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Nationalism and Conservatism in Neopagan Movements: The Case of Polish *Rodzimowierstwo*

Piotr Grochowski 

Institute of Culture Studies, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, ul. Fosa Staromiejska 3,
87-100 Toruń, Poland

Corresponding author: Piotr Grochowski, E-mail: groch@umk.pl

Abstract

In this article I explore the political aspects of contemporary Paganism. Based on my own fieldwork, I analyze the changes in views and attitudes in relation to nationalism among Polish followers of *Rodzimowierstwo*, which is a modern religious movement referring to the pre-Christian beliefs of the Slavs. I put forward the thesis that the attitude toward nationalism is an important element in shaping the dynamics of divisions within believers and at the same time radical nationalist views and attitudes present among them are marginalized. The gradual weakening of nationalist tendencies does not mean, however, the dissemination of liberal and universalist attitudes and views. Nationalism is being replaced by a specific type of conservatism, which consists in creating a clear opposition between “foreign” and “native” cultural patterns, and the postulate of preserving and defending the latter.

The Aim and Methods of Research and Theoretical Perspective

The purpose of this article is to analyze the attitude toward nationalism in the environment of the followers of *Rodzimowierstwo*, which is one of the most important currents of Neopaganism in Poland. In my considerations, I would like to develop two main theses. First of all, in Polish *Rodzimowierstwo* nationalist attitudes and views are gradually marginalized, but nationalism itself, paradoxically, remains an important point of reference in discursive practices serving, inter alia, determining the divisions within this movement. Secondly, the weakening of nationalist tendencies is not associated in this case with the growing popularity of universalist and progressive socio-political concepts, but—again paradoxically—with an intensification of conservative tendencies. For the purposes of this article, I use the well-known concepts of nationalism by Ernst Gellner and Benedict Anderson, which define the nation as a kind of community “imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 2006, 6), and at the same time refer to “a political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (Gellner 2008, 1). Simultaneously, I adopt a narrow understanding of nationalism as an attitude that relies on actively (verbally) defining the boundaries of a national community

(especially through exclusive practices) and defending its sovereignty against forces defined as “foreign” and at the same time demanding that the political unit prioritize the interests of a particular national group over the interests of “foreign” groups. I describe the understanding of conservatism in detail at the end of the article.

I formulate my argument on the basis of field work, which I have been conducting since 2018 among Polish followers of *Rodzimowierstwo*. In the presented analyses, I use three types of data:

1. 25 ethnographic interviews conducted by me between 2019 and 2021 with 28 representatives of *Rodzimowierstwo*, mainly leaders of the most active groups in this period.¹
2. Field notes from participant observation during religious rituals, open meetings of an educational nature, and many informal talks and meetings.
3. Existing data in the form of various types of publications (magazines, blog texts, videos on YouTube) and discussions on the Facebook.

Considerations on the attitude of the followers of *Rodzimowierstwo* to nationalism should begin with recalling a few findings developed based on pagan studies. It will allow the enclosure of the presented analyses in a broader context of contemporary pagan religions, and at the same time to show the local specificity of the discussed case.

Research on contemporary Paganism very often focuses on the problem of its political nature, especially the presence of radical nationalist and racist concepts (Gardell 2003, 2009; Shnirelman 2013). This fact is partly due to the historical entanglement in which the contents of pre-Christian European religions were used in the German *völkisch* movement to legitimize pan-German nationalism and Nazi ideas from the period of the “Third Reich” (Tomasiewicz 2006, 324–33; von Schnurbein 2017, 17–48). It is usually pointed out that since the time of Romanticism, interest in pre-Christian beliefs was associated with the idea of the emancipation of national groups. Some researchers note that this is also the case today, when “ancient’ or ‘indigenous’ religions are being used to provide the symbolic capital for new nationalisms” (Rountree 2015, 5). Contemporary Paganism is a diverse phenomenon and within it there are progressive trends that implement, e.g., feminist, ecological, and even radical left-wing and anarchist ideas.² However, it is often emphasized that, Neopaganism is also part of the return of nationalist ideologies related mainly to the intensification of anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic attitudes, and is in line with resistance to cultural changes, the consequences of which are not only specific political events (e.g., the governments of Donald Trump in the United States or Victor Orban in Hungary), but also such tragedies as the mass murder committed by Anders Breivik in Norway (Strmiska 2018, 13–15).

Michael Strmiska puts forward the thesis that within neopagan movements there is a tendency to polarization of political views, which is correlated with the type of Paganism. Leftist views are mostly characteristic of representatives of the universalist and eclectic current (combining elements derived from different ethnic religions); it is Paganism under the sign of “peace and love,” inclusive and open to people of various ethnicities, disdaining military elements, but exposing the issues of gender equality and ecology. On the other hand, right-wing views are rather typical of the ethnic

and reconstructionist current (trying to recreate one specific religious tradition), in which so-called “blood and soil” Paganism dominates, exposing the category of “ancestral land” and the need to protect its tradition against foreign cultural and religious influences, often referring both to military aspects and the ideal of a warrior (Strmiska 2018, 27–31).

In this context, the basic division of Neopaganism is sometimes indicated, according to which Western European movements are more eclectic and liberal, and their participants more often represent left-wing political views, while Central and Eastern European (CEE) movements emphasize issues related to the nation and ethnic traditions more strongly, and their participants lean toward the political right, which is associated with adopting extremely nationalist and racist attitudes, sometimes even acts of violence committed by members of certain neopagan groups (Laruelle 2008; Shnirelman 2013). However, as Wiench rightly notes (2013, 12),

[i]t may be tempting to reach for an overly simplified approach and imply that all of the CEE Neopagan movements are, at their heart, politically oriented, racist, nationalist, and perhaps even Neo-Nazi. [...] However, such an approach de-emphasizes, and perhaps even overlooks, the fact that many movements adopt a largely non-political stance, and are mostly active in the cultural realm.

Indeed, the landscape of Neopaganism, both in Western and post-Soviet countries, is very diverse, as shown, for example, by the research on the Russian followers of Rodnoverie by Aitamurto and Gaidukov (2013a). Therefore, Aitamurto and Simpson (2013b, 3) suggest that modern Paganism should be seen “as a broad spectrum of overlapping sets of ideologies” and “a polymodal continuum (that is, a range of possibilities in which there is more than one point at which we find peaks of frequency).” According to this model, left-wing and right-wing views as well as political and non-political attitudes are not permanently assigned to specific geopolitical areas or to specific currents of Neopaganism, but may appear in various places and groups, and at the same time enter into various interactions.

In adopting this model, one must not forget, however, that there is a significant difference between the Western and the post-Soviet countries, because the different forms of Neopaganism existing there are conditioned by different historical situations. While in the West contemporary Pagan religions developed on the wave of the 1960s revolution and partially adopted its postulates and values, such as peace and anti-militarism, feminism and human rights, in Central and Eastern Europe they were a reaction to practices of communist regimes that fought against both religion itself and local identities or traditions. Thus, in the West, universalist eclectic forms of Neopaganism dominate, and in post-communist countries ethnic forms of modern Paganism of a reconstructionist nature prevail (Strmiska 2018, 18–19). In the latter, the return to ethnic cultures and their “authentic” forms of pre-Christian spirituality is to fill the “ideological void” and act as an essential element in the process of regaining freedom and rebuilding nation-states that have been destroyed by forces perceived as foreign and seeking to enslave people. Pagan nationalism is thus seen as a kind of alternative to the communist regime (Shnirelman 2002, 197–203; Lesiv 2013, 64).

The Political Landscape of the Polish Neopaganism and *Rodzimowierstwo*

Rodzimowierstwo is one of the local currents of Slavic native religion (Rus. *Rodnoverie*, Ukr. *Ridnovirstvo*, Cz. *Rodnoěřf*), i.e., contemporary Paganism, which refers to the beliefs and culture of pre-Christian Slavs. In Poland, it is probably the largest fraction of neopagan religions in terms of the number of followers. The number of *Rodzimowierstwo* believers is very difficult to establish. This is due to the fact that they are not required to make official declarations or undergo specific rituals to become members of *Rodzimowierstwo*. The estimates based on the average number of people participating in the rituals and conversations with group leaders indicate that the number reaches around 1,000 believers. The total number of followers of all fractions of Neopaganism in Poland (Wicca, Asatru, Druidism, Neoshamanism, and people who practice eclectic forms of witchcraft) is estimated at approximately 10,000. It is a dispersed environment, without strong organizational structures, and its impact on national and local social life is relatively small. Paradoxically, however, in some situations it is referred to in the public discourse as a “serious” threat (more on this later in the text). Currently in Poland there are four religious associations of *Rodzimowierstwo* officially registered, two of which have not been active for a long time. Most of the followers, however, do not belong to any of these unions, but only work in groups (most often referred to as *gromada*) that are informal or registered as non-religious foundations or associations. During my research, there were approximately 30 of them.³

The situation of neopagan movements in Poland differs from that of many other post-communist countries and in some respects more closely resembles the situation in countries such as Spain or Portugal (cf. Fedele 2018). It is primarily about the very strong position of Christianity, and more specifically the Roman Catholic Church, which played a key role in the fight against the communist regime, and at the same time was and is one of the most important points of reference in the construction of national identity. Due to this situation, after 1989 neopagan movements did not enter the “ideological void” in Poland, and moreover, they could not effectively use the idea of returning to ethnic cultures, because this idea was already harnessed by movements with greater or less Christian tinge. Since Catholicism was for a long time a very important component of ethnic thinking in Poland, many Poles can nowadays find certain forms of culture of pre-Christian Slavs paradoxically appear as “foreign”, and ideas of returning to them may be treated as a threat to a stabilized national identity. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that some environments related to the Catholic Church currently have a very critical attitude toward neopagan movements, treating them either as a kind of dangerous sects, or as a form of demonic forces, accusing them of occult or even satanic practices. An example of such an approach may be the materials posted on the Polonia Christiana website:

At a time when initiatives aimed at building “Slavic” shrines are beginning to appear in Poland, it must be said straightforwardly that playing “*Rodzimowierstwo*” is a grave sin. For there is One God and only He deserves to be worshiped. In turn, the pseudo-Slavic - and in fact, the New Age movement, which genesis dates back to the counterculture of the 1960s - the worship

of false gods and participation in ceremonies devoted to them is occultism bordering on satanism (Relich and Wałach 2018).

It sometimes happens that local authorities are also suspicious, or even clearly averse, toward various manifestations of pagan religions present in public space. An example of such situations may be the conflicts around the statues of Światowid (one of the gods worshiped by pre-Christian Slavs) on Babia Góra near Choroszcz (Bukłaha 2018) and on Mount Ślęza (Harłukowicz 2013) or the initiative to remove sculptures depicting the images of folk demons in several communes in Kashubia (Karaś 2020).

Thus, unlike in some post-communist countries, in Poland modern pagan movements should not be viewed as a set of native ideologies and practices responding to the Soviet colonialism. Rather, the opposite is true. They are treated by a part of society as a peculiar “import” from the West (New Age), and thus they are assigned the meanings and functions characteristic of globalization tendencies rather than activities related to the idea of reviving or defending ethnic or national identities.

The origins of *Rodzimowierstwo* in Poland go back to the 1920s and 1930s, and already at its emergence it is characterized by a specific split approach to the issue of nationalism. In the interwar period, there were several groups that hailed from pre-Christian beliefs, but the most influential ones were two circles, which largely shaped the contemporary landscape of Polish Paganism. The first is centered around Władysław Kołodziej, who in 1921 founded *Święte Koło Czcieli Światowida* (the Holy Circle of Worshipers of Światowid), which mainly associates artists and academics with occult interests and does not take up nationalist themes in their activities (Łapiński and Szczepański 1996, 107–11; Pręcikowski 1998, 230–33; Simpson 2000, 68–74; Okraska 2001, 60–61; Szczepański 2009, 63–67). The second milieu is created by Jan Stachniuk, who, in the years 1937–1939, publishes the journal *Zadruga*; promoting a radical form of nationalism with strong anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, and—in the early issues of the journal—racist components (Potrzebowski 1982; Grott 2003, 23–39; Strutyński 2013, 283–287). During the Second World War and during communism, as a result of the oppressive actions of the fascist and communist regimes, the activity of Kołodziej and Stachniuk was significantly limited and the development of their movements was completely blocked (Szczepański 2009). However, after 1989, the religious and political concepts developed within these movements were continued in the activities of two organizations that were registered in Poland as a religious association.

The first is *Rodzimy Kościół Polski* (Native Polish Church—further in the text RKP), established in 1995, which members consider themselves heirs and continuators of the initiatives of Władysław Kołodziej and in their ideological declarations emphasize openness both in terms of shaping religious views and practices, as well as in the approach to the issue of ethnicity and nationality, in the latter aspect, while applying the volitional concept of national identity. In the official statement it can be read:

Since the Slavic native faith by definition [...] determines its scope, The Native Polish Church does not consider it necessary to verify the origin of its potential members. You can become a follower of the Native Polish Church regardless of

the nationality of your ancestors in your family tree, as a nation is primarily a common language and culture. We assume that a Pole is one who (by appreciating the native, ethnic tradition) considers himself a Pole and so understood Polishness was used in the name of the Native Polish Church (RKP [n.d.](#)).

On the other hand, the religious association *Rodzima Wiara* (Native Faith—further in the text RW), registered in 1996, refers to the concept of Jan Stachniuk and *Zadruga*, strongly emphasizing the close relationship between national identity and religion, assuming that the return to the pre-Christian faith of the ancestors is to contribute to “heal the national character of Poles.” It is characteristic that the nation is treated here as “a sacred community” (Eriksen 2010, 130) and as a kind of absolute, toward which religion seems to play a secondary and servant function. It is understood ahistorically, i.e., according to Benedict Anderson’s definition of “as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (Anderson 2006, 26), and this community includes not only Poles living now, but also those living in the areas of present-day Poland of pre-Christian Slavs, and even “ancient Aryas” who are allegedly their ancestors (cf. Lesiv 2013, 99). In the ideological declaration we read:

The Native Faith satisfies the need for religion as a confession of the creative and heroic community of the Nation. Each follower of the reborn Native Faith acts, lives and works for the good of the Nation. The good of the Nation is a common good, it is the good of all of us, it is the good of each of us. In the Nation, the native believer finds fulfillment of his desire for immortality. The consolidation of one’s own personality consists not only in the transfer of genes to the offspring, but also in a creative contribution to the development of the Nation and to the development of the eternal ancestral community of Aryoslavics (RW 2 [n.d.](#)).

The program statements of the RW also strongly emphasize the issue of ethnic origin, understood in the biological sense as “genetically inherited record,” assuming that “[only] people who are of Slavic origin belong to the native Slavic faith” (RW 3 [n.d.](#)).

Thus, shortly after the fall of communism, the situation in Poland largely corresponded to the Western model of the functioning of neopagan movements, where universalist and inclusive trends operate in parallel, and at the same time place themselves in opposition to nationalist and exclusive trends. The latter in the 1990s and at the very beginning of the 21st century were characterized by considerable diversity in Poland. In addition to the RW, at that time there was a whole range of initiatives and groups in which neopagan threads were associated with political practices under the sign of nationalism and the extreme right, often also neo-Nazism, neo-fascism, and racism. The activities of these circles have been quite well documented and analyzed both by academic researchers (Simpson 2000; Strutyński 2008; Filip 2009) as well as journalists dealing with tracing and stigmatizing contemporary neo-fascist and racist ideologies (Kornak 2009; Witkowski 2018).

The situation outlined above, however, changed significantly at the turn of the first and second decades of the 21st century. During this period, there was a significant development and diversification of relations within *Rodzimowierstwo*. This tendency

also led to an evolution in terms of the place of politics in the activities of believers and their dominant political views, including their attitude to nationalism and the ideological inheritance after the activists of the pre-war *Zadruga*.

Despite the apolitical attitude declared by many groups, political views still seem to be an important component of identity of the representatives of the Polish *Rodzimowierstwo*. The issue of nationalism also plays an important role, often becoming the subject of fierce discussions, but also manifesting itself in the form of various types of informal behavior, jokes, allusions, and comments appearing during various activities. It is, therefore, worth asking what does the current political landscape of *Rodzimowierstwo* in Poland look like, what trends in this area can be noticed in the activities of individual groups and what is their attitude to nationalist ideologies and practices.

Between Neo-Nazism and the Radical Left-Wing

I will begin my further considerations with an analysis of two situations that have touched *Rodzimowierstwo* in recent years, becoming a catalyst for heated discussions and certain actions, and thus, revealing the diversity of political discourses in the context of their attitude to nationalism.

The first case concerns the participation of *żerca* (a person who preside over rites, and is also a leader of particular group of believers), widely known among believers of *Rodzimowierstwo*, in a march organized by several nationalist organizations on May 1, 2018 in Warsaw. A day later, on the Facebook profile of the Center for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behavior (CMRXB), a short amateur video from the event was published, and it was entitled: *Neofascists threatening the Center's employee*. The material shows how the above mentioned *żerca*, holding the Polish flag with the sign of the *toporzeł* (ax-eagle),⁴ tries to cover the frame, approaches the person filming him, touches the camera with the shaft, and then goes away with the march. You can't hear him saying anything, but somebody from the crowd screams: "Fuck him on the phone with the stick." The publication of this film sparked a sequence of events and led to an escalation of tensions around the "problem" of nationalism in *Rodzimowierstwo*. First of all, it should be noted that in the discussion under the post on the profile of CMRXB, the issue of the relationship between nationalism and *Rodzimowierstwo* was basically not addressed, although the sign of the *toporzeł* is visible in the film, and the *żerca* was identified here by one of the Internet users. This matter might have been overlooked or kept silent, had it not been for the fact that on May 3 the post with the film was made available on the Facebook profile of the group *Słowianie Północy* (the Slavs of the North) with the following comment:

We are surprised that no one is doing anything about it. Such an individual should be immediately removed from the circles of *Rodzimowierstwo* because he brings disgrace by such behavior. Our group completely cuts itself off and condemns this behavior. And due to the fact that this individual is a *żerca* of the Swarga group from Lodz, we automatically cut off all contacts and cooperation (*Słowianie Północy* 2018).

The “problem” was thus, publicized not by CMRXB, but by a group of *Rodzimowierstwo* believers, who, in addition, a few days later launched an ephemeral page on Facebook called *Rodzimowierstwo bez nacjonalizmu* (*Rodzimowierstwo* without Nationalism), where for several weeks they tracked and revealed the nationalist inclinations of various people from the community, they criticized the politicization of *Rodzimowierstwo* and published polemics and anti-nationalist declarations, at the same time provoking numerous reactions in the form of comments. These circumstances have exacerbated the existing conflicts and radicalized positions. On the one hand, demands were made to decisively cut off *Rodzimowierstwo* from the ideas of Stachniuk and the pre-war *Zadruga* as well as to stigmatize and exclude “neo-Nazi creatures” that were “cancer of *Rodzimowierstwo*” (FN).⁵ On the other hand, the right to participate in religious rituals regardless of political views was defended and the principle of the “ritual peace” was invoked, which required the suspension of all disputes during the holiday.

The second of the aforementioned cases concerns the burning of a flag in Polish national colors with the sign of the *toporzeł* in a bonfire. The photos documenting this event were published on several pages and discussion groups on Facebook in mid-February 2020. According to the reports from the Internet users, this incident allegedly took place during the Kupala Festival organized by the group *Słowianie Północy* in 2018. However, the photographic materials that were shared do not allow the verification of this information, and the group accused of this act strongly denied that it had anything to do with this event:

Słowianie Północy has nothing to do with the burning of the Niklot’s flag. The individual Troy seen in the photos is not a member of our group, roughly two years ago he was removed from our ranks. *Słowianie Północy* abhors such a crime and unanimously condemns such behavior. We have no idea when or under what circumstances this happened (*Słowianie Północy* 2020).

In the Internet discussions—apart from the indignation at the profanation of the holy fire—there were several characteristic threads related to political issues. Firstly, general patriotic attitudes were strongly marked, consisting in the universal condemnation of the profanation of “holy national colors.” In this case, however, it seems significant that some people tried to convince that the profanation did not actually take place, because not the flag of Poland, but the flag of the Niklot association,⁶ was burned.

Other debaters were inclined to consider it a profanation to paint the symbol of the *toporzeł* on the Polish flag. These discrepancies show that patriotism is an important element of the identity of *Rodzimowierstwo* believers, but it can have very different shades, including those that are definitely critical of nationalist practices and views represented by organizations such as Niklot. Secondly, the incident was placed in the context of earlier calls to “depoliticize” *Rodzimowierstwo* and “cut off” the nationalist ideas of the pre-war *Zadruga*. From this perspective, it was treated as an example that is supposed to show, in an ironic way, the “true” face of the leftist stream of *Rodzimowierstwo*. Thirdly, two tendencies clashed in the discussions. On the one hand, it was believed that politics cannot be practiced during rituals or—more broadly—mixed with *Rodzimowierstwo*, which should unite people and not

divide them. Such a view was sometimes connected with a kind of symmetry consisting in pointing out that the instrumental use of religion for political purposes is present both in the left and right-wing currents of *Rodzimowierstwo*, which should be freed from “political fools.” On the other hand, there were opinions that the idea of “depoliticizing” *Rodzimowierstwo* is fundamentally flawed, because in some sense it is “inherently” political and, as an ethnic religion, it connects with nationalist ideas. From this perspective, the discussed incident was interpreted as an attack by leftist circles, and at the same time as evidence of the infiltration of *Rodzimowierstwo* and its manipulation by foreign, globalist, or Bolshevik leftist groups. Postulates were put forward for the self-dissolution of such groups, for condemning their members to social ostracism and “civil death,” and even for the final removal of “Marx and Lenin worshippers” from the ranks of the followers of *Rodzimowierstwo*.

The views, attitudes, and actions, briefly characterized in the context of the two cases described above, are revealed in many other situations, delineating three basic discourses within *Rodzimowierstwo*, which relate to nationalism and, more broadly, to political issues.

Affirmation, Elimination, and Downplaying of Nationalism

The first is the nationalist-racial discourse, within which it is assumed that nationalist ideas are appropriate and “natural” to *Rodzimowierstwo*, and sometimes it is even assumed that “nationalist ideology [...] flows from and is most compatible with *Rodzimowierstwo* and is not an addition, but a logical consequence and effect of professing *Rodzimowierstwo*” (Neonowe Słowianowierstwo 2018b). This discourse refers to a specific type of ethnic nationalism, according to which humanity is internally diverse and divided into blood-linked groups that are the product of long-term historical interactions of individual communities with the natural environment in which they live (Ivakhiv 2005, 195). As a consequence, it is assumed here that nations understood in this way are “rooted” in a specific territory and have a “natural” and “inalienable” set of features (tradition, spirit) conditioning the way they function in various areas of culture. Therefore, we are dealing here with a kind of biological and ecological determinism, according to which not only the origin (broadly understood ancestors enclosed in terms of kin, ethnicity, or nation), but also the place of birth largely determine human behavior both in the area of physical practices and in the sphere of spirituality.

Such an assumption results in the understanding of *Rodzimowierstwo* as an ethnic religion, which is one that closely links a given form of belief and worship with a specific ethnos, additionally related to a specific geographical area (Rountree 2015, 6), whereas in the nationalist discourse, the contemporary equivalent of the former ancestral, tribal, or ethnic community is a nation. In this approach, it is assumed that the place and cultural environment of birth (including relationships with ancestors who lived here earlier) determine the “appropriate” form of religiosity for a given individual. This form can of course be changed, but it is not advisable and beneficial, because “foreign” religious systems do not match the “natural” spiritual conditions of an individual and hinder their functioning and development. In their declarations of

belief, representatives of the RW association state: “Religions that are foreign to the nation’s bios are always harmful. Such religion becomes bad especially when someone else’s religious consciousness replaces their own national consciousness” (RW 1 n.d.). Such an approach leads some of the environment to the conclusion that “the native religious message is directed only to the Slavs” (Duchtynia 2018).

In more radical variants of the nationalist discourse, biological (racial) aspects are strongly emphasized. It is stated here, for example, that “the biology of our ethnus is as important as culture and tradition” (Gromada Swarga n.d.), interchangeably uses the categories of nation and race, indicating that the latter also has a specific spiritual aspect exhibited in *Rodzimowierstwo* (Neonowe Słowianowierstwo 2018b) or says that “we are linked by blood ties to people who professed their native faith in pre-Christian times” (Duchtynia 2018) or even puts forward a thesis about the genetic kinship of the entire ancestral community of so-called Aryoslavians (RW 1 n.d.). Understanding the ethnic and national community as a form of kinship is therefore not so much metaphorical (Eriksen 2010, 129–31) as literal. In this context, the issue of origin is also considered as a condition for participation in *Rodzimowierstwo*, according to it believers may be people who “genetically belong to the Slavic peoples” or “are of Slavic origin” (Gromada Swarga n.d.; RW 1 n.d.).

An important aspect of this discourse is the defense of sacred and naturalized elements of culture. Getting to know, cultivating and promoting Slavic culture takes on a special meaning here, because it becomes a form of “opposition to multiculturalism, which is nothing else than mixing different cultures into one supercultural mush, which leads to the disappearance of any diversity” (Neonowe Słowianowierstwo 2018a). In this approach, nationalism is presented as an ideology that “opposes this practice, believing that diversity is beneficial, and that diversity should be preserved and cultivated” (Neonowe Słowianowierstwo 2018a). Defense of native values and rejection of what is “alien to the Slavic bios” may undergo a kind of sacralization and be presented as a fight for the purity of a culture which has a religious dimension.

The second of the aforementioned discourses is the discourse of stigmatizing and eliminating nationalism as a kind of pathology. Radical actions, such as the burning of the flag described above, are rather rare here, because this discourse is shaped primarily by the rhetoric and practice of separation and exclusion, which results in group division, removal of members, and a complete lack of cooperation between the various circles of believers. In this context, the borderline is even drawn between “true” and “false” *Rodzimowierstwo*. The latter is often referred to as “brown” and, apart from extreme nationalism, ascribes to it such ideas as German volkism, fascism, Nazism, and racism, and accuses of treating deities only as symbols used for political purposes (Simpson 2017, 74). Siding some believers with the above-mentioned ideas additionally fits in the historical context specific for Poland, related to the tragic events of the Second World War, and at the same time emphasizes the religious concept of communication between the faithful and the spirits of ancestors who were murdered by the Nazi occupiers. My interlocutors put it as follows:

We certainly will not tolerate an entirely extreme form of nationalism, which, to make matters worse, can boil down to a form of neo-fascism or neo-Nazism. Some groups see no problem with this. And for us [...] it is an irreconcilable

point. We believe that as Slavs who suffered [so much] at the hands of Nazi and fascist ideology, [...] it is incompatible, unfair towards our ancestors, their spirits. We believe that knowing that someone is a neo-Nazi or a neo-fascist, we would not dare to stand in one circle with him in front of the gods, in front of the ancestors, because we would not be able to face ourselves honestly in the mirror if we did. One does not face the murderers of his ancestors in one line. Nothing justifies it, neither political nor any other interest (EI).⁷

[Nationalists] bear the symbol [swastika] of the man who destroyed our nation. He destroyed our culture, he destroyed our country [...]. And such [a] nationalist[s] I would not even like to call nationalists, because - in my opinion - they are some kind of trollop [...]. Do you have to fight him? Yes. I fight in my group. I have a few nationalists in the crowd who are trying to get into nationalist polemics with me, but it's not too difficult to upset them and corner them. Usually it's 3-5 questions and they don't know what to answer anymore. And yes, more or less, I eliminate them slowly (EI).

Strong criticism, often taking a sarcastic form, is also subject to racist concepts emphasizing the kinship of all Poles and their biological ties with distant Slavic (or Aryan) ancestors. One of my interlocutors says directly: "When someone comes to me and talks about some kind of superiority and the creation of the Slavic race, I am overcome with empty laughter. Let him check his genotype, how much of this Slav is in him. Suddenly it turns out that [there is] none" (EI). Another person humorously comments on this in a Facebook post: "You inherit protruding ears through blood, not the faith of your ancestors, and sunscreen is the best way to protect white skin" (Rodzimowiercza Wspólnota Gajowniki 2018). In this discourse, condemnation of racism and rejection of the concept of biological kinship of the members of the nation are combined with the assumption that "Polishness is spiritual, not genetic or racial [...]" and at the same time "anyone can become a Pole and a believer of *Rodzimowierstwo*, it is enough to join Polish culture and worship devoted to Gods, Ancestors and Heroes" (Rodzimowiercza Wspólnota Gajowniki 2019).

Rhetorical interventions consisting in public accusations of spoiling the image of *Rodzimowierstwo* and damaging it by "groups linking the Slavic culture with nationalism and politics" are also of significant importance here (Kalinowski 2020). It is pointed out that "any ties with the neo-Nazi ideology mean civil death in the eyes of Polish public opinion" (Rodzimowiercza Wspólnota Gajowniki 2018), which in turn leads to the fact that believers of *Rodzimowierstwo* meet with reluctance and various difficulties on the part of the authorities and society.

The third of the discourses signaled is the discourse of downplaying and privatizing nationalism and silencing political issues. It consists of several basic elements that can be expressed in various ways, combined and supplemented with other ideas. In the first place, this discourse highlights the strong diversity of believers, who are in fact supposed to represent "the entire spectrum of political views" (FN) from the extreme right to the extreme left, while at the same time pointing to a significant number of people with moderate or politically indifferent views. As one of the

żerca's emphasizes: "the greater part of our group consists of people [...] from the center of the Gaussian curve. These are perfectly normal people who have centralist political views" (EI). The presence of strongly differentiated political views among believers of *Rodzimowierstwo* is usually considered here as an acceptable and "natural" thing. As one of my interlocutors noted: "It never bothered me that someone might have had some [political] views" (EI).

The second key element of this discourse is the concept of a strong separation of political views, which are considered a "private" matter of individual believers, from the religious sphere, which in turn is treated as an area of community activity and tried to be cleaned off all the political aspects. As noted by Simpson (2017, 71), "the tendency to openly combining politics and religion in the Polish Native Faith has significantly decreased in the last two decades." This is especially evident in ceremonial situations. As one of the people conducting the rituals put it: "[when] I do the rite, I am not interested in the fact that someone has views – it is not my business [...]" (EI). Another *żerca* stated:

Above all, I am trying to uphold - and I believe effectively - the ban on politics during the holidays. When a holiday begins, it doesn't matter if someone is a leftist, a rightist, or a libertarian - it doesn't matter. He's come to celebrate and it's forbidden. And neither Tusk nor Kaczyński are important [the leaders of the main political parties in Poland - ed. PG] - we have a holiday, gods are important as well as community. The people of *gromada* have different views, and I don't even know what political views some of them have (EI).

The prohibition to discuss political topics during ritual meetings, which is one of the aspects of the "ritual peace," is often mentioned in public invitations to rituals, and people who break it are admonished by religious leaders. However, the concept of separation of the religious sphere from politics is understood here more broadly and extends beyond ceremonial practices. In one of the program documents, we can read: "We deem it inappropriate to combine *Rodzimowierstwo* with political ideology [...]. Political compromises often go against the principles of faith. In controversial situations, faith must always come first" (Rodzimowiercza Wspólnota Gajownicy 2019). In turn, one of the leaders of the RKP states: "As for the RKP, [...] we assumed that we do not combine faith with politics at all. The political assumptions of the members of the RKP [...] are their private affairs. We focus on faith, religion" (EI). Other of my interlocutors adds: "In my opinion [...] it makes no sense to link anyone's beliefs with any of the politics. This is putting a tablespoon of tar in a barrel of honey" (EI).

The discussed discourse is also characterized by an ambiguous attitude toward nationalist discourse, which could be briefly described as downplaying it. In this view, the actions of nationalists active in *Rodzimowierstwo* are dismissively described as "babbling about the same topic over and over," which in fact has no "driving force" (FN). One of my interlocutors says directly: "The issue of nationalists and *Rodzimowierstwo* is a cow that roars a lot [but] gives little milk. Because people who talk about nationalism and *Rodzimowierstwo*, that one results from the other, they usually don't know shit [...]. These nationalists raise their heads from time to

time, shout how important they are and how the Native Faith is eternally related to nationalism, but fewer and fewer people listen to them” (EI).

However, downplaying nationalism has yet another dimension. It is based on the fact that the representatives of the “middle current,” on the one hand, essentially dissociate themselves from the ideas of Jan Stachniuk, but on the other hand, they do not clearly condemn the nationalist attitudes and views of contemporary followers of the pre-war *Zadruga*. Extreme nationalistic views do not seem to be a major problem here (they can be tolerated or kept silent), as long as people who represent them are truly religiously committed and do not propagate them during ritual meetings. It seems significant that not only a certain (sometimes considerable) tolerance is allowed for people with nationalist views, but some of them are clearly appreciated and respected for some reasons. Of key importance here is the issue of their knowledge about the culture and religion of the Slavs and involvement in activities aimed at promoting it.

In this discourse, downplaying nationalism is usually associated with the conviction that this “problem” is artificially created or exaggerated by representatives of the anti-nationalist discourse or leftist circles unrelated to *Rodzimowierstwo*. Especially the latter are accused of “defamation of *Rodzimowierstwo*” and spreading a false stereotype of a nativebeliever-nationalist by “mindlessly repeating certain patterns” originating in the history of German Nazism, biased and ideologically conditioned publicizing the actions of individuals and “persistently searching for a handful of extremes” and “making scandals” about outdated statements and activities from two decades ago (cf. Simpson 2017, 73; Hudziak 2019), and even deliberate manipulation of facts and provocations. A characteristic expression of such convictions may be the interpretation of the previously described participation of *żerca* in the march of nationalists. One of my interlocutors comments on this incident as follows:

There was some provocateur from this Center for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behavior, he started recording [*żerca*], approaching his nose there, pushing the flag away from him to record his face. And [*żerca*] stood in front of him and started waving the flag in front of him. Anyway, I saw this recording, he simply waved the flag to chase him away, cover his camera and so on. And it was known that a neo-Nazi attacked a social journalist. Well, with all the absurdity [...] of the situation, it was not an attack, after all [*żerca*] didn’t hit him with his fist, he didn’t hit him (EI).

By exposing the unreliability of the leftist criticism of the nationalism in *Rodzimowierstwo*, its significance is also deprecated, for example, by stating that: “*Krytyka Polityczna*”⁸ is such an environment that even to Milton Friedman, who was a Jew, could point out fascism, so I would not treat them [...] very seriously” (EI).

From Nationalism to Conservatism

The analyses presented above show that the description of *Rodzimowierstwo* in terms of dichotomous divisions into right-wing and left-wing or ethnic/nationalistic and universalistic in relation to the current situation turns out to be too simplified. At present, we are dealing with the coexistence of three basic discourses that function in a

situation of constant tension and enter into various interactions, mainly of a conflict nature.⁹ One of the basic features distinguishing these discourses is the attitude to the issue of nationalism (including the controversial legacy of Jan Stachniuk and the pre-war *Zadruga*), and in a broader perspective, the understanding of politics and its place within religious practices. The theses about the existence of a “brown swamp” flooding *Rodzimowierstwo*, as well as accusations of “sweeping the problem under the carpet” or “devious justification” and tolerating “open neo-Naziism” within groups (FN), collide with the opinions that calling for a distance from the nationalist heritage of *Rodzimowierstwo* is in fact, a kind of hysteria, and the ideas of “depoliticizing” it are impossible to implement and harmful. The idea of the political neutrality of *Rodzimowierstwo* as well as marginalization and privatization of political issues is also criticized. Particularly naive centrism and political indifferentism are attacked, as well as the tendency to indicate people representing such an approach as a specific model of a “normal” believer. Both in the nationalist discourse and in the anti-nationalist discourse, it is pointed out that such a political indeterminacy or lack of formation creates the phenomenon of “useful idiots” who unknowingly legitimize and promote specific political ideas with their statements and actions.

Characteristic for the current relationship between *Rodzimowierstwo* and nationalism is that the very status of the “problem” of nationalism is problematic in the sense that it is subject to discussion and negotiation (for this reason I consistently put the term “problem” in quotation marks). As I have tried to show, among believers of *Rodzimowierstwo* there are people for whom this “problem” is real and requires an urgent solution, people who do not consider nationalism as a “problem” but as an integral and “natural” aspect of *Rodzimowierstwo*, and finally people who believe that it is an apparent “problem” or it is deliberately constructed by certain environments.¹⁰

Regardless of the status attributed to the “problem” of nationalism, the analysis of the materials I have collected can conclude that, in a general perspective, nationalist tendencies in *Rodzimowierstwo* are weakening, so that the diagnoses formulated in this respect at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries are already largely obsolete. As Simpson (2017, 75–76) notes, in Poland right-wing *Rodzimowierstwo* stands in a peculiar position in relation to Catholic nationalism: they have common “enemies” (immigrants, Islam), but at the same time it is not in the interest of believers of *Rodzimowierstwo* to take joint actions to “defend Christian Europe,” because it strengthens yet, very strong Polish Catholicism as well as the Christian components of the national identity. This uncomfortable situation is undoubtedly one of the reasons that reduce the nationalist tendencies in *Rodzimowierstwo*. My observations and conversations, however, result in the fact that the demographic factors are more important. In the last 10 years, there has been an influx of a significant number of young people, for whom the most attractive and desirable in *Rodzimowierstwo* was its pluralistic dimension (polytheism and an alternative to the dominant Catholicism in Poland), exposing the relationship between man and nature, a unique kind of openness (no dogmas, no holy books, and a closed canon of the truths of faith), as well as non-impudence (lack of proselytism, missionary activity, and treating faith in terms of an individual choice). As a consequence, the tendencies described as typical for the Western model of Neopaganism grew stronger in Polish

Rodzimowierstwo, and people with moderate political views began to dominate the milieu statistically.

This does not mean, however, that there has been a fundamental shift toward universalism and a transition to the form of inclusive Neopaganism under the sign of “peace and love.” The dynamics of the development of *Rodzimowierstwo* is shaped according to a different, more complicated model.

Firstly, nationalist tendencies, although weakened, are still present here, sometimes gaining new forms of expression, especially in the context of fears related to the phenomena of mass migrations. The essence of this approach is well reflected in the statement by one of the participants in the discussion on nationalism that took place on the group *Rodzimowiercy Słowiańscy* on Facebook: “Let China accept these migrants, because they are responsible for the greatest CO2 emissions after the US. I am not going to make room in my sacred Slavic land for newcomers from Africa because it’s too hot for them” (Dejnega 2018). However, nationalist tendencies in *Rodzimowierstwo* are channeled in a specific way. It consists in the fact that in the clusters with a more centrist or leftist attitude there is a strategy of separation, and at the same time the phenomenon of a kind of “self-exclusion” of nationalists, which is described by one of my interlocutors: “As for the nationalist approach and the nationalists in my group, they crumble by themselves. A year to a year and a half to attend the ritual with me is really enough for such a nationalist, and he will just at some point decide that this is not his way. And very well” (EI). This leads to a rearrangement of the landscape of *Rodzimowierstwo*. As one of the *żerca*’s points out, people with nationalist views “gather around one idea, not a religious or belief idea, but a political idea. And such a religious association is the *Rodzima Wiara*, of which Staszko is the chairman and everyone knows his approach to politics” (EI). Apart from the aforementioned RW, which has been operating continuously since 1996, from time to time there are also other initiatives aimed at gathering of believers with this type of views (e.g., *Neonowe Słowianowierstwo*, *Gromada Swarga*, *Gromada Białozar*). At the other extreme, there are groups that strongly condemn nationalism (such as RKP, *Słowianie Północy*, or *Rodzimowiercza Wspólnota Gajownik*) and strongly express left-wing views (such as *Wolni Rodzimowiercy Krakowa*), which are also subject to a specific exclusion and marginalization. My interlocutors say:

XX: Among many circles of *Rodzimowierstwo*, we are considered to be a left-wing [group].

YY: We are a bit excluded [...] from the entire community of *Rodzimowierstwo* mainly because of these libertarian, anarchist aspirations and so on, [because] for some people this is at odds with the idea of *Rodzimowierstwo*.

There are groups between these extreme positions, in which moderate political views and the aforementioned tendency to silence political issues prevail, while at the same time moderate forms of nationalism are accepted or tolerated. The latter circles—which could be described as “centrist”—seem to be gaining a dominant position in recent years.¹¹ It is worth noting that the above-described tensions and divisions

caused by different approaches to nationalist ideas and political content are not unique and take place within various neopagan religious groups both in Western and post-communist countries (Lesiv 2013, 4–6, 41–42; Amster 2015, 50–55).

Secondly, the weakening of nationalist tendencies does not lead to a clear spread of liberal views and a universalist, inclusive, and eclectic model of the Neopaganism. On the contrary, it turns out that the departure from nationalism is paradoxically connected with the intensification of conservative views and attitudes and, at the same time, with the dissemination of ethnic, reconstructionist, and exclusive type of Neopaganism. These tendencies are clearly visible within the “centrist” groups, but it should be emphasized that in a certain sense they also apply to nationalist groups that pay more and more attention to issues related to the preservation or restoration of native culture and religion, and to a lesser extent draw from the achievements of such figures as Julius Evola or Alain de Benoist and engage in strictly political activities. Thus, this does not mean that the described tendency is a simple cause–effect relationship and that nationalist groups are (or are becoming) less conservative than the “centrist” groups.

The conservatism of the followers of *Rodzimowierstwo* in general can be described as a “turn to the past,” that is, striving to maintain or restore certain norms and patterns that are considered to be Slavic heritage, and at the same time to oppose phenomena that are perceived as its distortions or modifications. Conservatism understood in this way has two basic aspects that interpenetrate and condition each other, namely the religious aspect and the socio-political one.

The religious aspect of conservatism lies primarily in the fact that in recent years there is a clear strengthening of the reconstructionist model of Neopaganism. It is about recreating and preserving the religion of pre-Christian Slavs in its possibly “initial” and “original” shape, and at the same time protecting it against “unjustified” changes resulting from adapting to modern conditions or fashionable ideological or religious trends. The attitude that many believers present in this respect is sometimes referred to by their critics as “obsession with sources” or “treating sources like the Bible” (EI). The point is that only those beliefs and ritual actions that are well confirmed in reliable historical and ethnographic sources about the culture of the Slavs and are consistent with the current findings of academic researchers are considered “correct” and admissible. People or groups who decide to interpret the sources individually and freely, and especially to combine different types of sources derived from non-Slavic traditions, are exposed to severe criticism and social ostracism. Their actions are inscribed within the scope of esoteric practices under the sign of New Age, and thus excluded from *Rodzimowierstwo*. This criticism and exclusion very often take the form of mocking or sarcastic comments made both on the Internet and during various types of informal meetings and discussions. The contemptuous terms *wicca-slavicca* and *ezo-mezo* (FN) are used to describe eclectic religious practices, and their stigmatization often refers to the metaphors of disease and pathologies that disturb or even destroy “authentic” *Rodzimowierstwo*. An example of initiatives created for stigmatizing such “unorthodox” practices and views may be the Facebook group *Raki pogaństwa, historii oraz archeologii* (Cancers of Paganism, history, and archeology).¹² The religious aspect of conservatism also consists in the fact that in *Rodzimowierstwo* there is an increasing need to clarify (or even codify) certain truths

of faith and the ritual and ethical principles resulting from them. Representatives of this approach are concerned with treating *Rodzimowierstwo* as a “serious” and “true” religion with specific obligations to gods and people. They contradict the opinion that there are “no dogmas” (FN) in *Rodzimowierstwo*, which means that it is a set of loose beliefs and practices that everyone can shape according to their preferences and needs. Such a “liberal” attitude is mockingly described as *fajnowierstwo*,¹³ it is also emphasized that *Rodzimowierstwo* is not there to please people or to make them feel good. Critics of such a purist approach, in turn, accuse him of dogmatism, claiming that it is essentially a “Christian fraction of Paganism” that “does not want to break away from the patterns that Christianity brings with it” (EI).

The second of the aforementioned areas concerns socio-political concepts. The fact that the cult of ancestors plays a very important role in *Rodzimowierstwo* is of key importance. In this context, the hypothetical models of the social order ascribed to these ancestors are highly valued and treated as ideal, sacred models that, with some modifications, should also be implemented today. This results in the fact that many believers are very critical of various progressive concepts.

In the first place, it concerns feminist ideas that undermine the “natural” division of roles between women and men. In this respect, a certain paradox can be observed within *Rodzimowierstwo*. In recent years, the role and social position of women have clearly increased here (this applies to both the celebration of rituals and non-religious activities).¹⁴ From my observations during the research, it appears that the acceptance of the general idea of gender equality is common here, and cases of misogyny or condescending treatment of women are rare (FN). At the same time, however, both men and women distance themselves from feminism, which, in their opinion, aims to create for both sexes exactly the same conditions for social and occupational existence. In this respect, my research confirms the thesis of Aitamurto and Gaidukov that “Rodnovers tend to subscribe to the idea that men and women are different, and therefore their tasks differ” and gender equality is about giving equal appreciation to male and female roles within this diversity (2013a, 152–54). Such views are particularly evident in ritual practices and activities related to the preparation and celebration of holidays, in which there is a clear division into male and female work and tasks. For example, the preparation and kindling of fire is always done by men, while the tasks of women include baking the ritual bread (*kołacz*). Similarly, in many situations requiring the use of physical force or related to the consumption of alcohol (opening or pouring honey, wine, beer), there are also references to the “traditional” division of roles, which often takes the form of a somewhat playful exclamation “Is there a man here?” (FN). Certain patriarchal elements can also be seen in the structure of rituals in which prayers and sacrifices to male deities almost always precede those to female deities (with the exception of rites dedicated to goddesses). In the prayers themselves, there are also sometimes expressions that refer to men as the “head of the family” (EI). Such reproduction in various situations of certain elements of patriarchal structures is clearly felt and negatively perceived by feminist believers. One of my interlocutors even complained about the female leader of his *gromada*, who in his opinion “acts like a patriarch in a skirt at times” (EI).

The traditional understanding of the family as a permanent relationship between a woman and a man, an important aspect of which is childbearing, is also dominant in

Rodzimowierstwo. Such views are well illustrated by the statements of two representatives of one of the groups I studied:

XX: The principle of fidelity and, however, maintaining the status in marriage is absolutely [...] necessary - also in *Rodzimowierstwo*. It's not like a soul rush without a robe. And the marriage itself is a very important institution, because the family is very important in *Rodzimowierstwo*. And lineage extension. [...] So, in fact, all these anti-natalisms, I don't know... same-sex relationships as we understand them are unacceptable.

YY: They destroy the social order and the value of the family. A family that is fertile. If a heterosexual couple came and said that they wanted *swadźba* [wedding ritual], but did not want to have children, then this *swadźba* does not make sense either.

XX: We won't marry them, we just won't do that (EI).

Another of my interlocutors complained:

There was such an unpleasant situation when our priestess-*żerca* said that you should not leave your husband because the marriage act had been concluded, and that you have to listen to your spouse and fight for this relationship, which I didn't like very much.

As can be seen, the reference to the traditional family model leaves little room for attitudes and behaviors that clearly contradict this pattern. This is especially true when it comes to attitudes toward same-sex relationships. Although at present it is quite rare to come across explicitly homophobic statements and attitudes in *Rodzimowierstwo*, most groups strongly reject the possibility of giving any form of marriage to the same sex, and many people are also critical of the public expression of feelings by homosexual couples. The few groups expressing progressive views in this matter are described with the contemptuously and ironic term of the "rainbow *Rodzimowierstwo*" (FN), and the occasional idea of organizing special wedding ceremonies for homosexual couples is met with scathing mockery and severe criticism.

Another manifestation of conservatism in the socio-political sphere is associated with the attitude of *Rodzimowierstwo* to ecology. There is also a paradox here. On the one hand, believers strongly emphasize the relationship between man and nature and perceive *Rodzimowierstwo* as a natural religion, the principles of which are derived from the observation of the laws governing nature. On the other hand, however, many projects concerning environmental protection, especially ideas and practices under the sign of deep ecology, are treated with distance by most adherents, considered as contradictory to a rational approach to reality and traditional models of human-nature relations and described sarcastically as "different religion" (FN). In this context, for example, ideas such as a complete ban on hunting perceived as part of the "ancestral traditions" and one of the "natural" human activities (FN) are rejected. Similarly, all manifestations of anti-natalism (in the sense of refraining

from procreation, which is seen as one of the causes of the climate crisis) are criticized, as well as abortion. However, the opinions of the followers of *Rodzimowierstwo* are very different on the latter issue. Opinions appear here that “abortion is an affront to the ancestors” (EI) or an action “contrary to nature” and therefore in *Rodzimowierstwo*, which is a natural religion and honors ancestors, it is unacceptable at all. Much more often conservatism in this respect manifests itself in opposition to the “liberal” approach to this issue (the so-called abortion on request), which is justified by the reference to the concept of reincarnation. The attitude of such “moderate” conservatism in this area is well reflected by the statements of two of my interlocutors:

XX: Well, I think that giving birth to a child that comes from rape is also embedded somewhere in such a deep chaos that nothing good can come out of it, so here the right to terminate [pregnancy] is justified in my opinion. Yet, abortion is absolutely not a contraceptive. And it’s not like “my body, my business”, because [getting pregnant] we call our ancestors, we call souls. This is a huge mystical act.

YY: And such an abortion is against your lineage. Because a woman who already carries the soul of her ancestor, who is somewhere on the way from the underworld, well, it is interrupted and what is to happen with this ancestor? Will he return to the underworld? We are not sure what will happen to him [...].

XX: Besides, we really [...] dislike the re-evaluation of notions that it is a fetus and its removal. No, this is a child and his killing. And as we understand it, it’s not that every murder is wrong. It’s just that, sometimes you kill [...]. If a child is sick and is going to suffer, yes, we will kill him to survive it somehow, to maintain order, but it is still homicide (EI).

In general, both the religious and social aspects of conservatism relate to the ideas of native and ethnicity. It is about maintaining the norms and patterns that are perceived as appropriate for a given ethnic group, as a tradition inherited from Slavic ancestors. The key element of such an attitude is the defense of this tradition against foreign or global forces. In this context also any progressive social concepts are usually inscribed in broader phenomena, such as globalization, cultural unification, or commercialization of interpersonal relations, and generally perceived as a kind of threat. Such conservatism, postulating the preservation of the “ancestral traditions” and a return to strong ethnic identities, is to protect Poles from joining the “club of cultural suicide” (FN).

Conclusions

The research I have carried out allows the formulation of several conclusions.

Firstly, despite the fact that in recent years strictly political activity and the overt involvement of the followers of *Rodzimowierstwo* in the promotion of nationalist ideas have clearly decreased, nationalism itself has remained an important topic in internal debates, disputes, and practices of exclusion, stigmatization, and delineation of borders.

Secondly, the political landscape of Polish *Rodzimowierstwo* and the dynamics of its changes in general resemble the situation described by Gardel (2009) and von Schnurbein (2017) on the basis of Norse Paganism (Asatru, Odinism, Heathen). They pointed out that within this branch of Neopaganism there are three attitudes: (a) explicitly racist; (b) ethnicist; (c) non-, anti-, or a-racist, and while the groups of the first type dominated in the 1970s and 1980s, in the first decades of the 21st century, most groups oscillated between the second and third types of attitudes. In this context, however, *Rodzimowierstwo* is characterized by several specific features. For historical and political reasons, changes take place here with a delay of about 10 years, and the category of race has usually been and is being replaced by the category of the nation. Besides—as my analyses have shown—non-/anti-racist groups constitute a separate (and rather marginal) current, while the attitude that Schnurbein describes as a-racist (rejection of the race category but no active opposition to racism) is appropriate for “centrist” groups that represent the ethnicist position, that “tends toward a cultural essentialism which sees ‘culture’ as an immutable and ideally homogenous entity rooted in a deep past - an idea which often carries with it a desire to purify and re-homogenize this alleged essential, traditional culture” (von Schnurbein 2017, 7). Consequently, in *Rodzimowierstwo*, the dominant position is gained by a reconstructionist approach and exclusive model of Neopaganism which rejects radical nationalism and tries to marginalize political issues but is clearly conservative and by no means inclined toward ideas of multiculturalism.

Thirdly, the tendency of *Rodzimowierstwo* to drift from nationalism to such understood ethnic conservatism makes believers constantly transform and migrate between different groups of *Rodzimowierstwo* and/or different currents of contemporary Paganism. It is particularly characteristic that some young people ultimately consider the above-described openness of the *Rodzimowierstwo* as apparent, and thus disappointed with the overly conservative attitudes of this milieu (perceived as too “Christian” or “Catholic”), leave, looking for their own way in other, more universal, and inclusive forms of Neopaganism.

Fourthly, the conservative turn I have described is not an exclusive feature of Polish *Rodzimowierstwo*. This tendency also occurs in other countries in Central and Eastern Europe and can be explained using the postcolonial key. As Piotr Wiench proves, for followers of native faith “the neopagan narratives serve as a shield protecting them from the ills of modernity, and they serve to establish a counter-hegemony to protect themselves from external domination. Thus the construction or re-discovery of the forgotten or eradicated past becomes a rejection of the domination of foreign, non-native, expansive cultural patterns which are perceived as a major threat to the ethnic or national identity” (Wiench 2013, 20). However, in the case of *Rodzimowierstwo*, we are dealing with a peculiar situation, which is characterized by a specific irony. Conservative resistance to global cultural neocolonialism meets here with a different kind of resistance, namely the aforementioned attacks by Catholic conservatives who treat *Rodzimowierstwo* as a form of New Age Neopaganism, i.e., a manifestation of new global forces alien to the Polish Christian tradition.

This paradoxical situation puts *Rodzimowierstwo* in a problematic position. On the one hand, it is too conservative for many young people who, in neopagan religions,

seek an escape from the dominant conservative Catholicism in Poland. On the other hand, the latter responds much more strongly and effectively to the need to resist foreign, expansive cultural patterns dominating in the globalized world. In such circumstances, the prospects for the further development of *Rodzimowierstwo* seem rather vague.

Notes

1. In total, during the research, I had direct contact with 20 groups operating in the vicinity of Warsaw, Poznań, Wrocław, Lublin, Kraków, Bydgoszcz, Toruń, Olsztyn, Gdańsk, Wałbrzych, Silesia, Lower Silesia, and the Świętokrzyskie Mountains.
2. An example of such trends may be the Reclaiming movement, pagan feminist spirituality (Eller 1993) or initiatives such as Dragon Environmental Network, in Poland *Wolni Rodzimowiercy Krakowa* (Free Rodzimowiercy of Cracow).
3. Many of these groups are unstable, arise quickly, decay, and divide into smaller ones. The number of members of individual groups is varied, and at the same time quite unsteady, and ranges from several to several dozen people. Due to the limited volume of this article, I do not provide more detailed information on individual groups, I only mention their actions or statements by their members as examples illustrating the phenomena being the subject of my analysis.
4. *Toporzeł* (ax-eagle) is a graphic sign designed in the 1930s as the emblem of the reborn Poland by the famous sculptor Stanisław Szukalski, who in his work referred to the pre-Christian religion of the Slavs. The ax-eagle mark is now used by various nationalist organizations.
5. The abbreviation FN means the quote is from my field notes.
6. *Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Tradycji i Kultury Niklot* (The Association for Tradition and Culture Niklot) is a non-governmental organization that refers to the idea of the pre-war *Zadruga* and deals with promoting the nationalist political concepts of Jan Stachniuk.
7. The abbreviation EI means that the quote is from ethnographic interviews.
8. *Krytyka Polityczna* is a Polish left-wing journal not related to the neopagan environment.
9. It should be noted, however, that in the statements and behaviors of individual believers, one can also notice cases of overlapping or combining certain elements from described discourses.
10. The latter opinion can be interpreted in a broader context as examples of elements that make up the defensive discourse characteristic of some neopagan environments (Strmiska 2018, 15–16).
11. It is difficult to come up with quantitative data on the number of believers representing each of the options. Based on the activity of the groups I observe and the statements of their leaders, I estimate that the proportions are as follows: approximately 20%—groups with a nationalist attitude; approximately 10%—groups with a clear anti-nationalist attitude; approximately 70%—“centrist” groups with an ambiguous attitude to nationalism.
12. This is a closed (private) discussion group. For ethical reasons, I am not giving details or quotes from the discussions there.
13. *Fajnowierstwo* is a neologism consisting of the noun *Rodzimowierstwo* and the adjective *fajny*, meaning pleasant, nice, kind.
14. Out of 20 groups with which I had direct contact during the research, in five women acted as leaders or co-leaders. It should be emphasized, however, that in most of the remaining groups, women perform important religious functions and, according to my estimates, they account for a total of approximately 50% of the *ofiarnik* (people who offer sacrifices and pray during holidays).

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Piotr Grochowski is an associate professor at the Institute of Culture Studies, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Poland). His main research areas are folk customs and oral narratives; 19th-century broadside ballads and popular religious songs; vernacular religions and contemporary Paganism. He is the author of several books, among others *Dziady. Rzecz o wędrownych żebrakach i ich pieśniach* [Dziady. The point about wandering beggars and their songs] (2009); *Straszna zbrodnia rodzonej matki. Polskie pieśni nowiniarskie na przełomie XIX i XX w.* [A mother's terrible crime. Polish "news songs" at the turn of the 20th century] (2010); *O tym nie wolno mówić... Zagłada Żydów w opowieściach wspomnieniowych ze zbiorów Dionizjusza Czubala* [We are not allowed to speak about it... The extermination of the Jews in memoirs from the collections of Dionizjusz Czubala] (2019).