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From Norway to Soweto: South Africa's Demogoroth Satanum as a Black Metal Band

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Abstract

Black metal, a genre known for its radical musical and ideological transgressions, originated in the early 1980s and consolidated in Norway during the 1990s. While traditionally linked to a raw sound, Satanic themes, and a misanthropic worldview, the genre has continued to evolve. This article investigates Demogoroth Satanum, a black metal band from Soweto, South Africa, to understand their alignment with and divergence from the core Norwegian black metal scene.

Demogoroth Satanum's raw, lo-fi sound authentically reflects black metal aesthetics, partly due to financial realities, reinforcing their credibility. While embracing Satanic imagery, they navigate the unique challenge of community stigma in Soweto, where accusations of witchcraft can have severe consequences, leading them to emphasize the symbolic aspect of Satanism rather than its confrontational ideology.

The band's black identity, a stark contrast to the predominantly white black metal scene, has been strategically leveraged to gain media attention and distinguish them. Most notably, the band's overarching goal of uniting diverse populations and transcending racial tensions in post-apartheid South Africa directly contradicts the misanthropic principles central to traditional black metal, highlighting a unique contextual adaptation of the genre.

Keywords: Black metal, Demogoroth Satanum, Norway, Soweto, South Africa

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Introduction

Black metal is a music genre known for its extreme sound, themes, and visuals, even relative to other extreme metal genres. Originating during the 1980s but only becoming well established during the early 1990s – primarily in Norway – black metal is "the most radically transgressive space within extreme metal" (Kahn-Harris 2007, 41). Known for its shock value, the genre has expanded across the world over the last three decades, including to Africa.

Black metal emerged as a distinct genre through a process of radical musical and ideological transgression that spanned several decades (Patterson 2014, 4). The development of black metal is typically segmented into three waves, starting in the early 1980s (Tsatsishvili 2011, 27; Hagen 2020, 18; Shadrack 2021, 57). The music developed as an offshoot of thrash and death metal (Hagen 2011, 182), with early bands including England's Venom, Sweden's Bathory, and Switzerland's Hellhammer (Tsatsishvili 2011, 27; Shadrack 2021, 58; Patterson 2014, 11; Hoad 2021, 98). This first wave pushed metal toward more extreme territories in sound and imagery, utilizing Satanic themes, although this use was generally regarded as more geared towards theatrical shock value than actual belief in Satanism (Patterson 2014, 11; Ekeroth 2008, 9, 27). Venom's album, *Black Metal* (1982), gave the genre its name and set a blueprint for the use of overt Satanic themes (Shadrack 2021, 58; Dyck 2016, 57). Musically, these early efforts were often close to speed metal (Tsatsishvili 2011, 27). Nevertheless, the commitment to an extreme image and raw sound paved the way for subsequent extreme metal genres, including the more serious developments that followed (Ekeroth 2008, 9).

The genre crystallized in its modern, infamous form during the second wave in Norway in the early 1990s (Tsatsishvili 2011, 27; Hagen 2020, 18; Shadrack 2021, 57). Crucially, Hagen (2020, 19) states, "Norway is where black metal found its first expression as a coherent musical genre". Because this wave codified black metal, this is the main point of comparison for Demogoroth Satanum's music in the current article. Key figures of the second wave, such as Øystein 'Euronymous' Aarseth of Mayhem and Kristian 'Varg' Vikernes of Burzum, provided the necessary infrastructure and ideology for the scene's formation (Hagen 2011, 182), as is discussed in more detail below. The movement's goal was to be in confrontation with society and to elevate their extremism beyond the theatrics of the first wave (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003, 194).[1] Ideologically, the second wave embraced extreme, anti-Christian beliefs, often broadening the focus from conventional Satanism to include Paganism, and a yearning for a pre-Christian Scandinavian past, which sometimes developed into Viking metal (De Klepper et al. 2007, 38; Unger 2016, 22; Dyck 2016, 57). This anti-Christian focus is discussed in more detail later in the current article. The movement gained global infamy not just through its music but through highly publicized transgressive actions, including church burnings, cemetery desecrations, and violence (Hagen 2011, 181). Musically, the second wave consolidated the genre's distinct sonic imprint, which favoured raw, low-fidelity production to prioritize atmosphere and aggression, as is also discussed in more detail later.

Although there was a period of conservative, rule-bound adherence to this sound, black metal has continued its evolution in a third wave from the mid-1990s onwards (Shadrack 2021, 57). This later evolution saw the genre's boundaries continually expanded through new artistic configurations (Patterson 2014, 623; Hagen 2020, 24). Crucially, the third wave involved black metal spreading globally, including to South Africa (Senekal 2025).

[1] Moynihan and Søderlind (2003) have received a lot of criticism for their promotional tone and over-emphasis on violence, criminality, and far right connections. Nevertheless, Hagen (2020, 30) writes, "Scholars like myself who write about black metal continue to grapple with the book's legacy, even as it remains a valuable primary source."

This article examines Demogoroth Satanum, a black metal band from Soweto, South Africa, to understand how they both align with and diverge from the core Norwegian black metal scene of the second wave. The aim is to highlight their unique contextual adaptations of the genre within a South African setting. The article is structured around five key issues: the band's sound, their interpretation of Satanism, their engagement with the black metal scene, the role of whiteness in their identity, and their approach to misanthropy. By exploring these aspects, the discussion will demonstrate how Demogoroth Satanum maintains authenticity within black metal while simultaneously challenging its established boundaries and leveraging the band's own unique identity for community-building purposes in post-apartheid South Africa.

Demogoroth Satanum and the South African extreme metal scene

Metal started in South Africa in the 1980s with the formation of various groups, including Black Rose (classified as heavy metal, founded in 1981 in Johannesburg), Voice of Destruction (V.O.D.) (initially hardcore/punk and later death metal with doom/thrash elements, Cape Town, 1986), Ragnärok (thrash metal, Johannesburg, 1986), Aragorn (thrash metal, Pretoria, 1987), Immortal Slave (gothic metal, Cape Town, 1989), Raven Wolf (power metal, Kenilworth, 1989), and Urban Assault (thrash metal, Johannesburg, 1989) (Senekal 2025, 316). This was a time characterized by extensive censorship under the consecutive states of emergency as violent opposition to the white minority government increased. Although censorship and states of emergency generally suppressed the creative industries prior to 1990, there is little evidence that South African metal music was specifically targeted at the time. Banchs (2022, 99) claims that police monitored metal bands and occasionally broke up shows using tear gas when subversive political messages were conveyed, but Voice of Destruction's Francois Blom noted that he never experienced this during the 1980s (Blom and Crous, 2026). Furthermore, while censorship barred metal from being played on apartheid-era radio, actual recordings were rarely banned (Banchs 2022, 92). The metal scene was probably too small to attract specific attention.

The 1990s saw a gradual increase in the number of South African metal bands. Bands such as Brutal Awakening (heavy metal, Johannesburg, 1991), SacriFist (symphonic death metal, Johannesburg, 1992), Agro (thrash metal, Johannesburg, 1994), Groinchurn (grindcore, Johannesburg, 1994), DieVersion (death metal, Bloemfontein, 1996), and TRYST (thrash metal, Bloemfontein, 1997) were formed (Senekal 2025, 319), representing both a stylistic expansion and a footprint in a larger number of cities. The first black metal bands in South Africa were also formed, namely Retribution Denied (Johannesburg, 1991), Nocturnal Dominion (Bloemfontein, 1995), Stygian (Eastern Cape, 1997), Mjöllnir (Pretoria, 1998), Wrath (Cape Town, 1998), Crystal Dawn (Roodepoort, 1998), Funeral God (Pretoria, 1998), and Thy Soul Devoured (Cape Town, 1999) (Senekal 2025, 320). While South African bands recorded exclusively in English during the 1990s, during the 2000s, black metal expanded in South Africa to also include bands that recorded in Afrikaans, such as Nahul, Ominous Reflections, Scathanna Wept, and VleesAnker (Senekal 2025, 324–330). Numerous English bands were also formed from the 2000s onwards.

Demogoroth Satanum was formed in 2009 in Soweto, a township southwest of Johannesburg (the name is an abbreviation of SOuth-WEstern TOwnship). The band consists of Trevor 'Paranoia' Macupe (guitar), Thapelo 'Thane Bellicose' Mokoena (bass), Modiba 'Belgaroth' Rabothata (drums), Siyabonga (Brian) 'Thronumgoroth Diabolus Antikristus' Mngadi (guitar), and Sthembiso 'Tyrant' Kunene (vocals) (Monnakgotla 2017; Encyclopaedia Metallum 2025). They have released two EPs to date: *True Black* (2012) and *Becoming* (2018), along with a

demo, *Flesh Viaticum to a Dying God* (2010), and two singles, *Kingdom ov Hell* (2014), and *Quintessence* (2025). They use Satanic imagery in their logo and on the cover of *Flesh Viaticum to a Dying God*, and use corpse paint on the cover of *Kingdom ov Hell*. These are typical of the black metal scene, as is discussed later. On the other hand, *Quintessence* and *True Black* show African imagery: violent riots in the townships in South Africa during the 1980s (*True Black*), and a witch doctor, locally known as a *sangoma* (*Quintessence*). This combination of European and South African visuals echoes their stance as both a black metal band and a band from Soweto, as is discussed in more detail later.

As can be expected, Demogoroth Satanum draws inspiration from established European black metal bands with strong Scandinavian connections. Among their influences, band members of Demogoroth Satanum name Watain and Dark Funeral from Sweden, Azaghal from Finland, 1349 and Carpe Tenebrum from Norway, and Nazxul from Australia (Noizr 2017). Elsewhere, they note that they listen to Batushka from Poland, Drudkh from Ukraine, Setherial from Sweden, Negator from Germany, Svarttjern and Ragnarok from Norway, Sad from Greece, and Sacrilegious Impalement from Finland (Metal Injection 2017). The members of Demogoroth Satanum have also been active in other black metal bands, as is discussed later.

Demogoroth Satanum as a black metal band: Congruence and divergence

The current section discusses congruence and divergence between Demogoroth Satanum and the Norwegian black metal scene, particularly in relation to the defining second wave, in an effort to show how they tie in with but also distinguish themselves from core black metal features. I focus on five key issues: the sound of black metal, Satanism, engagement with the scene, whiteness, and misanthropy. As is shown in this section, Demogoroth Satanum should primarily be compared to the second wave of black metal because they embrace its defining aesthetic elements, particularly the raw, low-fidelity (lo-fi) sound often called 'necrosound'. Like the Norwegian second wave, the band members use corpse paint as a visual manifestation of the demonic and anti-mundane aesthetic, distinguishing them from the first wave's more theatrical shock value. Their thematic focus aligns with the second wave's extreme anti-Christian and anti-establishment worldview, portraying Satanism as a core ideological framework for rebellion. However, unlike the exclusionary misanthropy that was central to the Norwegian scene, Demogoroth Satanum use their black identity and the genre's rebellious spirit for the constructive goal of community building and transcending racial tensions in post-apartheid South Africa.

Sound

Heavy metal, in general, is known to be loud, with volume contributing significantly to its perceived 'heaviness' (Walser 1993, 44; Wallach et al. 2011, 12). Black metal, however, deviates from the traditional emphasis on low-frequency 'heaviness', favouring harshness and timbral density instead (Hagen 2011, 187). Key musical features include fast tremolo picking on the guitars (De Klepper et al. 2007, 33; Hagen 2011, 184; Patterson 2014, 180; Unger 2016, 24), blastbeat and double-bass drumming (De Klepper et al. 2007, 33), and high-pitched, anti-melodic screaming vocals (Hagen 2011, 184; Patterson 2014, 180; Bogue 2004, 107; Olson 2008, 9). Black metal musicians often reject the virtuosity and musicianship prevalent in other extreme metal subgenres like death metal, striving instead for a messier, grungier, and more chaotic sound (Bogue 2004, 106).

A defining aesthetic marker of black metal, particularly of the second wave forged in Norway, is its primitive, raw, and often intentionally low-fidelity (lo-fi) production, sometimes referred to as 'necrosound' (Segers 2012, 49). This lo-fi approach emerged partly from practical considerations, as early bands often lacked the budget for or access to expensive recording studios, necessitating a DIY approach (Hagen 2011, 188; Shadrack 2021, 59). The resulting low-budget production soon became codified as the 'true' black metal sound (Hagen 2011, 188; Patterson 2014, 239), functioning as a mark of resistance to the homogenized sound of mainstream heavy metal and to the music industry itself (Hagen 2011, 188). Early bands proudly embraced this lack of sophisticated production; Venom, for example, often noted on album sleeves that the recording was done in minimal time, which was later viewed as a feature of extreme metal (Patterson 2014, 159).

The lo-fi production techniques yield distinct sonic results. Instead of producing recordings where "the individual voices are crisply defined and easily heard, black metal bands often blur the parts together to create an atmospheric wash of sound" (Hagen 2011, 187). This practice obscures the clarity of the instruments, sometimes drowning out the bass guitar entirely (Hagen 2011, 187). Guitar sounds are typically thin and trebly, particularly because the instrument's lower frequencies are rarely boosted to a significant degree, and lack the 'rhythmic punch' associated with typical metal 'heaviness' (Hagen 2011, 187). Black metal guitarists also rely heavily on tremolo picking, a rapid double-picking technique that, when combined with distortion, creates an overall droning quality and diminishes rhythmic emphasis (Hagen 2011, 187). This buzzing sound, which some compare to 'bees in a tin', contributes to the overall sonic texture and philosophical concept of sound as negation (Shadrack 2021, 105).

The vocals are also heavily impacted by the lo-fi production. Black metal vocals are predominantly high-pitched, rasped, or guttural screams (De Klepper et al. 2007, 33; Hagen 2011, 184; Patterson 2014, 180), but they are often mixed quite low in the overall soundscape (Hagen 2011, 187). This means the vocals function as an element of the atmosphere, rather than existing on a privileged plane where lyrics are easily intelligible (Hagen 2011, 187; Shadrack 2021, 17). The intention is often the opposite of clear lyrical articulation; the vocals reinforce the music's dark and fractured quality (Shadrack 2021, 17).

To achieve this extreme rawness, some seminal recordings utilized primitive techniques, notably the use of only a single microphone. For example, the VON demo *Satanic Blood* (1992) was captured using just "a single microphone hanging down between the band members from a pipe" (Patterson 2014, 133). This resulted in an intense, primitive sound, although the distortion was less pronounced than later efforts (Patterson 2014, 133). The character of Varg Vikernes also refers to this technique in the film about Mayhem and Burzum, *Lords of Chaos* (Åkerlund 2018). Similarly, the production of Black Sabbath's early work, which influenced black metal, was partially a result of the cheap recording situation necessitated by the band's working-class poverty (Dee 2009, 57). These technical limitations, embraced by the artists, led to the development of an aesthetic where the lack of polish became a defining hallmark of authenticity (Patterson 2014, 159, 239).

Demogoroth Satanum is well-versed in the aesthetics of black metal. As Kunene remarks in an interview, "We read all the books, watched all the documentaries, and we used just the bare necessities to record" (Metal Injection 2017). This familiarity with the sound of black metal is clearly audible in their recordings, which showcase "only the bare necessities with little to no mixing to retain the crisp bite of the unpolished black metal of old" (Metal Injection 2017). Kunene even notes, "Some songs were recorded with a single mic placed in the room that captured the whole performance" (Metal Injection 2017). Demogoroth Satanum therefore has a

raw black metal sound that can be described as "an atmospheric wash of sound" (Hagen 2011, 187). The lo-fi aesthetic also ties in well with their financial situation, since, as Monnakgotla (2017) noted, all band members at the time performed entry-level and skilled-trade jobs, earning little from their music. While their lo-fi sound therefore lends authenticity to their music and is a deliberate choice, practical financial realities support this choice, providing further authenticity.

True Black (2012) is an example of a raw, uncompromising manifestation of the second wave's sound aesthetic. The band achieves a typical 'necro' sound through lo-fi production that favours a piercing, treble-heavy mix. This is evident in the song "Elizabeth Bathory", where the guitars are distorted into a continuous, buzzing wall of static, stripping away mid-range warmth to create a cold, abrasive atmosphere. Their 'heaviness' is derived from tremolo-picked riffs and blast beats; these characterize songs such as "Constellation of Holy Ranks Asunder". The vocals feature shrieks that are high-pitched, distorted, and not clearly intelligible, creating an atmospheric sense of suffering rather than a clear lyrical exposition. By utilizing these 'primitive' recording techniques and a chaotic song structure, Demogoroth Satanum successfully captures the 'true' black metal spirit – prioritizing raw emotional extremity and a bleak, nihilistic mood over traditional musical polish.

Satanism

Satanism stands as a core and frequently defining element within black metal, functioning less as a monolithic belief system and more as an ideological framework for rebellion, transgression, and the creation of extreme identities (Patterson 2014, 452). The genre, particularly in its second wave form in Norway during the early 1990s, is often characterized by an extreme anti-Christian and anti-establishment worldview, with Satanism serving as the primary symbol of opposition (De Klepper et al. 2007, 34; Patterson 2014, 416; Mora-Rioja 2023, 24). Though the ideology is diverse, encompassing both literal belief and philosophical metaphor, the preoccupation with the diabolical is integral to the music's aesthetic and thematic identity, setting it apart from other metal subgenres (Mora-Rioja 2023, 24; Kahn-Harris 2007, 38). As Gaahl from the Norwegian black metal band, Gorgoroth, argues, "Black metal is Satanism […] there is no other answer" (quoted in Olson 2008, 50). Similarly, Euronymous from Mayhem avers, "If a band cultivates and worships Satan, it's black metal" (quoted in Patterson 2014, 181). Both Morgan Håkansson and Mortuus from the Swedish group Marduk have made similar statements: "black metal's definition is simply extreme music with a Satanic philosophy and belief" (Håkansson) and "If it's not Satanic, it's not black metal, it's 'something else-metal'" (Mortuus) (quoted in Patterson 2014, 443, 452).

The lineage of Satanic imagery in black metal can be traced back to the genre's earliest precedents in heavy rock and metal. Bands like Black Sabbath explored occult themes, but generally framed Satan as a terrifying force to be feared, rather than worshipped (Olson 2008, 12; Moore 2009, 149; Patterson 2014, 7). The bands of the first wave of black metal made heavy use of explicit Satanic themes and imagery in their lyrics (Granholm 2011, 526; Skeech 2022, 98). Venom's album, *Black Metal* (1982), introduced overt, often cartoonish Satanic themes and imagery to the genre (Weinstein 2000, 287; Taylor 2009, 83; Patterson 2014, 12; Skeech 2022, 67; Kubiak 2021, 164). Venom's lyrics were generally understood within the scene as being meant to produce shock value and theatricality (Segers 2012, 25; Kahn-Harris 2011, 220).

The relationship between Satanism and the genre became far more codified during the emergence of Norwegian black metal in the early 1990s (the second wave) (Tsatsishvili 2011, 27; Patterson 2014, 6; Hoad 2021, 64). Figures within the scene, such as Mayhem's Euronymous,

advocated for a hard-line, misanthropic ideology that was sincerely and overtly religious, moving beyond the theatrics of the first wave (Olson 2008, 7). However, even during this period, literal references to Satan were sometimes less frequent in the lyrical content of bands like Darkthrone and Burzum compared to their first-wave counterparts (Granholm 2011, 528). Instead, the focus often broadened, placing the anti-Christian stance within a framework of Paganism (Granholm 2011, 528; Patterson 2014, 512; Unger 2016, 80). For many, Satan became a tool of ideological and cultural opposition, standing as a symbol of authenticity and resistance against the perceived weakness of Christianity and modern society (Unger 2016, 80).

Within the black metal scene, two primary interpretations of Satanism emerge. The first is a philosophical Satanism, heavily inspired by Anton LaVey's Church of Satan, which views Satan as a symbol of individual sovereignty, self-actualization, and anti-humanist elitism (Kahn-Harris 2007, 40; Olson 2008, 42; Hagen 2011, 190; Gunstad 2015, 22). This approach champions the destruction of the self and the rejection of mundane identities in favour of transgressive spiritual personas (Olson 2008, 40). The second, less common but more extreme approach, is a theistic Satanism or literal devil worship, which elevates Satan to the level of the sacred and professes belief in a literal, biblical devil (Granholm 2011, 527; Olson 2008, 42). Regardless of the specific interpretation, Satanism is consistently deployed to establish a profound sense of difference, confrontation, and antagonism toward the perceived hollow culture of the modern world (Patterson 2014, 416; Olson 2008, 28).

As a result of metal's use of Satanic imagery, 'Satanic panics' occurred throughout the West during the 1980s and early 1990s, with Dunbar and Swart (2012, 609) mentioning Satanic panics specifically in the USA, Canada, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Australia, and New Zealand (see also Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994, 166). These Satanic panics diffused to white South Africa, where the first Satanic panic took place between 1978 and 1982 (Dunbar and Swart, 2012, 608). According to Dunbar and Swart (2012, 608), this Satanic panic was fuelled by moral pessimism after the Soweto uprisings and rumours about secret, evil rituals. A second Satanic panic took place in white South Africa between 1989 and 1993, against the background of political uncertainty in the run-up to the transition to a black majority government (Dunbar and Swart, 2012, 608). One of the targets was the rock movement, Voëlvry, which included musicians that were critical of the establishment and apartheid and were said to encode Satanic messages in their songs (Dunbar and Swart, 2012, 613). In 1992, the South African police also established the Occult Unit under the leadership of Kobus Jonker to investigate Satanism (Dunbar and Swart, 2012, 618; Falkof, 2015, 35). Notably, media coverage framed Satanism as an issue primarily associated with white communities, with Black African newspapers specifically identifying white students as having introduced the phenomenon to the townships (Dunbar and Swart, 2012, 616). On the other hand, "black African 'witchcraft' were relatively peripheral to the focus of the moral entrepreneurs and interest groups who shaped the satanic moral panic of 1989–1993" (Dunbar and Swart, 2012, 607). While the social context may be different, the fact that Satanic panics occurred in other Western countries around the same time underscores the fact that ideas diffuse over national boundaries; just as metal spread to South Africa, so too did the moral panics.

Demogoroth Satanum of course portray themselves as Satanists, as is already obvious in the name, which is a transformation of Demogorgon and Satan. In addition, their guitarist, Siyabonga (Brian) 'Thronumgoroth Diabolus Antikristus' Mngadi, has also adopted an 'infernal name' ('Thronumgoroth'), which is a term that refers to a list of figures from various mythologies and religions, intended for use in Satanic rituals, as described by Anton LaVey in

The Satanic Bible (1969, 145–146). Demogoroth Satanum's lyrics are also ostensibly Satanic, as exemplified by the song, "Constellation ov Holy Ranks Asunder" (*True Black,* 2012):

> With paradise a distant light
> Away with Christ this unholy night
> Of halos rusted, purity ousted
> The serpent flew heaven's bastard
> Devoid of faith, an angel that fell
> Back to nature cursed with spells
> To destroy Christ with madras, hell
> Scream in worship Satan's hail
> Unholy lord of darkest veil
> With thy name we invoke hell.

Similarly, "Black Metal Wrath" (*True Black,* 2012) proclaims,

> Death to Christ
> Father of lies
> Invert the Cross
> Kill Heaven's host

Although Demogoroth Satanum is considerably less confrontational and rebellious than groups like Mayhem, they still embody a rebellious spirit. Banchs (2013) quotes one of the band members: "In the townships, a lot of ideas that allow freedom are viewed as the devil's work, through metal we've learnt to confront and question that which lies beyond what we've been told and what we're accustomed to." In this sense, the rebellious spirit of Satan is manifested in the ideology of Demogoroth Satanum, although in interviews (Dunn 2016; UPROXX 2017; Steytler 2017) the band members stress their non-confrontational attitude. Nevertheless, Demogoroth Satanum have attracted much criticism from the Soweto community over their Satanic image. Kunene says,

> Not just our families, but the whole black community had a very negative view on what we're doing because it's not in the Sowetan comfort zone. They would say it's witchcraft or Satanism with the corpse paint and the loud music and screaming. (quoted in Monnakgotla 2017; see also Dunn 2016)

Demogoroth Satanum is confronted by a unique challenge because of the stigma of witchcraft in South Africa: mob violence. In an interview, Thapelo 'Bellicose' Mokoena related a story where he was verbally accosted while on a train and accused of being evil:

> The first thing he said was that I am 'evil and Illuminati, you're the one poisoning our children'. He attacked me and didn't get to know my name. I let him vent because it was a scary situation because of mob justice. If half the train thinks he's right, I would have got my ass kicked for wearing a metal t-shirt. I didn't want to engage him in case I incite a violent situation. (quoted in Monnakgotla 2017)

Teppo (2009, 27) notes that while witchcraft in European Paganism can be either good or evil, African communities always regard witchcraft as evil (in contrast with traditional healers or *sangomas*). In addition, African communities often regard witchcraft as real, which creates a

tangible risk for anyone accused of witchcraft (Teppo 2009, 28). African communities have resorted to violence when someone was accused of witchcraft, and Dicey (2021, 102) claims that by the mid-1980s, the standard way of dealing with witches had become burning: "They were burnt alive in their huts, thrown onto open fires, or doused with petrol and set alight." One of the biggest cases in South Africa was the Sekhukhuneland massacre in 1986, where 32 women were burnt alive by youths; a month later, another 30 women were necklaced in Mapulaneng, east of Lebowa (Niehaus 2000, 389; Dicey 2021, 100, 104).[2] While there was a Satanic panic in white South Africa during the 1980s and 1990s, the consequences of being accused of witchcraft in an African community are considerably more severe than in a European community. Demogoroth Satanum have therefore gone to great lengths to convince their Soweto community that Satanism is just part of the music (Dunn 2016), and therefore nothing to be feared.

A visual manifestation of the demonic in black metal is the use of corpse paint. Although precursors like KISS, Alice Cooper, and King Diamond used theatrical makeup, the specific practice of using corpse paint – stylized black and white face paint intended to make the wearer look dead or demonic – was codified and popularized within Norwegian black metal, notably by Mayhem's vocalist Per Yngve 'Dead' Ohlin (Patterson 2014, 173; Olson 2008, 15; Kubiak 2021, 165). Its primary function is aesthetic, ritualistic, and ideological, transforming the musician into a gruesome, inhuman, or super-human entity to evoke a dark atmosphere and to symbolize antagonism toward mundanity (Olson 2008, 47–48; Kahn-Harris 2007, 38; Bogue 2004, 106). The band members of Demogoroth Satanum have also adopted this aesthetic, as can be seen in most of their band photos, and on the album cover of *Kingdom ov Hell* (2014). Sampson (2022), however, notes, "Though the corpse paint they wear is reminiscent of Norwegian death metal bands, it has a distinct African flare"; and indeed their corpse paint also reminds one of the white face coverings used in African youth initiation ceremonies in South Africa. These coverings are made from a white clay called *ingxwala*, as discussed in Mpako et al. (2011, 235–244).

Engagement with the scene

The establishment of the Norwegian black metal scene during the second wave was not a spontaneous musical development but a deliberate effort to engineer an extreme cultural system rooted in specific ideological and aesthetic principles (Patterson 2014, 6). At the centre of this formation was Øystein Euronymous Aarseth of Mayhem, who established the foundational look, sound, and philosophy of the movement (Olson 2008, 27). Euronymous realized that to garner support, they needed to push their extremism further than their predecessors in death metal, injecting their efforts with a grim seriousness previously unimaginable in the underground metal scene (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003, 32). This ambition meant creating an atmosphere that was intensely anti-Christian, anti-establishment, and anti-modernist, often manifesting as a profound misanthropy (Olson 2008, 7). Euronymous's drive and influence were so significant that black metal as it exists today would not have existed without him (Patterson 2014, 154; Olson 2008, 27). The film, *Lords of Chaos* (Åkerlund 2018), dramatizes the events around Euronymous.

A crucial practical step in creating this scene was to establish a physical and economic infrastructure dedicated to its uncompromising ideology. Euronymous re-established his record label as Deathlike Silence Productions (DSP) and founded the record shop Helvete (Hell) in Oslo,

[2] While the context for one of these incidents was alleged witchcraft, the other was to consolidate support for anti-government activities. See Niehaus (2000) and Dicey (2021).

where he and the 'Black Circle' could convene (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003, 63; McIver 2005, 112). Helvete served as the central hub for the developing scene, functioning as a meeting ground where musicians and fans could socialize, obtain albums, and gain crucial ideological insights (Patterson 2014, 184; Hagen 2011, 182). Through Helvete and DSP, Euronymous disseminated his aesthetic throughout the extreme metal press, boosting Norwegian black metal in fanzine interviews that stressed the evil, dangerous nature of both the music and the performers (Hagen 2011, 182; Bogue 2004, 109).

This ideology was materially supported through specific aesthetic and transgressive actions. The musicians adopted a distinct visual code of spikes, chains, and corpse paint, deliberately contrasting with the casual street attire of the death metal scene (Patterson 2014, 416). Beyond visual posturing, the scene demanded real acts of opposition; Euronymous and Vikernes assembled a conspiratorial group of arsonists intent on demonstrating their commitment to evil (Bogue 2004, 109). The resulting highly publicized acts, including cemetery desecrations, church burnings, and violence – culminating in the murder of Euronymous by Vikernes – gave the movement a semblance of authenticity, establishing a global reputation of notoriety for Norwegian black metal (Patterson 2014, 215; Unger 2016, 25; Kahn-Harris 2007, 45; Weinstein 2000, 289).

Demogoroth Satanum have actively worked to establish a black metal scene in Soweto, albeit using far less extreme methods than Mayhem and Burzum. Unlike in Norway, there is no established collection of groups or fans to draw on in Soweto, and in 2016 Rabothata estimated the number of metal listeners in Soweto at 12 – himself and the rest of the band members of Demogoroth Satanum included (Dunn 2016). Demogoroth Satanum therefore built up a scene from a non-existent state. Kunene says:

> … at the time, there wasn't an established Soweto metal scene, it was just a few guys and so we hoped to start a sort of revolution with the album [*True Black*]. And as unrealistic as that seemed, we succeeded in galvanizing such a movement. And as small as Soweto is, it's produced several other black metal bands, like Demigod (SA), Grand Architect and Shrine ov Belial. But be that as it may, it's important to note that said bands feature either one or more members of Demogoroth Satanum. (quoted in Metal Injection 2017).

Figure 1 shows the network of bands and band members that have evolved around Demogoroth Satanum, using data from Encyclopaedia Metallum (2025). Band members are in grey and bands in black. This figure shows the bands directly linked to Demogoroth Satanum through band members (past and present), as well as other members of these bands and the bands these other band members have contributed to. This is a very small network, consisting of 11 bands. Ominous Reflections and Die Skemer are interesting here, since these bands have recorded in Afrikaans (Senekal 2025, 326),[3] and therefore the band member Ibex connects the Soweto and Afrikaans black metal scenes through Defile the Idol. Note that this network only illustrates the black metal scene that developed around Demogoroth Satanum in Soweto, not the entire South African metal scene.

[3] Die Skemer is not included in Senekal (2025), but in an interview, Ibex confirmed his involvement in both bands (Ibex 2026).

Whiteness

The issue of whiteness in black metal is important in the ideological development of the genre, particularly within the Norwegian scene of the early 1990s (Hoad 2021, 2; Unger 2016, 80). The perceived 'default fan' or heavy metal musician, especially of black metal, is a young, white, heterosexual male from Western Europe or North America (Hoad 2021, 18). The issue is so central to heavy and black metal that Hoad (2021) has dedicated an entire monograph to the subject.

The white character of heavy and black metal seems to be maintained both by black listeners' tastes and perceptions, and by those of whites. Weinstein (2000, 66) traces the phenomenon back to the formative years of heavy metal and states that parts of the black community actively condemned black artists who played 'white' music, especially rock music, with Jimi Hendrix himself receiving criticism from fellow black people. Banchs (2022, 94) confirms that the belief exists within black cultures that rock is exclusively a white genre, and this is the case in South Africa as well (Klopper 2009, 16). There are of course exceptions, as documented by Banchs (2022) in particular, but generally, rock, heavy metal, and black metal are considered white music genres. It is therefore to be expected that South Africa would have by far the largest[4] heavy metal scene on the continent, and this is indeed the case, with 276 bands in South Africa compared to 49 in Egypt (which has the second highest number of bands on the continent) (Sampson 2022). Zoran's (2025) heavy metal map confirms this trend: there are 11.81 heavy metal groups per 100,000 people in the USA, 10.78/100,000 in Britain, 14.89/100,000 in Australia, 16.26/100,000 in Germany, 16.26/100,000 in Denmark, 44.35/100,000 in Norway, 59.33/100,000 in Sweden, and 97.43/100,000 in Finland. In contrast, there are 0.34/100,000 in Botswana, 0.02/100,000 in Kenya, 0.02/100,000 in Zimbabwe, 0.15/100 000 in Namibia, and 0.47/100 000 in South Africa. Kahn-Harris's (2007, 118) statement that "Sub-Saharan Africa (with the exception of white South Africa and Namibia) and the black Caribbean appear to be metal-free" may be a generalization, but the South African heavy metal scene is significantly larger than those of other African countries, and the primary reason for this is the larger white population.[5] Dunn (2016) and Sampson (2022) also claim that the majority of heavy metal fans in South Africa are white.[6]

This demographic reality is compounded by the genre's self-conscious efforts to establish an identity rooted in Northern European heritage and antagonism toward modernity (Hoad 2021, 77). Most visibly, heavy metal in general but black metal in particular often uses Northern European imagery and therefore encourages those with a Northern European heritage to identify with the music:

> Many of the symbols, especially the visual ones, of heavy metal are derived from medieval northern Europe, ancient Anglo-Saxon, and Nordic mythologies. Thus the

[4] Maguire (2021, 6) notes the different measures that could be used to quantify the size of a metal scene. I use Zoran's figures here as an indication of the size of the South African metal scene, in support of observations made by those within the music industry, including the band members from Demogoroth Satanum. It is by no means certain which measures are best at describing the size of the scene.

[5] DeHart's (2018, 568) quantitative analysis of the distribution of metal bands worldwide finds that "metal flourishes in wealthy and politically open countries." DeHart (2018) does not factor in race and therefore sees wealth and political openness as predictors of the size of metal scenes, but of course Western countries are generally wealthier than African countries and also have greater political freedom (compare for instance Norway with Zimbabwe).

[6] Note that Sampson (2022) incorrectly claims that South Africa gained independence in 1994, when the country had already obtained independence in 1961.

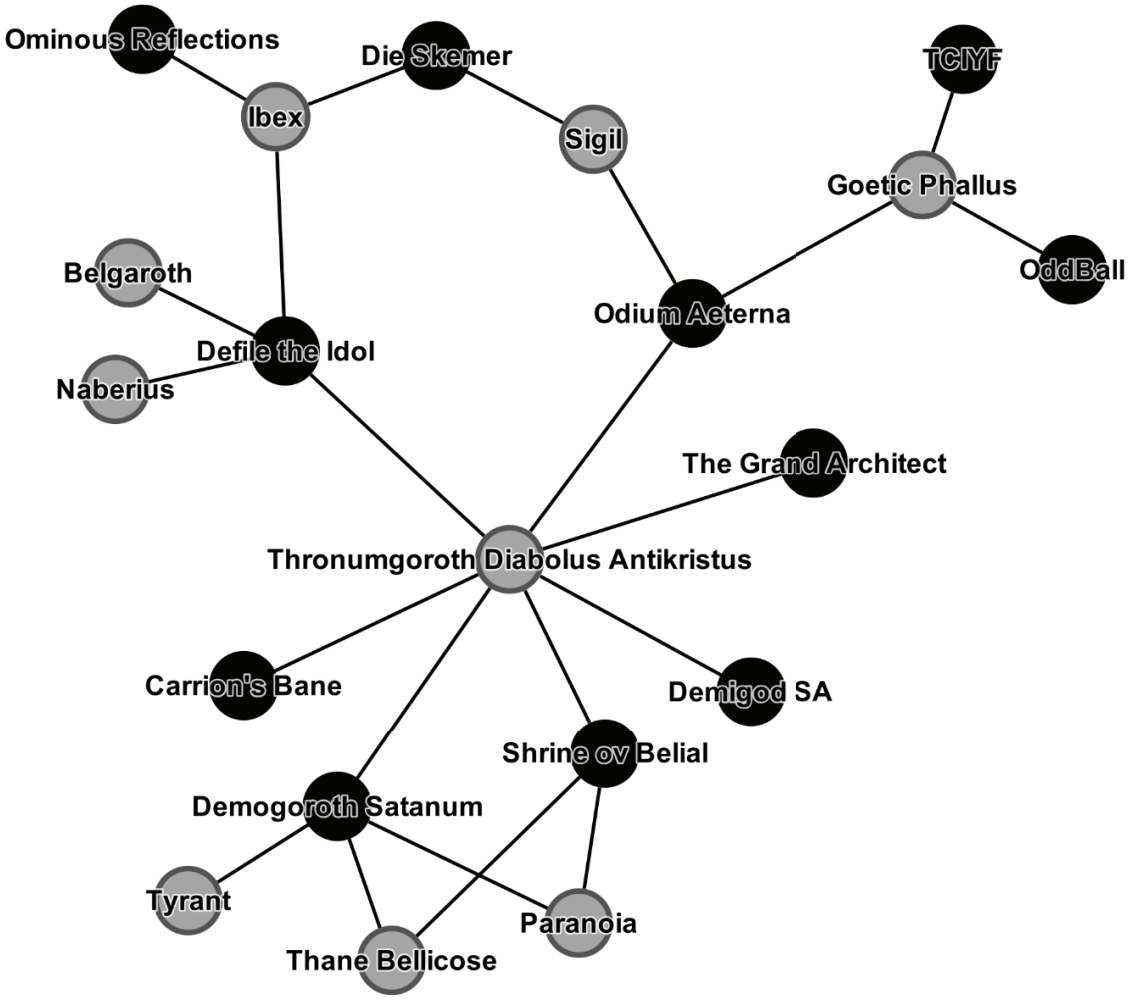


Figure 1: The black metal scene linked to Demogoroth Satanum, with band members in grey and bands in black

> heavy metal subculture is less a racially based than a cultural grouping, drawing on the symbols of particular ethnic traditions. (Weinstein 2000, 113)

There have also been overtly racist incidents in the black metal music scene. Mayhem's drummer, Axel 'Hellhammer' Blomberg, caused controversy when he claimed "black metal is for white people" (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003, 305; Patterson 2014, 477). According to Patterson (2014, 477), members from groups such as Mayhem and Dimmu Borgir have also used swastikas and/or racist language in interviews and correspondence. Darkthrone in turn includes the following lyrics in the song, "Over fjell og gjennom torner" (*Transilvanian Hunger* 1994): "Den Norrøne Rase må Slakte den andre / Nar blåmenn dunker for tungt pa var dør" (The Norse race must slaughter the other / When the blue men knock too hard on our door) (the

Old Norse for black people is *blamenn*; see Cole 2015). In exceptional cases, such sentiments develop into what is known as National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM). Since NSBM constitutes a niche in black metal, it falls outside the scope of the current study; the reader is rather referred to Hochhauser (2011), Patterson (2014), and Dyck (2016).

The perception that black metal is a genre favoured by white people is held by the band members of Demogoroth Satanum as well (Irizarry 2017; Bramucci 2017; Monnakgotla 2017; Wenig 2023). In terms of their functioning within the Soweto community, Monnakgotla (2017) notes how out of place black metal sounds in Soweto, "Passers-by are stunned when they hear metal churning out in a place where township music is the beat of the streets." This "township music" is usually kwaito, a genre of electronic dance music that originated in post-apartheid South Africa, characterized by slow, bass-heavy house beats, spoken or shouted vocals, and a focus on township life and urban slang. Kwaito is associated with townships and black South Africans, and contrasts sharply with black metal. This contrast has resulted in negative reactions from the black community, and the band often notes criticism they have received for making 'white people's music' (Irizarry 2017; UPROXX 2017). Kunene states that the younger generation accuse them of playing "white-boy music" and allege that Demogoroth Satanum are trying to emulate white people (Monnakgotla 2017).

While the band mentions negative reactions to their music from within the black community, the reaction to Demogoroth Satanum from the white community in South Africa is generally positive. In an interview with Sam Dunn, Rabothata says that he was welcomed when attending metal shows where the vast majority of the crowd was white (Dunn 2016). Although Kunene claims that they found it difficult to obtain their first gigs (Irizarry 2017), Monnakgotla (2017) contrasts the above-mentioned incident on a train with the group playing a gig in Pretoria:

> On August 4, the band was in a safer place. The gig was in Pretoria, the capital city of South Africa, about a 91-kilometer drive from Soweto – in cultural terms, it could have been on Mars – at a pub called Arcade Empire peopled by whites. On the night, the only black people there were the members of the bands, the waiters and myself. Nothing unusual for Demogoroth Satanum.

Similarly, a video on YouTube showing the Caedem Metal Event in 2017 shows the band performing in Bloemfontein in front of an almost exclusively white crowd, who cheer them on and headbang to their music (Bloem Metal Scene 2018).

Demogoroth Satanum have capitalized on this stark racial difference between themselves and the core of the black metal scene, using their blackness to distinguish themselves, and often gaining media attention because their members are black. Demogoroth Satanum have been featured in a short film, *Black Black Metal* (Steytler 2017), and a short documentary by UPROXX (2017) entitled "Demogoroth Satanum, All-Black Black Metal Band". As a rule, media reports refer to them as "the first all-black, black metal band" to come out of South Africa (Monnakgotla 2017; Irizarry 2017; Bramucci 2017; Rajaonary 2017; Wenig 2023; Metal Injection 2017; Steytler 2017). Similarly, Pope (2019) calls their song, "Black Metal Wrath" (*True Black*, 2012), one of the ten greatest metal songs by "African American artists" (which the members of Demogoroth Satanum obviously are not). Their page on *Encyclopaedia Metallum* (2025) also calls them "the first all-black black metal band in South Africa". Because whiteness is such a core feature of the black metal scene, Demogoroth Satanum have been able to use this feature to their advantage and set themselves apart.

Misanthropy

The pervasive theme of misanthropy is a fundamental ideological pillar of black metal, particularly within the Norwegian second wave (Olson 2008, 7; Kahn-Harris 2007, 40). This contempt for humanity positions the music and its ideology in stark opposition to mainstream society, conventional morality, and the perceived 'weakness' of most humans (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003, 194; Olson 2008, 7; Kahn-Harris 2007, 40). Misanthropy in black metal is a core component of the genre's 'dark aesthetic' and commitment to transgression (De Klepper et al. 2007, 34; Kahn-Harris 2007, 40). When this hatred is directed at people, some argue it should be seen as hatred toward all people, not just specific groups, as singling out specific groups for superficial reasons negates the philosophical point of black metal's total misanthropy and nihilism (Shadrack 2021, 67). For this reason, there is a contradiction when NSBM groups present ideals of solidarity that are too tolerant of the black metal scene's misanthropic and society-destroying principles (Patterson 2014, 489).

The misanthropic philosophy developed as a key marker distinguishing black metal from other extreme metal subgenres like death metal. While death metal lyrics concerning horror and mutilation are often intended to be enjoyable, akin to an 'audio horror film', black metal is characterized by its humourless, militant, and uncompromising nature, utilizing misanthropy and Satanism to unite 'true believers' in a deadly serious attempt to operate outside of everyday life and mundanity (Olson 2008, 25). In the Norwegian scene, figures like Mayhem's Euronymous have promoted misanthropic pronouncements and extravagant aesthetics (Olson 2008, 7). Misanthropy is intrinsically linked to the philosophical brand of Satanism often adopted in black metal, where Satan symbolizes anti-humanist elitism and individual sovereignty (Moynihan and Søderlind 2003, 198). For many musicians, this ideology expresses "infinite hatred for mankind" and the conviction that you have "the right to do whatever you want to do regardless of anyone else's opinion or attempts to stop you" (Patterson 2014, 71). This radical individualism often manifests as a determined effort to set oneself apart from the world; some black metal followers claim to avoid social interaction as far as possible, focusing instead on fitting into their "own world" (Kahn-Harris 2007, 40).

The misanthropic worldview often accompanies a critique of contemporary society and, specifically, Christianity, which is viewed as a force that "weakens and enslaves otherwise strong individuals" (Hagen 2011, 193). This perspective is often expressed as a form of Social Darwinism, lamenting that modern society caters entirely to "the weak" and "failures" (Hagen 2011, 193).

In line with Norwegian black metal bands, Demogoroth Satanum also voices criticism of Christianity as a religion for the weak, as stated in "Black Metal Wrath" (*True Black*, 2012):

> A system of guilt
> A religion of filth
> Accepted by those
> Feeble and weak.

Despite its overt hatred, misanthropy in black metal often "betrays a hope for something better" and a "desire to create a new/old, more vital version of humanity" (Olson 2008, 97). Demogoroth Satanum has elevated this constructive aspect of misanthropy to a defining ideology. In contrast to Norwegian black metal bands such as Mayhem and Burzum, Demogoroth Satanum have a community-building aim, their goal being to unite people through a shared love of music by connecting black fans with new genres and white fans with Soweto's black population, while

transcending the racial and geographical boundaries traditionally associated with the music (Bramucci 2017; Irizarry 2017; Wenig 2023; UPROXX 2017). Kunene argues:

> We're trying to get white people to come to Soweto more. In Soweto that's a very, very weird thing to see. [...] Apartheid is only like what, just over twenty years ago. So there's a shitload of tension. We're trying to break that fucking tension. Once our country breaks that racial tension, then we can fucking move on and they won't call us 'white people' for playing 'white people music'. (quoted in UPROXX 2017)

This goal of uniting diverse populations goes against the negative aspect of black metal's misanthropic outlook, and this is an important deviation necessitated by context. As an ethnically diverse country, South Africa is known for its ethnic conflicts, and post-apartheid studies have shown an increase, rather than a decrease, in ethnic tensions (Durrheim et al. 2011; Durrheim 2024). Demogoroth Satanum therefore deviates from core black metal groups in using black metal and the image of Satan for community-building purposes, thereby overturning a core principle of black metal, yet retaining the positive aspect of misanthropy by suggesting that society could be better.

Conclusion

This article has explored Demogoroth Satanum as a black metal band, examining how they both align with and diverge from the core Norwegian black metal scene across five key issues: sound, Satanism, engagement with the scene, whiteness, and misanthropy. The band's raw, lo-fi sound authentically reflects black metal aesthetics, partly due to financial realities, thereby reinforcing their credibility. While embracing Satanic imagery and themes, Demogoroth Satanum navigates the unique challenge of community stigma in Soweto, where accusations of witchcraft can have severe consequences, leading them to emphasize the symbolic aspect of Satanism rather than its confrontational ideology. Crucially, Demogoroth Satanum is actively working to build a black metal scene in Soweto, a significant departure from the exclusionary tendencies of the Norwegian second wave. Their black identity, a stark contrast to the predominantly white black metal scene, has been strategically leveraged to gain media attention and distinguish them. Most notably, the band's overarching goal of uniting diverse populations and transcending racial tensions in post-apartheid South Africa directly contradicts the misanthropic principles central to traditional black metal, highlighting a unique contextual adaptation of the genre.

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