia (1995–present), and Tharaphita from Estonia (1995–present).

### **Metal Music Studies and Pagan Metal**

Metal music studies, being a highly interdisciplinary academic field, focuses on the study of both metal music itself and its surrounding culture. Hence, since the birth of the first research endeavours in the field in the 1990s

(see Weinstein 1991; Gaines 1991; Walser 1993) and up until the present metal music studies scholars conduct and publish their research under affiliations with musicology, sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, folkloristics, etc. Since the beginning of the 2000s, scholars have started to focus more on the specific features of the different metal subgenres, including specific symbolism, political ideologies, gender discussions and other subcultural aspects (e.g. see Purcell 2003; Mudrian 2004; Phillipov 2012 on death metal; Maspero, Ribaric 2015; Wilson 2014; Shadrack 2021 on black metal).

The black metal subculture tends to be the one most investigated, mainly owing to the occurrence of a few shocking episodes that have aroused public concern over the course of its existence, such as church arsons and murders committed by black metal musicians, or their far-right affiliations. Researchers of black metal music and subculture have discussed its symbolism, ideology, aesthetics and history from a diversity of angles (see e.g. Hoffin 2018; Steinken 2018; Tyft 2021; Hoffin 2023; Patterson 2023).

While there seems to be a consensus among scholars on what black metal is and how to approach it, pagan metal remains a rather vague and under-researched area. According to some, pagan metal is not even considered a separate subgenre of metal (e.g. von Helden 2012), while others offer different definitions and categorisations that sometimes need justification (Weinstein 2014; Manea 2016; Hofmann 2020).

Among Estonian scholars, Kristiin Hanimägi defended her bachelor’s thesis on pagan metal and its religious component (Hanimägi 2015). Otherwise, only a few aspects of Estonian metal subcultures have been researched, such as the role of communication in the Estonian heavy metal subculture (Araste 2010; Araste, Ventsel 2015), the history of the Estonian metal subculture, and the subculture’s social constitution (Karjalainen 2019, 2022) or the aspects of nation building and cultural trauma in the lyrics of the folk metal band Metsatöll (Polese et al. 2017; Valijärvi 2022).

### **Estonian Pagan Metal Subculture**

In this research, “pagan metal subculture” serves more as a tool for analysis rather than a distinct

subculture and assists me in narrowing down the focus of the analysis. I use this concept as a collective indicator for the bands and band members that are united by the certain types of music and thematic ideas described above and who, at the same time, are tightly interrelated with the general pool of extreme metal bands in Estonia.

It is important to indicate that, from the emic perspective, not all participants refer to their bands as pagan metal, and not all of them consider pagan metal subculture as something that even exists within the Estonian extreme metal scene. This is not uncommon in the world of metal music and popular music in general as the self-definitions of musicians and the audience's perception might differ; hence, I based my definition on the etic reception of the bands' music and creative activities. Moreover, some participants disagree with the mere functionality of the term "pagan metal" in their understanding: during the interview, participant C told me that "there is no such riff or pagan metal riff or something like that. There is nothing like that" (interview 13.10.2022). Generally, my participants consider themselves members of the extreme metal scene or its specific clusters, which may often be socially (friend/interests groups) or geographically (Tartu/Tallinn) based, and they can be involved in multiple, and in terms of subgenres, diverse, music projects.

Thus, the participants I defined as members of the analytical pagan metal subculture take part in one or more bands as well as being members of other bands that might not even be metal per se (e.g. punk or neofolk).

### **Methods and Fieldwork**

My fieldwork methods included interviews, questionnaires, participant observation and netnography. The majority of my fieldwork for this research was conducted between November 2021 and April 2023, with some of the additional details being collected up to the time of writing this article (October–December 2023). During that time, I became an active part of the subculture. My personal journey into the Estonian subculture began with an encounter at a merch stand during the first gig I attended in Tartu in November 2021. After that, my subcultural involvement quickly

expanded through snowballing recommendations and meeting new participants at diverse events.

### **Bands**

The focus of my study mainly involved such bands as *Ulguränd*, *Langenu*, *Loits*, *Bestia*, *Wolfskrone*, *Tapper*, *Kaev*, *Pagansarv* and *Tharaphita*. Some members were my interviewees, while others were subjects of online research or participant observation during their live performances. Some other bands, such as *Pime* or *Kõdu*, were taken into account, though, the possibility of contacting them personally did not emerge during the course of my fieldwork. The bands were chosen on the basis of my theoretical framework (i.e. what I define as pagan metal in my research).

### **Participants**

Overall, there were seven participants from the above-mentioned bands who were interviewed or responded to a questionnaire, and four more were questioned orally in the course of participant observation, making a total of overall eleven active participants. All the respondents were musicians – vocalists, guitarists, bass players and drummers. The majority of the participants were Tartu-based, so the data mainly represents the Tartu cluster of the subculture. In terms of age, they were in their 20s–50s, and gender-wise all were men due to the prevalent number of male musicians over female ones in the scene (on gender in metal see e.g. Schaap, Berkers 2014, or Kinnunen, Honkanen 2021).

Additionally, there were some subculturists who I had rather brief conversations with during my participant observation – at least fifteen more persons, including both musicians and fans. These people provided me with contextual data about the scene, the history of Estonian metal, music recommendations, etc. that I recorded in my mental or digital notes, and this helped me with pinpointing patterns and important details in my data analysis.

### **Interviews and questionnaires**

Overall, I conducted four semi-structured interviews: two face-to-face interviews in Tartu and two online interviews. The average length of an interview was two hours. There were twelve thematically divided blocks of questions, each

of which contained three to five questions. The themes included the beginning of personal interest in music, first experience with playing in a band, discussion on pagan metal as a genre, views on style and authenticity, etc. Each participant represented one or more bands of my research interest.

With regard to the questionnaires, there were three detailed questionnaires, each of which consisted of 17 sets of questions (the participants could respond to all of them or select the most relevant ones). The questionnaires were sent to the participants online, using social media, in docx format. The choice of questions was based on my interview experience in the sense that the previous knowledge gained from interviewing allowed me to select the questions that would be more personalised and allow participants to reply in a more descriptive manner and, as a result, feel more comfortable and open to write as much as possible. Some of the topics included music background, former and current bands, sources of inspiration, upcoming releases, symbols and rituals in the scene, understanding of authenticity, etc.

I chose questionnaires as an additional method due to some participants' reluctance to be interviewed. Originally, there were five questionnaires sent out to the participants who agreed to participate, but two of these did not manage to return them owing to personal issues.

### **Participant observation**

Overall, I attended over 30 metal music events (or "gigs", as subculturists call them in English<sup>2</sup>), mostly in Tartu. I also had a chance to attend gigs in Tallinn as well as going to the biggest metal festival in Estonia, Hard Rock Laager, twice – in the summer of 2022 and 2023. Additionally, as in the course of my fieldwork I have become part of the Estonian metal community, I was welcomed at private gatherings and after-parties, where I had access to the observation of the most exclusive subcultural performance and knowledge production.

As for note-taking, in most cases, I took mental notes and then wrote them up in a private document later on. Sometimes, I took quick

notes in my phone note app, especially when it concerned personal names, places, names of bands and the like.

With four participants, more elaborate conversations during participant observation occurred. As there was no way to provide direct quotes, information from those encounters is expressed as freely formulated ideas in the text. The same applies to my other encounters during participant observation.

### **Netnography**

Netnography is a qualitative method designed for studying online communities. The choice of netnography as a method was based on its efficiency in collecting and analysing the online presence of the bands under research. The bands' choices in maintaining an online image provided me with considerable insight into their symbolism, common practices and morals, as well as with practical information such as dates of online performances or album releases. Thanks to my prior online research, I found and attended my first gig in November 2021, where Ulguränd, Bestia and Pagansarv were performing,<sup>3</sup> and where I was finally able to shape my research idea.

### **Language of the fieldwork**

The interviews, questionnaires and overall communication with the participants was predominantly in English, with me using Estonian to the extent my skills allowed at the time.

### **Data analysis**

Inductive thematic analysis was prevalent in the fieldwork data analysis. The main aim of thematic analysis lies in defining and enunciating thematic threads in data (Coker 2021). The choice was based on the nature of the research process and the process of collecting my fieldwork, as inductive thematic analysis is more exploratory. I started analysing the data without any pre-conceived expectations, which allowed me to track themes and patterns emerging directly from the data. During this process, I could apply open coding, which involved engaging with the raw data in a detailed and line-by-line manner without

<sup>2</sup> *Keika* or *konsa/kontsert* in Estonian.

<sup>3</sup> Facebook event link: <https://fb.me/e/2MrynsM4Q> (last access 7.08.2024).

predetermined categories and generating codes based on the actual content of the data. Themes emerged organically through repeated examination of the data, and they guided the structure of my research in an approach that was exploratory and which led to the discovery of unexpected insights and patterns within the data.

### **Limitations**

As this article is based on my master's thesis, it has allowed me to review the work I have done and pinpoint certain limitations in the research analysis and its results. First of all, the participant selection implies a level of limitation in the research results in terms of gender representativeness as, during the fieldwork process, I did not specifically consider bringing in gender diversity but just went with the "snowballing" flow of participants. In addition, the participants' responses were analysed without taking their age into account as the pool of the participants was relatively small and I did not ask the age of those questioned during participant observation. As a result there was no emphasis on how responses differed in terms of gender and age dimensions.

Secondly, while integrating into the community significantly enhanced my research, the ethical considerations of forming close friendships during fieldwork posed challenges, which resulted in minor clashes and misunderstandings. Although such encounters offered valuable insights into conflict resolution when conducting fieldwork in the subculture, they also presupposed an expectation of side-taking in diverse antagonisms, which sometimes slowed down the research process.

Finally, the nature of the thematic analysis was predominantly descriptive; employing an alternative approach could offer different results.

### **Subcultural Constitution and Information Transmission**

To understand how authenticity is reproduced in the first-order zone, a reader first and foremost must understand what a subculture is and how subcultural information is shared within its borders.

A subculture can be described as a "culturally bounded (but not closed) network of people"

(Williams 2011: 148), within which the subcultural network zones are formed and maintained. To investigate the social constitution of this network I turned to Dorothy Noyes' understanding of network (Noyes 1995). She describes network as containing a division between the first-order zone (immediate acquaintances) and the second-order zone (friend of a friend). She also talks about them having greater or lesser density, centrality and peripherality, and clustering (Noyes 1995: 457). All these features can be applied to the Estonian pagan metal subculture, which functions as a social network.

The first-order zone is dense and can be multiplex, meaning that individuals often hold multiple roles within the subculture. For example, a person may own a label that releases music produced by pagan metal bands while also being a merchandise creator, a band member or a friend or acquaintance of many musicians within the subculture. I also consider the most dedicated fans actively engaged in the subculture's internal processes as integral members of the first-order zone. An example of such groups of people can be the creators of extreme metal music clubs, such as the Black Magic Estonia in Tallinn or Pergerus in Tartu. Music-wise, these clubs are mainly black metal-centred. The main difference between the two groups is that Pergerus only includes band members and their venue serves as a rehearsal room, whereas Black Magic Estonia includes like-minded people fond of black metal who organise events like concerts or movie nights. Pergerus occasionally organises small-scale events too but their main focus is communal practices related to bands-members' activities: "We see ourselves as a group of creators of music and visual art" (interview 11.08.2022).

The second-order zone, on the other hand, is much larger and involves the audience. The network connections within this zone are sparse (there are individuals who do not know each other) and the level of clustering is high (individuals form tighter groups of interests, mainly friend groups, which can be highly distinct and not familiar with each other). This is a constantly changing zone of the network as many "outsiders" may occasionally attend thematic events, for example when invited by friends who do not have anyone else to go with. The position of the outsiders, however, depends

on their level of integration in relation to the subculture. Unless they have a deep interest in the subculture or attempt to integrate with it, they mostly remain in the liminal zone – a zone of floating memberships, where actors interact with the subculture without being a part of it.

Within the subculture under research, the first-order zone mainly consists of the musicians themselves – band members – as well as venue owners, label owners, merchandise artists, gig photographers and others closely related to the organisational and performative aspects of the subculture activities. As such, musicians have a deep understanding of the subculture because of their regular participation in the subcultural practices; they are often the most stable contributors to the collective subcultural capital as being in a band leads to regular presence in the subculture and the most immediate communication with other musicians. Musicians are also crucial for the study because metal subcultures are music-centred subcultures, where the “music comes first” notion is the whole pillar of their entire existence.

Subcultural knowledge transmission within different zones varies, however, among the first-order zone; some of the most common channels of transmission are:

- 1) Daily interactions – rehearsals: Information transmission becomes an integral part of the daily routine, occurring organically during regular rehearsals. Such interactions serve as a ground for the exchange of ideas, creative collaboration and the passing on of subcultural capital – cultural knowledge, skills and practices that are valued within a particular subculture (Thornton 1995; Jensen 2006). It includes both material and symbolic resources that are used to establish and maintain social status and subcultural authenticity within the scene.
- 2) Music composition and lyric writing: The creative process of making music and writing lyrics becomes a significant channel for subcultural knowledge transmission. The act of composing not only involves the technical aspects of music creation but also incorporates subcultural narratives that contribute to the shaping of the subcultural identity.

### 3) Leisure time together:

Beyond formal settings, leisure activities shared among subculturists play a crucial role in knowledge dissemination. Whether bonding over shared interests, discussing subcultural themes informally or simply spending downtime together, these moments contribute to a mutual understanding of the shared subcultural symbols, practices and rituals of subcultural everydayness.

While the subculture itself is a socially bounded but not closed network, the inner subcultural network zones function in the same manner. The concept of “communication-interlocks” emphasises the possibility of subcultural knowledge spreading through diverse sorts of societal channels. Williams argues that “ideas, objects, and practices – the essential parts of culture – are transmitted via ‘communication-interlocks’, social linkages or conduits within and among networks of people” (Williams 2011: 40), and distinguishes between four types of such linkages: multiple group cultures, structural roles, “weak ties” and media diffusion. The first three widely resonate with Noyes’ features of the network (clustering, first-order zone and second-order zone concepts respectively).

The first type of communication-interlocks, group cultures, is based on the idea that subcultures consist of smaller group cultures. One way of calling these group cultures is “idiot-cultures” (see Fine 1979), but for this research, the name “scenes” is more appropriate as this is the most common way participants themselves refer to a subculture, as well as being widely used by scholars in subcultural studies (Williams 2011: 40). Williams illustrates this interlock with an interest in “tribal” tattoos: one person finds a tattoo in a magazine, shares it with a friend, and both develop an interest, leading them to festivals. Through these interactions the newborn subculture evolves over time as new elements are introduced into the cultural process (ibid.: 40).

The example provided by Williams largely corresponds with how the participants described the scene formation to me, or rather how they formed smaller clusters (bands and groups of interests) that later became part of the Estonian extreme metal scene and within which the formation and transmission of the subcultural capital occur. All my respondents started playing

musical instruments very young, with the age range being 9–15 years old, and they indicated a fondness for metal (sometimes also punk) music as their first and foremost motivation to start learning how to play. They were introduced to metal by someone from their environment: for instance, H mentioned a metalhead relative, while for C it was the school environment where older schoolmates played in bands. Their passion for music eventually led to them forming bands with a few like-minded friends: J was already in his first band when he was 14 and at the age of 16 joined one of the bands of my research interest.

Participants from the smaller towns, however, indicated that they were not able to form or join the scene in their hometown, and for A, for instance, this was one of the reasons for moving to Tartu. A, following his interest in music, started attending a guitar class advertised in his town and eventually founded a band with acquaintances from Tartu, which was the main reason for him to move there after graduating from high school. He explains:

If you go to a bigger place, like Tallinn, you can actually maybe chase your passions of becoming a musician there, there are people who are doing this. There are concerts and everything going on. But in [hometown name], you cannot do that there. And I had to get away from it, me staying there was just not an option for me (interview 10.07.2022).

When it comes to “weak ties” communication-interlock, these are the kinds of relationships subculturists sustain in different networks such as, for example, among work colleagues or classmates at school (Williams 2011: 41). The name “weak ties” comes from the fact that the subculturists may only interact with each other in some institutional context (e.g. school or work), where their relationship with others is mainly functional (ibid.: 41). However, these weak ties are present both inside and outside of the scene network. The second-order zone members can serve as weak ties for the first-order zone members and, subsequently, the second-order zone can also hold this function for the liminal members.

The structural roles, however, are located in the first-order zone. Recognised members of a subculture may perform the roles of gatekeepers

and guides to becoming a “core” member of a local scene (Williams 2011: 41), where I locate my research participants. The research participants’ description of the community structure fits this concept. One of the creators of Pergerus describes their community this way: “We have a core group, people who are more active, and there are some kind of like satellites who sometimes are more with us and sometimes they just mind their own business” (interview 11.08.2022).

Such a complexion of the first-order zone demonstrates the density and multiplexity of the network connections within it. The subculture’s multiplexity is the reflection of the inter-relational aspect – the musicians usually share the roles of either friends, close acquaintances or even family members. For some of them, this factor can be defining in their motivation to support their communal belonging. For example, F, a bass player, says that there is no “scene” in Estonia as it was before, in times of Loits and Tharaphita (meaning the late 90s and early 2000s), and he himself plays in bands just because his friends play in those bands. One of his family members was also a member of one of his current bands. H indicates that he was invited into both bands where he currently plays on the recommendations of friends (from the questionnaire materials).

The fact that musicians often share roles as friends or acquaintances reinforces a sense of camaraderie and shared experience that can contribute to the subculture’s overall cohesion, sense of community and density of the network. It also suggests that the scene represents a rather tight network, where multiple social roles can be at play.

A contribution to this idea can be an idea shared as a joke by some research participants that there are 15 musicians in the scene and they all are just mixed up between bands with different names. Furthermore, the documentary *Tartu Under the Horns* (2022) conveyed the idea that despite many bands producing only a demo and then disbanding, the individuals involved still remain active in the subculture, often forming new bands and continuing to contribute to the scene.

On a side note, the density and multiplexity of the social relationships in the network can also be a source of conflicts, which leads to the

bands splitting or certain band members quitting a band. For instance, B mentioned that they had to ask one of the former band members to quit: “... Then we kicked him out. [...] I think he grew a bit tired and we felt that we better to do it ourselves” (interview 11.08.2022).

One of the dispersion factors in the scene is the geographical factor. There are research participants who distinguish between the Tartu and Tallinn scenes and sometimes characterise them in different ways: some see the Tartu scene as more creative but at the same time more isolated. For example, G mentions that there are two sides in Estonian extreme metal – North Estonia and South Estonia – and that he can hear differences very well (from the questionnaire materials). However, even though I focused on Tartu-based musicians more, it is important to indicate that these two units are still deeply interrelated. For example, one band can consist of musicians based in Tartu, Tallinn or other cities, who constantly travel between different areas for rehearsals and gigs. Due to this factor, I suggest that on the first-order zone level, the dispersion is not a crucial factor for the objectives of my research and that the geographical factor would be more relevant if the research included the second-order zone too. In addition, the geographically based division is not strong enough to suggest that there are two distinct metal scenes – rather, there is one scene with different units. H specifically touched upon this topic in a questionnaire response: “What bothers me a bit is the talk of scenes. Many people who are more into metal like to talk about the differences between the scenes in Tallinn and Tartu for example like they are two completely different things, but Estonia is so small and it feels stupid to somehow try to divide it even more” (from the questionnaire materials).

Finally, one of the main specifics of the extreme metal scene in Estonia lies in its underground position, meaning that metal can be considered a minor genre compared to mainstream music genres such as pop, hip-hop, rap or generic rock (Karjalainen 2022: 232). As a result, the subculture is placed in a somewhat peripheral position within the larger music industry and operates on a much smaller scale compared to mainstream genres. This position of metal strengthens the sensed cohesion among the

subculturists (Karjalainen 2022: 233) and creates a sense of solidarity among the members. This is especially visible in the first-order zone as the scene members often have to rely on their own resources to organise and promote the events, distribute music and produce merchandise – all these practices contribute to the density of the network and its cohesion.

### **Performing and Reproducing Authenticity Within the Estonian Pagan Metal Scene**

In addition to the above-mentioned features, the first-order zone can be further characterised by the process of encapsulation (Noyes 1995). Encapsulation refers to the process of maintaining the boundaries between a subculture from the larger society or culture in which it exists. In the case of the pagan metal subculture in Estonia, encapsulation acts towards the relationship between the local subculture and mainstream culture, and between the subculture and the global extreme metal scene as well. C described the latter as “the most important problem in the Estonian scene” (interview 13.10.2022) because, in C’s opinion, this prevents bands from getting “out there” and establishing international connections. However, the majority of my research participants expressed a reluctance to get global. B justifies it as follows: “Since I don’t want to be world-famous myself, then I don’t pay so much attention to be approachable to everyone” (interview 11.08.2022). Furthermore, the *Tartu Under the Horns* documentary largely discusses the “Tartu scene” as an isolated network that does not strive for fame: “In Tartu, they want to preserve art for themselves” (*Tartu Under the Horns* 2022).

Such an ongoing thread can also be explained by the fact that the first-order zone of the subculture contains the most subcultural capital, as this is where the most committed and dedicated members of the subculture are found. The subculturists from the first-order zone have invested a significant amount of time, effort and resources into their involvement in the subculture, which has allowed them to accumulate such substantial subcultural capital. Moreover, they have developed a strong influence on the other members of the subculture and a reputation among them, which further enhances their status

and recognition within the subculture. It does not mean that the first-order zone is entitled to the subcultural values in a way that the second-order zone has no access to; however, the first-order zone is more resistant to liminal memberships and external cultural influences.

Talking about the encapsulation of a community, Noyes writes: “resistance to the exit of the expressive forms from the network is easily understood as a protection of cultural capital, the appropriation of which robs the network of a resource” (Noyes 1995: 464). In the context of the quote, the “exit” of expressive forms from the network can refer to the loss or removal of resources from the subculture, which can lead to a decrease in its subcultural capital. For example, if a member of the subculture stops participating in certain subcultural practices or stops creating subcultural artefacts, it could result in a loss of subcultural capital for the community. The resistance to this exit I see: 1) as a protective measure to preserve the subcultural capital of the community, and 2) as insurance for preserving *authenticity* within the subculture.

I would like to indicate here that authenticity in folkloristics has been a subject of debate and discussion because of the fluid nature of folklore (e.g. see the monumental Bendix 1997 on authenticity and the history of folklore studies; see Venbrux and Meder 2004 on authenticity as an analytic concept and defining “authentic” folk narratives; see van Ginkel 2004 on a debate between authenticity as untouched cultural heritage and “invention of tradition”). The situation is similar in research on subcultural authenticity, where scholars have been trying to figure out who is a “true” subculturist based on the emic point of view of the subculturists (e.g. Jasper 2004; Skadiang 2017; Barnard 2020). Finding emic authenticity criteria in subcultures is crucial for understanding how subculturists form their individual and collective identities. A sense of what is authentic is something that helps subculturists to distinguish “ours” from “theirs”, yet there is no guidebook for a researcher or a newcomer as to what is “right” – this is why, if we want to understand subcultural identities, we must search for answers in fieldwork among the subculturists. The right ground for joining a subculture is often implied in comparisons, rather

than explicitly articulated (Widdicombe, Wooffitt 1990: 274).

My research participants are not an exception in this matter. Preservation of subcultural authenticity serves as an active mechanism to uphold the distinctive identity and values that define the subculture and, as a result, assists the subculturists in performing their belonging and understanding such a performance as coming from others. To grasp this process, I turned to Susanna Larsson’s concept of “reproducing authenticity” (Larsson 2013). Larsson understands authenticity as related to individual morals (one’s own sense of originality) and as related to socially constructed morals – an in-group social negotiation of morals (Larsson 2013: 98). This suggests that authenticity is a combination of an individual’s sense of originality and the socially constructed morals of their subculture. These social norms and values act as a barrier that distinguishes the subculture from the wider society, which means the encapsulation of subcultural capital. Therefore, authenticity involves both being true to oneself and being a part of a group that shares similar values and beliefs. In the context of my research, it implies that the authenticity of the Estonian pagan metal subculture is shaped by the subculturist’s own sense of originality and the subculture’s socially constructed morals, values and practices. These morals, values and practices, in turn, are developed and reproduced within the in-group context.

The authenticity reproduction process occurs on two levels, social and thematic, both of which are strongly interrelated and cannot exist without each other (Larsson 2013). Social in-group authenticity can be investigated through the behavioural patterns of the subculturists, their worldviews and morals, while thematic in-group authenticity can be seen as the implementation of those through style, visuals and subcultural artefacts.

### **Social In-Group Authenticity**

When it comes to social in-group authenticity, one’s position in the scene and one’s “level” of authenticity in the scene are defined by other first-order zone members in the Estonian pagan metal subculture according to the amount of time

one invests into one's lifestyle as a metalhead. For example, participation in a band rehearsal for a truly devoted (and hence, authentic) musician must not be a "special event" but a part of their performed everydayness (Berger, del Negro 2004: 10) and must be perceived by other scene members as such. C indicates: "I think in metal scene, or black metal scene, or extreme metal scene, the most important way of existing is [...] that ideas that you represent and the lifestyle must be a part of your life" (interview 13.10.2022). In the interview, B particularly talked about unstable musicians who have so many other tasks to do that they eventually quit their bands or quit the scene entirely: "They want to get into the things, but after some time they get tired of it and they simply disappeared from that [the scene]" (interview 11.08.2022). I interpret this in the sense that the participants perceive a person who does not have enough time to participate in the life of the band or the scene activities as less authentic.

From this, the aspect of *devotion* emerges, since "less authentic" members are less devoted to the subculture and, thus, cannot be trusted in practical matters of the subculture like event organising or band managing activities. Being devoted to a subculture implies the necessity of having a sincere interest in music and subcultural life – as long as the intentions of the individual are based on sincerity, it is possible to be able to live authentically in subservience to a pre-existing social framework (Rodger Beehler, quoted from Barnard 2020: 6).

This leads to another characteristic of an "authentic musician", which is the length of one's participation in the scene. I indicated earlier that all of my participants started getting into metal as children or teenagers, which allowed them to accumulate the most subcultural capital over the years and, in this way, to maintain their devotion to the subculture. Even though it was not clearly phrased and stated by any of the participants, my analysis results show that the longer one is in the scene, the more one is perceived as authentic. The most devoted subculturists have gained a reputation for being authentic over the years which does not require additional "proof" from their side. This is what can be called recognisability in the social in-group, meaning the social in-subcultural context where

"individual and collective dedication is known and need not be argued for" (Larsson 2013: 95).

At the same time, from the etic standpoint, the reputation one has in the first-order zone does not tell an outsider about the specific reference points according to which this reputation was constructed in the collective perception. This is why at different points in my conversations with the research participants some of them brought up concrete evidence of dedication or a life story that would exemplify someone else's devotion. Such examples can demonstrate a collective acceptance based on others seeing one as more authentic.

The individual understanding of authenticity can be illustrated by the multiple examples C mentioned when talking to me. Firstly, he provided me with a story about a young musician at an international festival who tried to present his special promo text to different musicians, event organisers and record label representatives. However, doing so did not lead to getting his promo accepted. In the context of this story, C highlights several moments of individual understanding of authenticity: finding contacts and networking – *presence* ("you have to be present") in the scene's social activities always, not only when, for instance, you need promotion for your band; complete understanding of the scene members, their values and morals – *knowledge* based on the accumulated subcultural capital ("the most important is that you know the guys, you know the background [...] you are just there drinking beer with them [...] and [eventually] you are much more successful because you don't press yourself into their world, you are already there and you already understand everything") and, subsequently, this presence and knowledge combined give you collective acceptance based on others seeing you as more authentic. C then shared another story about one scene member who was mostly inactive in the scene's social life but who was a great collector and who had an extensive collection of cassettes, vinyl records and CDs. The interviewee mentioned that the man did not consider himself a scene member because of his lack of presence in social settings but the comprehensive collection was seen as devotion and thus was perceived by the interviewee as authentic interest. At first glance, it somewhat contradicts what C said earlier

about presence, yet from this story I drew the conclusion that the collector had been present in the scene long enough and had participated enough in the subcultural practices to obtain the reputation of an authentic subculturist. I suggest that this example further demonstrates the way authenticity reproduction works in terms of acceptance: the devotion to collecting is individually recognised as something authentic by C, but this recognition is also based on the collective understanding of subcultural authenticity.

From the in-subcultural standpoint, however, the participants themselves unanimously refer to authenticity simply as “passion”. When answering the questions about others’ authenticity, the musicians tended to prefer this word to others. The participants used expressions like “you just have to be passionate”, “passion is the most important factor” and alike (based on fieldwork materials).

Thus, passion seems to be an umbrella term for participants that unites the values of devotion, presence, knowledge and acceptance, and from passion is derived the “true sense of self”, which can be experienced by both individual subcultural self-expression and observing the subcultural expressions of others. One of the demonstrative examples of this process is the subcultural sense of style.

### **Thematic In-Group Authenticity**

In the thematic in-group, people can only rely on markers of recognisability such as attributes, symbols or other visual expressions (Larsson 2013: 104). The constituent “look” is one of the defining features of the metal subcultures around the world and it serves as the indicator of belongingness, especially in the subcultural social contexts where one is not necessarily familiar with other subculturists.

From the emic perspective, devotion to music is seen to be more significant than the visual rules when it comes to authenticity. The majority of the research participants stated that for them looks do not define authenticity. For example, H wrote in the questionnaire response the following: “[...] I wouldn’t tie authenticity to a certain look. I’m more wary about people who talk about being fans of metal but really not knowing many bands

at all besides Metallica or some other mainstream ones” (from the questionnaire materials). This also corresponds to the importance of the knowledge aspect already discussed above. Knowledge is more crucial than wearing “leather and spikes” in H’s perception of other musicians as authentic. This is why the power of knowledge and cultural awareness in validating a participant’s perceived “trueness” within the scene is of greater significance than any aesthetic dimension (Barnard 2020: 7).

In support of this idea, C even underlines that the level of devotion might not always be related to what extent the scene members care about the subculturally “accurate” appearance: “Those guys who are very serious into this scene and have been in the scene very long time in Estonia, they actually look like a quite usual person. The look has never been important” (interview 13.10.2022).

Yet the research participants themselves had attributes that to me, as a metalhead, served as a clear indication of their subcultural belonging. These visual attributes are the ones commonly spread in metal subcultures around the world: T-shirts and hoodies with local and foreign metal bands, patches with band names and logos sewn on jackets or vests, chains and long hair. I paid careful attention to the appearance of the subculture members in the contexts of communal activities such as gigs, informal events and the Hard Rock Laager festivals, and noticed that it is rather unlikely for a subculturist not to have at least one or two identifiers of subcultural belonging. Larsson suggests that even though music precedes the visual rules when it comes to authenticity, “this clashes with an implicit demand for belongingness” (Larsson 2013: 104). Subcultural recognisability and, thus, acceptance depend on visual indicators, which are, in turn, the sole method of directly connecting individuals with a particular social setting. This is why collectivism in metal subcultures is present both within the visually powerful uniformity of the dress code and in the display of knowledge and cultural awareness (Barnard 2020: 9).

The discrepancy between the claims of the research participants that looks do not matter and their consistent adoption of a specific dress style associated with extreme metal fandom suggests an interesting dynamic regarding authenticity and its reproduction. From an

emic perspective, the participants may see their dress style as a natural expression of their authentic subcultural identity, while at the same time rejecting the notion that appearance is a defining aspect of this identity. From an etic perspective, it can be argued that a certain look is a symbolic representation of the subculture and that the consistent adoption of this style by the participants reinforces its authenticity in the eyes of both insiders and outsiders. This suggests that subcultural authenticity may be a social construct that is perpetuated through the reproduction of specific subcultural practices, rather than being solely determined by individual self-expression. The observation of the participants bearing subcultural attributes even outside the official subcultural events demonstrates that, for a truly authentic subculturist, metal is a lifestyle and not a special occasion. It is such a natural part of everydayness that it becomes seen as the “usual” way of looking.

In support of this point is the fact that subculturists comment on those scene members who overdo their looks by “trying too hard”. It can be explained through Widdicombe and Wooffitt’s “being” versus “doing” punk: there is a distinction between those who are “doing metal”, as in merely performing a role, instead of “being metal”, as in having the correct grounds for subcultural affiliation (Widdicombe, Wooffitt 1990). I noted jokes that addressed those who try too hard and comments regarding how “ridiculous” or “pointless” it is to overdo merchandise or accessories. Some musicians connect it mostly with the young people who have just started getting into metal and wear merchandise associated with the world’s most famous metal bands (for instance, Metallica, Slayer or Slipknot). B commented on it in this way: “I used to listen to some bands like Metallica myself [...] I think it’s acceptable that younger people don’t know that much, but at the same time, it definitely helps if one is simply devoted to the music they like. There are many for whom metal is just a phase” (interview 11.08.2022).

Considering those participants who referred to some scene members as “usual-looking”, I see choices regarding appearance as important but not as the sole determinants of authenticity. Thus, the implication is that spending too much time on dressing up as a metal fan is seen as pointless (as

it must derive “naturally” from one’s subcultural knowledge). On the other hand, musicians do rely on looks as a recognisability factor when it comes to second-order zone subculturists. This suggests that if one’s awareness of someone else’s subcultural reputation is absent, they “evaluate” authenticity according to the way someone else is able to transmute their subcultural knowledge and devotion into visual attributes such as, for example, the selection of patches on their jackets. From the first-order zone members’ perspective, it may demonstrate their commitment to the scene: “If you see that a youngster is wearing a battle vest and there is a Metallica or Darkthrone patch, then you know that this is the beginning of the road [...]. Not because it’s a statement. You’re wearing statements. So it must be thought through, not just random favourite bands” (interview 13.10.2022).

### **Authenticity Reproduction in the Collective Dimension**

Larsson suggests that the authentic interest in music is something created by the individual and then reproduced culturally by the collective since a “heavy metal moral is reproducing authenticity when someone from the same context utters it” (Larsson 2013: 103). The mechanism through which authenticity is reproduced can be seen as a social process, where members of the subculture collectively negotiate and establish what is considered authentic and desirable within the group. This negotiation can take place through social interactions, shared experiences and the production and circulation of cultural artefacts such as music, literature and visual art.

Events and festivals are the crucial and most common spaces where ideas of what is authentic are transmitted between members in communication-interlocks. In such spaces, authenticity is reproduced through the acts of engagement of the audience with the performers, the performers with other performers, and the fans with each other. By engaging with the scene and participating in the scene practices, both musicians and fans construct the scene as a collective instead of as a group of separate individuals who listen to metal music.

One of the concrete examples of such collective engagement is the festival space of the

Hard Rock Laager. There, I investigated the diverse aspects of authenticity reproduced from the mundane subcultural capital, which is accumulated through a commitment to the collective (Kahn-Harris 2007: 127). Mundane subcultural capital refers to the collective power that arises from the everyday actions and contributions of all members of a subculture. It is built over time through the various practices and activities that keep the subculture alive and thriving and through which the scene is reproduced (Kahn-Harris 2007: 122).

Naturally, the interaction between the first and second-order zones is essential for maintaining the vitality of the subculture. Without the participation of the fans, the musicians would not have an audience to perform for, and the subculture would lose its communal aspect. Similarly, without the musicians, there would be no music for the fans to consume. At the Hard Rock Laager (HRL), the sense of unity and shared mundane capital is stronger than at any smaller-scale local events. Most musicians, who come to perform there, stay for the whole duration of the festival and, thus, become one with the crowd as listeners of the other performing bands.

Hence, the HRL is one of the essential collective experiences where the scene's collective values and sense of authenticity are reproduced, considering both social and thematic in-group authenticity aspects. The first point of reference for authenticity "evaluation" is the presence and length of subcultural participation. The most obvious visual evidence in this regard is HRL T-shirts. Every year, the festival organisers release festival T-shirts with diverse designs that necessarily include the year of the festival.

Even though it is possible to buy T-shirts from the previous festival years at the online store, the audience and musicians will consider an actual T-shirt bought on the spot from the merchandising stand as the most authentic evidence of dedication. This way, although I have not witnessed such cases myself, based on my personal in-subcultural experience I could assume that buying former years' festival T-shirts without actual attending the festivals could be ridiculed and disregarded.

Annual attendance at the festival is therefore also considered by the participants as a big indicator of one's devotion. Since the festival takes place in Vana-Vigala, people travel



**Figure 1.** HRL 2022 female T-shirt and HRL 2009 male shirt. Taken from Hard Rock Laager online store, <https://shop.hardrocklaager.ee> (last access 7.08.2024).

there from all over Estonia, and for many it is a significant sacrifice of time, money, and the stability of everyday comforts – the vast majority of the participants live at a camping area in tents for the duration of the festival.

As for the knowledge aspect, in the context of HRL, a great example would be an instance of festival lore. During my stay there, festival visitors at the camping area would shout “Eero!” intermittently during nighttime. Being deprived of a chance to sleep, I started asking around about the meaning of this behaviour. By investigating at the festival and afterwards in Tartu, I found two versions of the story’s origins. The first one tells of a man named Eero who borrowed money from somebody at the festival and did not return it. The person or people from whom Eero had borrowed the money were looking for him at the camping area and shouting “Eero! Eero!”. Over the festival years, the regular festival visitors appropriated the shout, sometimes also adding an additional part to it: “Eeero! Maksa võlg ära!”<sup>4</sup>

In the second version, Eero did not borrow any money but simply got lost at the festival area and did not make it back to the tent where he was staying with friends. His friends were looking for him and shouting his name. I could not find information about the exact year when the incident took place, however, some participants mentioned that the tradition of shouting Eero’s name has already existed since 2009.

In the collective context of the Hard Rock Laager festival, all the factors combined are perceived as subculturally authentic by those who attend the festival regularly, and this sense of authenticity is reproduced by the newer audiences (like me, for instance). By reproducing authenticity, the newcomers accumulate subcultural capital and acquire means of subcultural belonging, which can be the rewarding collective experience of the scene.

## Conclusions

This article offers a lens through which to understand local cultural expressions and identity formations by looking at the case of the subcultural authenticity of the Estonian pagan

metal scene. The use of “pagan metal subculture” as an analytic tool let me investigate a part of the extreme metal subculture that reflects a diversity of mindsets and musical talents but at the same time coherence in their subcultural perceptions. This, in turn, allowed me to engage with the previous research in folkloristics and subcultural studies and develop a theory for the scene’s social constitution, integrating the concepts of zones and the communication-interlocks, where the subcultural knowledge is passed on inside, between and outside the units.

The first-order zone, consisting of the scene members with the most subcultural capital, expressed itself as a community that strives for reservedness rather than openness. I describe this dynamic through the process of encapsulation – the subcultural resistance to individuals who stop participating or contributing to the subculture (Noyes 1995). This resistance serves as a means to protect subcultural capital but, more importantly in the context of the study, it stands as an insurance for maintaining the authentic nature of the in-subcultural expression.

To have a better grasp on the both emic and etic understanding of the authenticity in the Estonian pagan metal subculture, I looked at it from angles of social in-group and thematic in-group contexts, following Larsson’s conceptualisation (Larsson 2013). Investigation of the social life of the subculture, participants’ opinions and behavioural self-expressions formed my view on what can be called the etic perception of authenticity, which I categorised as devotion, presence and knowledge. These categories, however, are deeply interrelated and can be tracked together in the subcultural discussion of authenticity. The data demonstrates that from the emic perspective, authenticity can be equated to the notion of passion, which seems to be based on the idea of utmost contribution to the subculture and living for the sake of it.

This can be supported by the results of the thematic in-group analysis, which shows how social understanding of authenticity is realised in the visual attributes of the subculture. The main outcome of the contradiction between a concrete understanding of the authentic

<sup>4</sup> “Eero! Pay off the debt!”

visual elements alongside their representation through one's own subcultural style versus claims that look has never mattered in metal reveals that subcultural authenticity is not merely an outcome of individual self-realisation but rather a social construct sustained by the perpetuation of specific subcultural practices.

Observing participants wearing subcultural attributes outside formal subcultural occasions shows that, for an authentic subculturist, metal transcends being a mere musical preference; it evolves into a pervasive way of life rather than being reserved for a special occasion. This perspective highlights the notion that sporadic acts of self-expression, both social and thematic, do not solely determine authenticity as a constituent of a subcultural identity, but are rooted in the consistent embodiment of subcultural elements in one's everydayness. This, in turn, suggests that the authentic subculturists' commitment to the metal lifestyle extends beyond the confines of the performative subcultural frame by shaping their appearance and identity as an integral part of their everydayness.

The final outcome emerges from the case of the Hard Rock Laager as a space for authenticity reproduction in the collective context. The festival space reveals mundane subcultural capital that is formed by multi-levelled rituals of subcultural everydayness. This is where the diversity of group cultures clashes with structural roles and where it forms, consumes and reproduces new subcultural knowledge. Although the main focus of the study was on the first-order zone, the Hard Rock Laager case suggests that subcultural tendencies for authenticity perception could also be applied to the second-order zone; this, however, would have

to be investigated and supported with more data from the given zone.

Overall, the information transmission and authenticity reproduction analysed in the present study demonstrate the multidimensionality of the in-subcultural social processes, which shape subcultural dynamics in a way not visible or understandable for an outsider, but which at the same time have been formed under the influence of external cultural and geopolitical factors.

Besides, my fieldwork demonstrated that the first-order zone of the Estonian extreme metal scene is quite small and most of my research participants play in other bands in different subgenres of metal. This is why it can be assumed that the finding of this article could also be applied to other subscenes of the Estonian extreme metal scene more generally. My results encourage me to expand the research focus to more units within the subculture in order to provide a deeper understanding of authenticity from both individual and collective standpoints which will contribute to the debate around authenticity in folkloristics and subcultural studies through the etic interpretation of emic perception of authenticity. In my doctoral dissertation, I am currently exploring this process using a comparative perspective of Estonian, Finnish and Ukrainian extreme metal subcultures that will allow me to find scene-specific characteristics of authenticity while also considering the historical circumstances of subcultural development in the respective countries. Meanwhile, I invite the reader to read my master's thesis (Holitsyna 2023), which gives a more detailed overview of the Estonian pagan metal subculture.

---

**Sources**

Fieldwork materials (November 2021 – December 2023): participant observation, participant conversations (30 metal music events and private gatherings between summer 2022 and summer 2023), netnography.

Interviews (conducted from 10 July to 13 October 2022).

Questionnaires (March–April 2023).

---

**References**

**Araste**, Lii 2010. Communication Function in the Estonian Metal Subculture. – *Heavy Fundametalisms: Music, Metal and Politics*. Eds. Rosemary Hill, Karl Spracklen, Leiden: Brill, pp. 103–109, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848880177\\_011](https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848880177_011).

**Araste**, Lii, Aimar Ventsel 2015. They Have no Right to Wear Those Clothes: The Ambivalence of the Dress Code of German Skinheads and Estonian Metal Heads. – *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* 2/2, pp. 257–272, [https://doi.org/10.1386/fspc.2.2.257\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/fspc.2.2.257_1).

**Barnard**, Steven 2020. Power and Authenticity: Tradition and Transgression in Extreme Metal Music. – *Knowledge Commons*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/1t0p-7r81>.

**Bendix**, Regina 1997. *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. Madison/London: Univ. of Wisconsin Press.

**Berger**, Harris M., Giovanna del Negro 2004. *Identity and Everyday Life: Essays in the Study of Folklore, Music, and Popular Culture*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press.

**Coker**, David C. 2021. Making Thematic Analysis Systematic: The Seven Deadly Sins. – *Journal of Studies in Education* 11/3, pp. 126–146, <https://doi.org/10.5296/jse.v11i3.18882>.

**Fine**, Gary Alan 1979. Small Groups and Culture Creation: The Idioculture of Little League Baseball Teams. – *American Sociological Review* 44/5, pp. 733–745, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094525>.

**Gaines**, Donna 1991. *Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead End Kids*. New York: Pantheon.

**Ginkel**, Rob van 2004. The Makah Whale Hunt and Leviathan's Death: Reinventing Tradition and Disputing Authenticity in the Age of Modernity. – *Etnofoor* 17/1–2, "Authenticity", pp. 58–89, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25758069> (last access 6.08.2024).

**Hanimägi**, Kristiin 2015. *Religioosete ideede väljendusest black metal-bändides pagan/black metal-bändi Urt näitel*. Bakalaureusetöö, Tartu Ülikool, Tartu, <http://hdl.handle.net/10062/47811> (last access 2.08.2024).

**Helden**, Imke von 2012. Barbarians and Literature: Viking Metal and its Links to Old Norse Mythology. – *Reflections in the Metal Void*. Ed. Niall W.R. Scott, Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, pp. 155–166.

**Hoffin**, Kevin 2018. Decay as a Black Metal Symbol. – *Metal Music Studies* 4/1, pp. 81–94, [https://doi.org/10.1386/mms.4.1.81\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/mms.4.1.81_1).

**Hoffin**, Kevin 2023. The Norwegian Black Metal Second Wave: A Space for Performative Politics. – *Music in Crime, Resistance, and Identity*. Ed. Eleanor Peters, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, pp. 27–39, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003186410>.

**Hofmann**, Alexander 2020. Viking, Pagan or Folk? Distinguishing Possibilities for Metal Sub-Genres. – *Bašćinski glasi* 15/1, pp. 73–91, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/251320> (last access 2.08.2024).

**Holitsyna**, Polina 2023. *Estonian Pagan Metal Subculture: Community and Authenticity*. Master's thesis, University of Tartu, Tartu, <https://hdl.handle.net/10062/91206> (last access 2.08.2024).

**Jasper**, Agnes 2004. "I am not a goth!": The Unspoken Morale of Authenticity within the Dutch Gothic Subculture. – *Etnofoor* 7/1–2, "Authenticity", pp. 90–115, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i25758063> (last access 2.08.2024).

**Jensen**, Sune Qvotrup 2006. Rethinking Subcultural Capital. – *YOUNG* 14/3, pp. 257–276, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308806065820>.

**Kahn-Harris**, Keith 2007. *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*. Oxford: Berg.

**Karjalainen**, Toni-Matti 2019. The Construction and Cultural Specialties of the Estonian Heavy Metal Scene. Paper presented at the ISMMS 4th Biennial Research Conference, 17–20 June, Lieu Unique, Nantes, France.

**Karjalainen**, Toni-Matti 2022. Heavy Metal in Estonia: Cohesions and Divisions, Past and Present. – *Living Metal: Metal Scenes Around the World*. Eds. Bryan Bardine, Jerome Stueart, NED-New edition, UK: Intellect Ltd., <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xvw6k.17>.

**Kinnunen**, Maarit, Antti Honkanen 2021. Femininity in Metal Fanship: "I Do Not Need to Take Anyone Along". – *Metal Music Studies* 7/2, pp. 211–235, [https://doi.org/10.1386/mms\\_00046\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/mms_00046_1).

**Larsson**, Susanna 2013. "I Bang My Head, Therefore I Am": Constructing Individual and Social Authenticity in the Heavy Metal Subculture. – *YOUNG* 21/1, pp. 95–110, doi:10.1177/1103308812467673.

**Manea**, Irina-Maria 2016. *Valhalla Rising: The Construction of Cultural Identity through Norse Myth in Scandinavian and German Pagan Metal*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Bucharest, Bucharest.

**Maspero**, Davide, Max Ribaric 2015. *Wolves Among Sheep: History and Ideology of National Socialist Black Metal*. Milano: Tsunami.

**Mudrian**, Albert 2004. *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal and Grindcore*. Los Angeles, CA: Feral House.

**Noyes**, Dorothy 1995. Group. – *The Journal of American Folklore* 108/430, pp. 449–478, <https://doi.org/10.2307/541656>.

**Patterson**, Dayal 2023. *Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult*. The restored, expanded & definitive edition, UK: Cult Never Dies.

**Phillipov**, Michelle 2012. *Death Metal and Music Criticism: Analysis at the Limits*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

**Polese**, Abel, Jeremy Morris, Emilia Pawtusz, Oleksandra Seliverstova (eds.) 2017. *Identity and Nation Building in Everyday Post-Socialist Life*. London: Routledge, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315185880>.

**Purcell**, Natalie J. 2003. *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

**Schaap**, Julian, Pauwke Berkers 2014. Grunting Alone? Online Gender Inequality in Extreme Metal Music. – *IASPM*

*Journal* 4/1, pp. 101–116, [https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871\(2014\)v4i1.8en](https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871(2014)v4i1.8en).

**Shadrack**, Jasmine H. 2021. *Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound: Screaming the Abyss*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing.

**Skadiang**, Joel 2017. *True Black Metal: Authenticity, Nostalgia, and Transgression in the Black Metal Scene*. Bachelor's thesis, University of Sydney, Sydney, <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/18233> (last access 2.08.2024).

**Steinken**, Woodrow 2018. *Music as Transgression: Masking and Sonic Abjection in Norwegian Black Metal*. Master's Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, <http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/id/eprint/34017> (last access 2.08.2024).

**Tartu Under the Horns** 2022. An undergrounded documentary. Directed and produced by Sebastian Dörner, Estonia: Webzine Undergrounded.de, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8OKhgeE\\_-s&ab\\_channel=Undergroundtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8OKhgeE_-s&ab_channel=Undergroundtube) (last access 21.6.2024).

**Thornton**, Sarah 1995. *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

**Tyft**, Alf-Tore 2021. "If you don't like the old Darkthrone records... Fuck off!" – Nostalgia and subcultural capital as gatekeeping incentives in the black metal community. Master's Thesis, University of Gothenburg, <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.11466.70083>.

**Valijärvi**, Riitta-Liisa 2022. Cultural Trauma in the Lyrics of the Estonian Folk Metal Band Metsatöll. – *Metal Music Studies* 8/1, pp. 7–27, [https://doi.org/10.1386/mms\\_00066\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/mms_00066_1).

**Venbrux**, Eric, Theo Meder 2004. Authenticity as an Analytic Concept in Folkloristics: A Case of Collecting Folktales in Friesland. – *Etnofoor* 17/1–2, pp. 199–214, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25758075> (last access 6.08.2024).

**Walser**, Robert 1993. *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

**Weinstein**, Deena 1991. *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology*. New York: Lexington Books.

**Weinstein**, Deena 2014. Pagan Metal. – *Pop Pagans: Paganism and Popular Music*. Eds. Donna Weston, Andy Bennett, London / New York: Routledge, pp. 58–75.

**Widdicombe**, Sue, Rob Wooffitt 1990. "Being" Versus "Doing" Punk: On Achieving Authenticity as a Member. – *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 9/4, pp. 257–277, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X9094003>.

**Williams**, J. Patrick 2011. *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*. Cambridge: Polity.

**Wilson**, Scott 2014. *Melancology: Black Metal Theory and Ecology*. Alresford: Zero Books.

## Autentsus ja Eesti *pagan metal*'i subkultuurivõrgustik

—  
Polina Holitsyna

Artiklis uuritakse subkultuurse autentsuse konstrueerimist ja taastootmist Eesti *pagan metal*'i skeenes nii seesmisest kui ka välisest perspektiivist. *Pagan metal*'i skeene all mõistab autor *extreme metal*'i skeene ühte osa Eestis, mis on ühtlasi artikli analüütiline tööriist. *Pagan metal* hõlmab bände, mis muusikaliselt lähtuvad *black metal*'i helimaastikust ning mille tekstid on seotud ajaloo ja looduse teemaderingiga. Oma analüüsis toetub autor subkultuurivõrgustiku (Williams 2011) ja võrgustiku (Noyes 1995) mõistetele, defineerides subkultuursust kolme tsooni kaudu: esimene tsoon (muusikud ja kõige aktiivsemad subkultuuri liikmed), teine tsoon (paljud fännidest) ja liminaalne tsoon (ebapüsivad subkultuuris osalejad). Analüüsi keskmes on välitööde andmed, mis pärinevad esmajoones muusikutelt. Seega on artikli fookus autentsuse tajumisel ja konstruktsioonidel esimeses tsoonis. Välitöö meetodid hõlmasid intervjuusid, küsimustikke, osalusvaatlust ja netnograafiat (veebiruumide uurimist). Andmeid kogus autor kontsertidel, eraviisilistel koosviibimistel, järelpidudel, festivalidel ja üks-ühele-intervjuudes.

Autor uurib subkultuuri seemisi autentsuse konstrueerimise ja taastootmise protsesse temaatilistes ja sotsiaalsetes mõõdetes (Larsson 2013), mis on omavahel tihedalt seotud. Sotsiaalne autentsus hõlmab antud juhul subkultuurseid käitumismalle ja praktikaid, samas kui autentsuse temaatiline aspekt puudutab visuaalseid väljendusi, stiili ja sümboleid. Kuigi seesmisest perspektiivist kiputakse subkultuurisest autentsust samastama „kire“ mõistega, mis viitab esmajoones sotsiaalsele mõõtmele, näitab välisest perspektiivist lähtuv, et osalejad väljendavad oma arusaamu autentsusest, väärtustades pühendumust, kohalolekut ja teadmisi. Kuigi osalejad ise vaidlustasid idee, mille kohaselt määravad subkultuuri liikme autentsuse olulisel määral välimus ja stiil, selgus uuringutulemustest siiski, et visuaal on siseringi sotsiaalset autentsust kujundava väärtusena oluline, näiteks soengute, fännikaupade ja aksessuaaride kaudu.

Selline kompleksus näitab, et pühendumus *metal*'i elustiilile ulatub kaugemale juhuslikust osalusest subkultuurises elus ning tähendab pigem järjepidevust ja subkultuuri elementide kaasamist igapäevaellu. Seega on antud skeene raames tõeliselt subkultuurne inimene see, kelle jaoks *metal* on elustiil, mis kujundab tema argivälimust ja käitumist, tuues omakorda kaasa tugeva subkultuurisese kuuluvustunde. Neid mõisteid analüüsib autor Hard Rock Laagri festivali näitel, mis on hea näide autentsuse taastootmisest kollektiivses kontekstis. Festivalil kogunevad samale pinnale, mille subkultuurilised teadmised kujunevad ja kus neid taastoodetakse, nii esimese kui ka teise tsooni subkultuurised inimesed, samuti liminaalsed liikmed. Olulisel kohal on nii sotsiaalne kui ka temaatiline siseringi autentsus, mis realiseerub Hard Rock Laagri tegevuses ja visuaalses stiilis. Tervikuna illustreerib artikkel subkultuurilise autentsuse seemiste ja väliste perspektiivide keerukust, mis kujuneb sageli esimese järgu tsoonis ja kinnistub laiemas *extreme metal*'i subkultuuris.

Tõlkinud Brigitta Davidjants