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**Radical Paganism: Contemporary Heathens in
Search of Political Identity**

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Poděkování

Tereza Matějčková, Ph.D. mě podpořila povzbuzujícími konzultacemi, podnětnými připomínkami a trpělivostí během doby, kdy práce vznikala. Jagodě Mackowiak vděčím za přátelskou podporu a Mgr. Veronice Krajíčkové za neocenitelnou radu v začátcích. Nepřímo se o mou práci zasloužil i Adam Anczyk, PhD, který ve mně vzbudil zájem o téma novopohanství a jeho transformace v dnešní společnosti. Všem bych tímto ráda upřímně poděkovala.

ABSTRAKT

Tato práce si klade za cíl zmapovat vývoj politického myšlení Severského novopohanství a určit faktory, které vedou k politizaci konkrétních typů novopohanských skupin a k jejich příklonu k pravicovému radikalismu. První kapitola po úvodu sestává ze čtyř případových studií, z nichž každá představuje jiný typ skupiny z pohledu místa a okolností vzniku, kontextu, v němž se vyvíjela jejich náboženská a politická přesvědčení, a ze způsobu legitimizace jejich případného politického aktivismu. Následující dvě kapitoly se soustředí na analýzu historických souvislostí, které zapříčinily rozdílné ideologické směřování skupin v rámci dvou hlavních typů Severského pohanství, Ásatrú a Odinismu, a to ve dvou odlišných kulturních prostředích Evropy a Spojených Států. Závěrečná kapitola přináší syntézu zkoumaných skupin ve vzájemných souvislostech spolu s jejich historickým pozadím; tato syntéza pak nabízí možnou interpretaci procesu jejich radikalizace.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA: Nová náboženská hnutí, Germánské (Severské) novopohanství, náboženský rasismus, politické náboženství, nacionalismus, extremismus, Ásatrú, Odinismus

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the development of political thinking of Heathenry and the factors that determine the political identity of particular heathen groups, namely their tendency to right-wing radicalism. The first chapter (after introduction) consists of four case studies; each one represents a different type of group in regard to where and under which circumstances they emerged, to the context that has been shaping their religious and political beliefs, and to the way they legitimize their possible political activism. The following two chapters analyze the historical influences that marked the difference in the ideological development of the two main types of Heathenry, Ásatrú and Odinism, in two distinct cultural milieus – Europe and the US. The final chapter is a synthesis of the case studies in relation to their historical background. The outcome of this synthesis offers a possible interpretation of the process of radicalization of the heathen groups.

KEY WORDS: New religious movements, Germanic neopaganism, religious racism, political religion, nationalism, extremism, Asatru, Odinism

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1. Introduction

1.1. Paganism between spirituality and politics

The rising religious diversity in modern societies in the past few decades facilitated the emergence of new religious movements¹; among them, modern paganism is one of the most dynamic segments in terms of evolution of concepts and ideas, the growing number of its adherents, and also their increasing social and political engagement.

Modern paganism is a fairly heterogeneous movement that attempts to reconstruct or revive the ancient, polytheistic faiths of pre-Christian Europe. The reconstructionist approach tends to interpret the available primary sources and relevant cultural assets in a literal sense, applying them as a paradigm for a re-creation of beliefs and ritual practice of the renewed tradition, while revivalists dispose of these resources more freely, as they incline rather to the re-invention of the spirit of this tradition without insisting on restoring it in all its aspects. In both cases, the scarcity of the sources quite necessarily leads to borrowing from other religious traditions or to matching the ancient lore with new ideas from other fields², thus the contemporary pagans are far from being romantic dreamers stuck in the past, clinging to dead concepts and long time gone worldviews; instead, they strive to revamp the religious contents to adapt them to modern-day understanding and usage.

This paper will examine contemporary Germanic paganism, more often known as Heathenry. Heathen groups aim to bring to life Old Norse religion, the indigenous tradition of Scandinavia and in a broader sense of continental

¹ New religious movements (NRM) is a loose term frequently used by scholars to denote a wide variety of religious groups that “have appeared in Western societies since the mid-1960s, are nontraditional and nonimmigrant (...), have first-generation converts as their primary membership base, have attracted among their converts higher-status young adults, have manifested social movement characteristics, have presented an anomalous profile with respect to traditional religious organization, and have proclaimed themselves to be engaged in spiritual activity.” David G. Bromley, “Violence and New Religious Movements”, in James R. Lewis (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 143 – 162, pp. 144 – 145.

² Michael F. Strmiska, “Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives” in Michael F. Strmiska (ed.), *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005, pp. 1 – 54, pp. 18-20.

Germanic territories and Anglo-Saxon Britain.³ Despite its European origin, Heathenry is nowadays equally popular in the US where it absorbed many aspects of the local religious scene. Reconstruction of this tradition is dependent mainly on textual sources due to a lack of relevant material culture. The primary sources are the two Icelandic 13-century compendiums of Old Norse myths and poetry, referred to as the *Prose Edda* and the *Poetic Edda*⁴, and a medieval saga literature that is mostly of Icelandic origin as well. The secondary sources are provided by the scholars in Old Norse religion, many of whom are practising neo-pagans themselves.

Heathenry is an earth-centered religion, with an emphasis on ritual practice rather than dogmatic teaching in most cases. The same as many other neo-pagan groups, heathens perform seasonal rites that correspond to nature's cycles: equinoxes, solstices, and four quarter days (or variation of these) alongside with additional celebrations as oath ceremonies or rituals to honor a particular deity.⁵ In theory, all the gods of the Norse pantheon are worshipped – Odin, Thor, Freya/Freyr, Balder and Tyr⁶ being the most common.

However, some groups prefer to develop a cult of a single deity, or rather a form of henotheism with Odin as the main god. This preference marks the difference between Ásatrú (in Icelandic: the belief in the Æsir as a collective noun for all the deities⁷) and Odinism at first glance; some scholars consider it a mere nominal difference or simply a matter of terminology.⁸ Without denying their common roots and acknowledging that the line which can be drawn between them is often hazy and somewhat ambiguous, it's plain to see that the two types of Heathenry have demonstrated a significant shift in the way they relate not as much to the transcendent sphere of their gods but to the outer world.

³ Apart of fragments of runic inscriptions found on several localities in Northern Europe, the continental version of Old Norse religion was mentioned as early as in the 1st century AD by Tacitus in *Germania*, and by the 12th century, the whole territory became dominated by Christianity. The modern paganism thus refers to the era between late Iron Age and the High Middle Ages.

⁴ The *Prose Edda* (or *Snorri's Edda*) was compiled by Snorri Sturluson (1179 – 1241) as a textbook on Icelandic poetry that to a great extent worked with mythological motives, while the author of *Poetic Edda*, a collection of mythological and heroic poems, remains unknown.

⁵ Graham Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism: Listening People, Speaking Earth*, New York: New York University Press, 1997, pp. 57 - 58.

⁶ Since I don't focus on primary sources, I will be using English transcripts of the names of Old Norse deities throughout this paper.

⁷ The Old Norse mythology distinguishes between two groups of deities, Æsir (nom. pl.) and Vanir. Ásatrú in general worships both, as the difference between them is relative. Traditionally, Æsir were associated with sovereignty and warfare and Vanir were perceived as fertility gods, connected to wealth. Odin is counted among the Æsir. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁸ "There are other ways of referring to such people and traditions, some preferring the Icelandic name Ásatrú (...), others preferring to be named Odinist." *Ibid.*, p. 53.

Within the context of neo-pagan NRMs, a widely accepted hypothesis divides these movements into two basic types:

1. Spiritual, non-dogmatic, often eclectic revivalists with esoteric or New Age background and universalist approach (type Wicca, Druidry)
2. Politically motivated reconstructionists, often with a strong nationalist orientation and emphasis on local context (type Native faiths of Central and Eastern Europe)

The NRMs of the second type emerged largely in the said European countries after the collapse of communism, and often focus more on the consolidation of a national identity (as part of their opposition to former cultural hegemony of the Soviet era and now of the globalized world) than on developing a truly religious character.⁹ To a certain extent, we can say that some NRMs are religious groups with neo-pagan beliefs and rituals, and some others are rather “political movements that refer to Pagan values and use Pagan symbols.”¹⁰

There are obviously many variations between these two extremities, and some neo-pagan groups find themselves somewhere in the middle on the spectrum. Moreover, most of them, if not all, are under constant development, and it's not easy to predict in which direction they will be heading in the future.

The case of Heathenry is even more complex, as it seems to cover both types in full width and at once, the extreme forms being explicitly radical right-wing groups with clearly defined political goals. Traditionally, it has been Odinism that was considered type 2 and Ásatrú that was counted as type 1. However, as this paper aims to show, the current forms of both (including both European groups and their American counterparts) hardly prove the existence of such a clear dividing line.

This paper will focus on the factors that determine the level of political engagement of the heathen groups in the right-wing milieu, and will try to identify the breaking point that marks the difference between religious and political organization in the context of Heathenry.

⁹ Piotr Wiench, “A Postcolonial Key to Understanding Central and Eastern European Neopaganisms”, in K. Aitamurto and S. Simpson (eds.), *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Durham: Acumen, 2013, pp. 10 – 26, pp. 12 – 13.

¹⁰ Victor A. Shnirelman, “Russian Neopaganism: from Ethnic Religion to Racial Violence”, in K. Aitamurto and S. Simpson (eds.), *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Durham: Acumen, 2013, pp. 62 – 76, pp. 64 – 65.

The Chapter 2 presents four case studies on four distinct contemporary groups within Ásatrú and Odinism. The following two chapters are a brief historical analysis of the movement's origins and sources of inspiration that explain both past and present involvement in the political sphere; Chapter 3 examines more closely the link between the first forms of Heathenry and the extreme right ideology of National Socialism, an ideological heritage from which many of the heathen groups today try to distance themselves, yet others openly adopt it as part of their own worldview, thus reinforcing the well known public image of Heathens as neo-Nazis. Chapter 4 will further review the more recent developments, namely the mutual influence of Heathenry and American right-wing radicalism, placing it in the context of millenarian NRMs and the white supremacy movement. Finally, the synthesis of the case studies in Chapter 5 consists of finding the common features of the studied groups explained by their historical/contextual settings, which will bring us to formulate the final conclusion.

1.2. Terminology and definitions

The present-day academic discourse employs a wide variety of terms to describe the renewed pre-Christian religions. Neo-paganism, modern paganism or contemporary paganism all denote the same phenomenon, but generally speaking, these terms are not overly popular among the believers themselves. The original meaning of the noun pagan (from Latin *paganus*) is a “country dweller”, referring to peasants in a pejorative way, as intellectually and culturally backward people unlike those who accepted Christianity. Many modern pagans thus prefer to call their tradition by the generic term Native faith, or Heathenry in the case of the Old Norse tradition. First, even though “heathen” means, in fact, the same as “pagan”, the expression itself doesn't bear such pro-Christian connotations, and secondly, it's used exclusively for the Norse neo-pagans¹¹, whether they're followers of Ásatrú or Odinism (and of course, even more of them would call themselves simply Ásatrúer or Odinist). In this paper, I will use the terms “paganism” or “neo-paganism” to depict the forms of the Germanic paganism (chapter 3 and 4) that preceded contemporary Heathenry (chapter 2) to distinguish the modern developments from their historical context, and also when referring to other neo-pagan movements outside of Heathenry.

¹¹ Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003, p. 31.

The same diversity of expressions applies to the field of political terminology. Right-wing radicalism or right-wing extremism are often used interchangeably, though the former is more frequently used in the American context and the latter denotes rather the European forms of right-wing ideology. Both terms want to avoid the labels “neo-fascist” or “neo-Nazi” in order to reflect the postwar developments and their adaptation to the current social and political reality.¹² This paper will refer to the term “right-wing radicalism”, taking into consideration that the American forms of right-wing politics are emphasized. Right-wing radicalism is a political ideology based on the belief in the fundamental inequality of people (at both the individual and collective level), this inequality being defined in biological or cultural terms, thus leading to a racist worldview, extreme nationalism and/or xenophobia, anti-globalism and militarism, justifying the use of violence to fulfill a political vision.¹³

1.3. Current state of research and literature

The topic of heathens and their relation to political activism has been gaining popularity in academic circles together with the rise of right-wing radicalism in Europe and the US. The American heathen milieu is well documented in the works of Jeffrey Kaplan and Mattias Gardell, who investigated the grounds of the radicalization of both Ásatrú and Odinit groups from the 70's to the 90's. Their works represent a solid basis for anyone interested in this topic. Michael F. Strmiska represents a bridge between the American and European heathen movements with his research on their common roots with a glimpse into other neo-pagan traditions. Contemporary European Heathenry is examined by Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, who put it into a broader context of intersecting subcultures (namely black metal and Satanism). Stefanie von Schnurbein, Richard Rudgley and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke offer a comprehensive overview of the religious sources and esoteric background of National Socialism, whereas Samuel Koehne develops the concept of Nazism as a political religion formulated by Emilio Gentile. Richard Steigmann-Gall, Joe Perry, and William M. Harrigan discuss the relation of Christianity and the Nazi ideology and Carrie B. Dohe, William Schoenl, and Danielle Peck review C. G. Jung's psychological analysis of the latter. Further research on NRMs of the millenarian type is conducted by David G. Bromley, Hugh B. Urban, and Carol M. Swain, whose

¹² Jeffrey Kaplan and Leonard Weinberg, *The Emergence of a Euro-American Radical Right*, New Brunswick – New Jersey – London: Rutgers University Press, 1998, pp. 10 – 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

outreach into the study of white supremacy ideology helps to see the whole picture.

2. Case Studies

2.1. Selection criteria

The following four case studies aim to show the immense variety in the forms, structures, teachings and ideas that have developed within Heathenry during the few decades of its existence. The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the emergence of the most recently formed groups, but rather to offer insight into the dynamics of the movement's ideological development. Therefore, the studied groups have been selected according to:

- ideological background and local context
- organizational viability and impact on society
- universalist vs. nationalist approach
- political activism vs. apolitical character

From this perspective, the second chapter will present a brief overview of two Ásatrú groups (Ásatrúarfélagið and Ásatrú Folk Assembly) and two Odinist groups (Vigríð and Wotansvolk).

2.2. Ásatrúarfélagið

Ásatrúarfélagið, or the “Fellowship of Ásatrúar” as translated from modern Icelandic, is a religious organization based in Iceland that was founded in 1972 and officially recognized by the government shortly thereafter, in 1973. The 1970's is a period that is often considered a first phase in the development of post-war heathen groups of the Ásatrú type¹⁴, both in Europe (mainly Scandinavian countries and Britain) and the US. Ásatrúarfélagið can be perceived as a pioneering heathen initiative that succeeded to transform a small community of 12 founding members into a prospering, and later widely accepted religious society.

It started as a community of enthusiasts that might not have surpassed its own limits if their first attempts to create an organizational structure were not backed by Nýalssinna, an esoteric and spiritist group active since 1950 and led by Þorsteinn Guðjónsson at that time. The teachings of this group were based

¹⁴ Stefanie von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival: Transformations of Germanic Neopaganism*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017, p. 54.

on theosophical concept of Old Norse gods, who were imagined as inhabitants of remote stars and whose consciousness reached advanced level, which qualified them as spiritual leaders of humankind, and, more specifically, Icelanders.¹⁵ In spite of his initial interest in this teaching, the first established leader of the newly formed Ásatrú group, Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson (1924 – 1993), later led the group in a different direction, that of a religion of nature.

Icelandic Ásatrú spirituality is focused far more on connection with landscape and respecting and celebrating the natural cycles (often with practical applications in terms of being involved in various environmental issues activism) than on communication with transcendent celestial spheres. All the gods of the Norse pantheon are worshipped, taking into consideration every individual's personal preferences and choices. Some *Ásatrúar*¹⁶ even decide not to worship any particular deities at all¹⁷, but rather they find expression of their faith in following of the Ásatrú ethics and prioritizing the social aspect of their affiliation to the group by participating in rituals. For many of the adherents, being Ásatrú means basically returning to the original, pristine way of life of their ancestors. Performing rites is a central activity, whether it's legal acts, such as marriage (performed by the chief priest, the *Allsherjargodi*) or annual sacrifice (*blot*) or other rituals held for personal purposes. No dogmatic teaching is formulated, but tolerance towards other religions is encouraged.

Today, the group has around 4,126 registered members (and even more unofficial sympathizers), which is a significant number when considering the total population of Iceland - 356,991 as of January 2019.¹⁸

The popularity of Ásatrúarfélagið can be partly explained by the fact that the knowledge of Old Norse texts (namely Eddas and Sagas) and pre-Christian beliefs have always been an important part of Icelandic cultural heritage, reinforcing a sense of national identity. As M. Strmiska observes, “not all Icelanders would agree with worshipping the ancient gods, but very few would not know their names.”¹⁹ Most of the members are Icelanders, but the organization has an undisputed international impact driven by various cross-country cooperations with other heathen groups, publishing their own

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 59, paraphrased.

¹⁶ This term, derived from Icelandic, is commonly used to denote followers of Ásatrú (-er in singular, -ar in plural).

¹⁷ <https://asatru.is/hvad-er-asatru>. Accessed 4 July 2019.

¹⁸ See statistics on Icelandic population and Ásatrú adherents on <https://hagstofa.is/> (accessed 1 July 2019). The total number of *Ásatrúar* is based on census data published 1 January 2018.

¹⁹ Michael F. Strmiska and Baldur A. Sigurvinsson, “Asatru: Nordic Paganism in Iceland and America”, in Michael F. Strmiska (ed.), *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005, pp. 127 – 180, p. 163.

educational materials or artworks²⁰, and being openly supported by some famous Icelandic artists²¹.

It's the promotion of Ásatrú that is one of the main goals of the group, not missionary work²², as explicitly stated on their official website. Does it mean that Ásatrúarfélagið restricts the membership to adherents of Icelandic descent only? The same website defines the admission requirements as follows: "The organization is open to all those who are interested in different folklore, old traditions and customs and cultural values."²³ To register, the candidate has to be over 16 years old (as required by Icelandic law) and must submit a simple registration form via the Icelandic State's base registry site.²⁴ It presupposes that the individual is a permanent resident of Iceland, but no other specification regarding nationality, ethnicity etc. is mentioned.

Despite their mostly positive image and respect they gained in the Icelandic society over the years, members of Ásatrúarfélagið rarely try to expand their influence beyond the religious field, and since the very beginning, they have aimed to prevent overlapping of their activities as a group with political ones, which caused a minor clash among the early members of the community. The above mentioned Þorsteinn Guðjónsson failed to convey his right-wing political views to the others, which resulted in the founding of a separate political organization called Nordic Race (Norrœnt Mankyn) in 1982.²⁵ Even today, Ásatrúarfélagið remains apolitical, and if any of the members pursues a political career²⁶, it's considered their private occupation, not representing the community's views and opinions.

2.3. Vigrid

The Norwegian group Vigrid can be labeled as neopagan, far-right, violent, extremist, racist, or Neo-Nazi, and all of the labels can be justified. The organization characterizes itself as an "ethnic/religious community that aims to develop a Nordic society based on Nordic religion and Nordic cultural norms

²⁰ Beinteinsson himself was poet and performer (he published a CD with his reading of Eddic poems for example); current *Allsherjargodi*, Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson, is an active musician and film composer with interest in wide variety of genres. *Ibid.*, p. 166, 170.

²¹ For example by the Icelandic pop/folk singer Björk Guðmundsdóttir, Eivør Pálsdóttir, a Faroese singer who is based in Reykjavík, or well-known rock band Sigur Rós.

²² <https://asatru.is/athafnir>. Accessed 1 July 2019.

²³ <https://asatru.is/skraning-i-felagid>. Accessed 1 July 2019.

²⁴ <https://www.skra.is/umsoknir/rafraen-skil/tru-og-lifsskodunarfelag/>, full English version available. Accessed 2 July 2019.

²⁵ S. von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival*, p. 60.

²⁶ It's worth to mention here the case of Sigurjón Þórðarson, who was elected to the Icelandic parliament in 2003 as representative of the Liberal Party. See M. F. Strmiska and B. A. Sigurvinsson, "Asatru: Nordic Paganism in Iceland and America", p. 170.

and values.”²⁷ The group was formed in 1999 and its first leader was Tore W. Tvedt (*1943), a man in his seventies today, who was succeeded by Thorgrim Bredesen in 2006, but remains active within the organization he founded. Tvedt had two main sources of inspiration: The Norsk Hedensk Front (Norwegian Heathen Front) and Varg Vikernes.

The latter is well known black metal musician, frontman of a band called Burzum²⁸. Associating black metal with paganism (and even Satanism in earlier stages) has become a general trend since the 1980’s when different sub-genres of extreme metal music started to employ heathen themes and imagery.²⁹ Vikernes himself is a keen supporter of both heathenism and National Socialism, as he proclaims in his manifesto *Vargsmål*³⁰. His goals are, among others, to “secure Aryan supremacy on Mother Earth” and to “colonize the universe.”³¹ For this purpose, he is said to have founded the Norsk Hedensk Front in 1993, a strongly anti-Semitic, racist organization that later split into or merged with other international groups of the same rank. His linkage to this organization is however far from being clear, as Vikernes himself denied having been involved in their activities³² and a mere year later, he began his twenty-one-year sentence in prison for arson and murder³³, which surely limited his options to support the initiative. In the same way, he is sometimes considered to be a member of Vigrid that took the Norsk Hedensk Front as an example, but this has never been confirmed.

Vigrid managed to successfully merge the above-mentioned influences and become an organization that stands out like the tip of an iceberg of similar groups on the Norwegian radical right/neo-pagan scene.

Vigrid’s official website is certainly a rich source of information, but surprisingly not on the group’s religious views. Most of the content is focused on history and interpretation of the World War II, explanation of Judaism, the denying of the Holocaust (or HoloCa\$h as they call it, expressing belief that this “myth” is part of US campaign for supporting Israel), or glorifying Hitler and other prominent Nazis. Lots of attention is also drawn to the group’s media profile and how they are presented in public (the site has a large database of

²⁷ *Vigrid er et etnisk/religiøst fellesskap som vil utvikle et Nordisk samfunn basert på Nordisk religion og Nordiske verdi- og kulturnormer.* <https://www.vigrid.net/maalkontakt.htm>. Accessed 4 July 2019.

²⁸ <https://www.burzum.org/>.

²⁹ Kennet Granholm, “Sons of Northern Darkness: Heathen Influences in Black Metal and Neofolk Music”, *Numen* 58 (2011): 514 – 544, p. 525 – 526.

³⁰ “Varg’s Speech”, see Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, p. 306.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 307 (modified quotation).

³² Mitzi M. Brunsdale, *Encyclopedia of Nordic Crime Fiction: Works and Authors of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden Since 1967*, Jefferson: McFarland, 2016, p. 271.

³³ Vikernes was accused of several church burnings and murder of the frontman of another black metal band Mayhem. The sentence was later shortened to 16 years.

published news articles³⁴ on topics ranging from criminal reports to tabloid stories).

The sections about Nordic³⁵ history and culture are rather vague and general, but prominent place is dedicated to Nordic identity and race.

From their perspective, race and religion complement each other in the sense that race is an essential physical aspect of human existence, and religion is its mental or spiritual aspect. These two aspects have been developing together ever since, by being entwined to the point that only people who experience the harmony and balance between them can consider themselves human beings in the scope of the Nordic society. The statement that “we as Nordic people should have a Nordic religion” is a request of the “same priority as ensuring our people’s physical existence.”³⁶ This explicit request is further expressed in some of the group’s organized rituals, namely in what they call “baptism” (*dåp*) and “confirmation” (*konfirmasjon*), terms borrowed from Christianity and understood apparently in the exact same way. Being baptized equals not only to being accepted as a member of Vigrid, but also means that the person becomes fully human by this ceremony, finally embracing not only the race, but also the religion of their Nordic ancestors.

Various rites of passage (including marriage, for example) seem to have more significance for Vigrid’s members than participating in traditional *blot*, which is briefly described only in one instance (as celebration of winter solstice in 2012).

Any mention of concrete Norse god/s appears only sporadically. As part of Vigrid’s internal code of conduct (*De 10 Utevetregler*³⁷), which looks like it was formulated following the pattern of the Ten Commandments, the belief in Odin, Thor and Freya is mandatory. However, it is mainly Odin whose worship is emphasized, being considered the creator of the universe and the main god of the pantheon. The other mentioned gods have been granted existence in Vigrid’s worldview, but they play no role there (rather they become something like necessary extras).

Vigrid was also a registered political party in past (2008 – 2009), running for the parliamentary election in the county of Buskerud in September 2009. In order to become a political party in Norway, a list of 500 signatures of Norwegian citizens supporting the party is required. Vigrid was able to collect

³⁴ Frequency of adding this content taken from other sources is once per couple of days, which shows that the site is actively administered and visited.

³⁵ The term “Nordic” (in original: *nordisk*) is freely used throughout the whole website to denote people of European descent, and can be interchanged with “white” or “Aryan”.

³⁶ *Kravet om at vi som et nordisk folk skal ha en nordisk religion har dermed samme prioritet som at vi skal sikre vårt folks fysiske eksistens*, <https://www.vigrid.net/vtutvikling05.htm>. Accessed 3 July 2019.

³⁷ Exact translation is problematic, “The 10 Rules” or “The 10 Regulations” can be the most appropriate terms here. See <https://www.vigrid.net/resett13.htm>. Accessed 3 July 2019.

these signatures, however, the result of the elections was not very impressive – Vigrid obtained only 179 votes.³⁸

Despite this failure, the group tries to continue its political activities. And what is on their agenda today?³⁹

Firstly, the government’s legislative and administrative power should be decentralized. Norway should become a federal republic where the existing regions would be capable of self-government, limiting the federal government’s function mostly to maintain control over national defense. Secondly, the capital of this federation should be Hønefoss in Buskerud county, and not the current capital Oslo, which is seen as a hotbed of pro-immigration policies. These represent a direct threat to ethnic Norwegians, whose welfare, social security, individual freedom and national identity should be reinstated and preserved. Finally, the means to turn their political vision into practice is by an openly proclaimed civil war, a concept that resonates well with Vikernes’ idea of the world’s colonization by the Nordic race. Vigrid’s statement below almost every contribution on their website (“Join Vigrid's Nordic civilization battle or be slaughtered as deserved!”⁴⁰) leaves no room for doubt about how they plan to achieve their goals – yet no evidence of any actual violent acts committed by the members of Vigrid has been registered.

2.4. Asatru Folk Assembly

The role of Asatru Folk Assembly (AFA) in the US in terms of evolution, consolidation and transmission of the heathen movement is comparable to the role of Ásatrúarfélagið in Europe. The organization went by several different names that reflected different stages of its ideological and organizational development until it took its current shape. The connecting link between these various stages has always been the personality of AFA’s founder and leader, Stephen McNallen (*1948). He was initially interested in Wicca and occultism, but then - during his younger years - he discovered the world of the Vikings through reading, and despite having been raised as Catholic, he later decided to follow the spiritual path of Heathenry.⁴¹

In the early 1970’s, he established the Viking Brotherhood, which was “the first Nordic Pagan organization in the United States” according to Strmiska.⁴² At that point, McNallen’s motivation was driven far more by the ideal of Viking

³⁸ Ahmed S. Hashim, “Terrorism as an Instrument of Cultural Warfare: The Meaning of Anders Breivik”, *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 3.8 (2011): 1-6, p. 2.

³⁹ See the full program here: <https://www.vigrid.net/vipindex.htm>. Accessed 4 July 2019.

⁴⁰ *Bli med i Vigrids Nordiske Sivilisasjonskamp eller bli slaktet som fortjent!*

⁴¹ Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, p. 259.

⁴² Michael F. Strmiska and Baldur A. Sigurvinsson, “Asatru: Nordic Paganism in Iceland and America”, p. 129. In fact, it was the first organization of Ásatrú type, but the first Odinist group was founded by Else Christensen already in 1969, see Chapter 3.1.

warriors as portrayed in the Old Norse sagas than by the religious worldview expressed in them. This motivation was further strengthened when McNallen joined the military to serve in Vietnam and then Germany. After he came back in 1976, he created a new group (still largely based on the Viking Brotherhood) under the name Asatru Free Assembly⁴³. The following decade was very fruitful regarding setting up a model of a functioning and ever-growing heathen community; a new organizational structure was launched together with ritual practice, and both served as an example and inspiration for many succeeding heathen groups.

The organization had no central administration but was made up of loosely connected associations operating at the local level, known as “kindreds”. This structure has persisted until today. Kindreds could be of various sizes, but always remained non-hierarchical and democratic in all the decision-making processes, with leaders elected to their positions on a regular basis. Members of kindreds attend regional gatherings called *Things* (and also a once a year gathering on a national level, *Althing*⁴⁴) to strengthen their ties with fellow kindreds by participating in various festive activities, rituals, discussions, and entertainment. The leaders of the respective kindreds often also assumed the role of *godi* (from Old Icelandic *goði*) or *gythia* (female *gyðja*), a religious expert and performer of rituals.⁴⁵

The rituals that were introduced by the Asatru Free Assembly were the *sumbel* (a “drinking ritual” during which a decorated drinking horn filled with mead is passed among the participants; the purpose is mainly to take oaths) and *blot* (sacrificial ritual performed on feast days, usually outdoors).⁴⁶

The Asatru Free Assembly operated until 1987, when it was dismantled by McNallen himself. The reason behind was the incessant difficulties in preventing the group from being permeated by radicalized elements (for example, members of American Nazi Party⁴⁷) who wanted to implement their racist views into the group’s concept of spirituality. A few years later (in 1994), the association was nevertheless restored and adopted the current name, Asatru Folk Assembly. The new group performs the same rituals and keeps the same organizational structure as its predecessor but has come up with strict regulations on membership and refined the concepts of their beliefs.

⁴³ In this paper, the abbreviation AFA stands only for Asatru Folk Assembly. Asatru Free Assembly is consistently referenced by its full name to avoid confusion. About the evolution of AFA see Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, p. 260.

⁴⁴ *Althing* is a term borrowed from Old Icelandic/Old Norse (*Alþingi*). Originally it designed an annual meeting of Icelanders who met for the purpose of law-making, trade, settling of disputes etc. More about *Things* and kindreds see Michael F. Strmiska and Baldur A. Sigurvinsson, “Asatru: Nordic Paganism in Iceland and America”, pp. 130 – 132.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 129 – 130.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

To understand how their beliefs are represented today, a glance at the official website of AFA may be instructive. Not much information about Ásatrú as religion can be found there (though the fact that both Æsir and Vanir gods are to be worshipped is clearly present). Instead, there is a lot of emphasis on the building of family, living in the community and on following the Ásatrú ethics, which means to be honest, brave, exploring, generous, determined, hardworking and supportive of the community. The community is defined as “united by descent from common ancestry,” and this ancestry is further characterized as “Ethnic European Folk,”⁴⁸ meaning “white people.” People and religion are interdependent, as stated in the *Declaration of Purpose* (a summary of the main principles of AFA): “If the Ethnic European Folk cease to exist, Asatru would likewise no longer exist.”⁴⁹ Gods and folk are two expressions that very often go hand in hand on the website, almost as if equal status was given to both.

However, this explicit language doesn’t seem to incite hatred against any other ethnic group. In the same *Declaration*, the principle of promotion of cultural and ethnic diversity is formulated: “The world is not one uniform, unvarying mass. All peoples are, and by right ought to be, distinct and unique. Each and every culture should relish those differences and be free to work out their own destinies. Only in our uniqueness can our respective Gods fully manifest. The AFA supports the efforts of all cultural and biological groups to maintain their identity and opposes the cultural marxists who would reduce all of humanity to an indistinguishable gray mass.”⁵⁰ The “white people” of European descent should be protected and promoted, but this doesn’t mean that other groups should be suppressed, as they have value of their own.

Where do these ideas about ancestry and ethnicity related to religion come from? McNallen is well known in the Ásatrú circles for the controversy surrounding his theory of metagenetics.⁵¹ In short, this theory combines the Old Norse concept of transmigration of souls in ancestral lineage⁵², the Jungian concept of collective unconscious and the theory of archetypes with a strong ethnocentric perspective on spirituality. McNallen claims that the memory of our ancestors is contained in our DNA, therefore religion is hereditary in the same way as, for example, physical features and psychical dispositions. To accept the religion of one’s ancestors (for Ásatrú, that of ethnic Europeans) is the most natural thing, but on the other hand, people of different ethnic backgrounds should look into their own cultural traditions to find the native faith that is the most suitable for them. As McNallen says: “Our religion is a

⁴⁸ <http://runestone.org/statement-of-ethics/>. Accessed 6 July 2019.

⁴⁹ <http://runestone.org/declaration-of-purpose/>, section II. Accessed 6 July 2019.

⁵⁰ <http://runestone.org/declaration-of-purpose/>, section V. Accessed 6 July 2019.

⁵¹ See Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, pp. 269 – 271.

⁵² The most famous example of reincarnation in Old Norse literature can be found in *Völsunga saga* where one of the characters called Helgi Hundingsbani is supposedly the reborn Helgi Hjörvarðsson mentioned in the *Poetic Edda*, and reborn is also his mistress Sigrún/Sváva.

function of who we are, not just what we believe. Since the human being is a holistic entity, our spirituality cannot be considered something apart from our physical ancestry.”⁵³

This theory caused a split among the different branches of Ásatrú, and McNallen himself was many times accused of being racist, even though he rejects these accusations and openly proclaims to respect other cultures, religions and people of non-white origin. This view is reflected even on the level of political activism. AFA’s agenda is strictly apolitical, however, the organization supports – at least ideologically – various separatist initiatives all around the world, seen by them as the struggle to maintain the national or ethnic identity, whether these initiatives come from Native Americans, African tribes, or, for example, Tibetans.⁵⁴

2.5. Wotansvolk

“The Odinist path takes up where the Ásatrúers’ geneticist path ends – with race,” writes J. Kaplan in his analysis of the new religious movements’ scene in the US.⁵⁵ This is true only to a certain extent. The borderline between Ásatrú and Odinism is often very fluid, especially in their American versions, and both movements, under the umbrella term “Heathenry”, include so many variants that, in many cases, it’s difficult to tell them apart.

David Lane (1938 – 2007), the founder of Wotansvolk movement (classified usually as an Odinist group) didn’t even consider himself mainstream Odinist, rather he promoted his own version of it that he called Wotanism. He selected this name for different reasons. First, he believed that the term Wotan⁵⁶, that was used by Germanic tribes in the European mainland, would appeal to a broader audience than using the local, Scandinavian name Odin. Next, the acronym WOTAN can be read as “Will of the Aryan Nation”, which summarizes the main line of Lane’s ideological standpoint. Also, following his inclination towards symbolism and esotericism, he was persuaded that it was no coincidence that he was born on Wednesday (Wotan’s day) in a town called Woden⁵⁷, and later he published his main works under the pseudonym Wodensson.⁵⁸

⁵³ Stephen McNallen, “Genetic & Beyond. Metagenetics – An Update”, *The Runestone* 26 (1999). McNallen first formulated this theory in early 1980’s, but after vigorous reactions he received on the original article, he published an update to it in 1999.

⁵⁴ Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, p. 281.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America: Millenarian Movements from the Far Right to the Children of Noah*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997, p. 85.

⁵⁶ Different local variants of the name include Woden, Wodan, Oden etc.

⁵⁷ Iowa, USA.

⁵⁸ Richard Rudgley, *The Return of Odin: The Modern Renaissance of Pagan Imagination*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2018, p. 304, 307.

Lane, however, had to go quite a long way before he identified himself with heathen beliefs. Due to troubled early childhood impacted by abusive father, he spent some time in an orphanage before he was adopted and raised by a Lutheran minister, who naturally led him in attending church services and studying the Bible. In his early twenties, he became involved in the activities of the Christian Identity movement, whose strongly racist and anti-Semitic ideology is based on the premise that only white people (originally of European descent) can achieve salvation, and any other race or ethnicity can exist only as long as they can be subjugated to serve them. Later he cooperated with various other racist extremist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, and the White Aryan Resistance. Lane first got noticed by the state police in the early 1980's for the distribution of flyers entitled *The Death of the White Race* and in 1983 he joined The Order, a terrorist group that was formed as a sort of elite unit within the Aryan Nations. The Order focused on actions against state and federal authorities or public figures. In 1985, Lane was arrested for several crimes that he committed on behalf of this group - among others, for having participated in the murder of Alan Berg, an attorney of Jewish origin and fierce spokesman for anti-racist viewpoints. Lane was sentenced to 150 years in prison.⁵⁹

While serving his sentence, he became interested in Old Norse culture and history, and after having searched for his religious identity for some time, he abandoned Christianity for Heathenry of the Odinist type, as he found it the most convenient to his racist worldview. Still in prison, he married Katja (née Maddox) a few years later, and together they founded a publishing house named Fourteen Words Press⁶⁰. “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children” is the famous 14 words that were revealed to Lane in a dream.⁶¹ This simple sentence can be understood either as a credo of a religious group or a slogan of a paramilitary organization – Wotansvolk fulfills both functions.

Established in 1995 and officially registered as a church (under the name The Temple of Wotan) in 2001, Wotansvolk is a highly militant, anti-systemic movement that sees the current US government structure as infiltrated by Jewish authorities whose conspiracy resulted in the government's support of equal rights to non-white races, namely African Americans. These people are thus granted the same life and work opportunities, same living standards, and also the same living space as white people, but all of this is at the expense of the whites. To stop this is the main goal of Wotansvolk, and any means can be justified, explicit violence and terrorist acts included. Ideally, as a result of a total war that will break out in the near future, there will be one Aryan nation

⁵⁹ George Michael, “David Lane and the Fourteen Words”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10.1 (2009): 43 – 61, pp. 44 – 49.

⁶⁰ Many of the minor published works are available on the group's official website: <https://www.davidlane1488.com/intro.html>.

⁶¹ Richard Rudgley, *The Return of Odin*, p. 309.

built on the basis of a tribal structure with family as elementary unit⁶². For now, given the reality of the multicultural globalized society we live in, white people should at least strive to create small, autonomous communities, separated on their own territory from the corrupt society (which can be achieved also by quietly taking over the local political system⁶³).

In David Lane's perspective, religion serves mainly as philosophical background that gives justification to the group's actions and as a main source of inspiration - in particular in building up the image of the fearless warrior, fighting for his race, symbolized by Odin/Wotan: "Wotan has a totally revolutionary mentality. He has no loyalty to anyone or anything except his own cause. Those who do not share his cause are expendable and those who oppose his cause are targets."⁶⁴ With this philosophy, Lane stands in opposition to Christianity, which, in his opinion, reverses the natural order of the world, and by its universalist teaching, causes the decline of the white race. Christianity is thus part of the Jewish conspiracy and a "racial suicide", as he says in one of his works: "God is not love (...) God the Creator made lions to eat lambs, he made hawks to eat sparrows. Compassion between species is against the law of nature. Life is a struggle, and the absence of struggle is death."⁶⁵

What Lane conceived more like a philosophy, Ron McVan, who joined first the 14 Words Press and then Wotansvolk, fully developed into a religious concept. Artist and author McVan was initially interested in Eastern religions, esotericism, mysticism, and spirituality, and shared similar views on Christianity with Lane. After having found his religious and artistic expression in Ásatrú in 1992, he co-founded Wotan's Kindred, but he was expelled for his racial interpretation of the ancestral faith.⁶⁶ His work for Wotansvolk later included several books on rituals, invocations, ethics, and translations and various artwork. He believes that in order to preserve the race, people need to "be in touch with its racial soul", which requires from each one to reach a certain advanced level of collective consciousness in order to get connected to gods, the archetypal figures that represent the racial soul; and it's through the ritual that this deep inner connection is enabled. Therefore a great emphasis is put on ritual practice that is largely based on the practice of Ásatrú, including common celebration of annual feast days following the cycle of nature (Midsummer, Yule – Midwinter and so on), holding regular *blots* and *sumbels*, rites of passage or rituals performed for personal purposes (for example performing magic or ritual revenge).⁶⁷

McVan together with Katja Lane soon became a driving force behind David Lane's attempts to spread his racial version of Odinism, helped to disseminate

⁶² George Michael, "David Lane and the Fourteen Words", p. 54.

⁶³ Richard Rudgley, *The Return of Odin*, p. 314.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America*, p. 96.

⁶⁵ Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, p. 202.

⁶⁶ "An ancestral faith that puts race first", *ibid.*, p. 206.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 213 – 216.

the materials online and also launched a prison outreach program to recruit new members of Wotansvolk. Today, the organization operates worldwide through a net of its own kindreds, being successfully recruiting adherents in countries such as Japan, Argentina, and Sweden to name only a few.

3. European origins

3.1. The emergence of the first heathen groups

The pre-Christian forms of religiosity as an integral part of history, culture and folklore have been attracting curiosity of the European Romantic movement since the late 18th century, but the interest remained somehow on the theoretical level, shared by scholars, writers and artists of the era.

In German speaking countries, it wasn't until the early 20th century that serious attempts to reconstruct what was considered a Germanic native faith were made. These attempts had their roots in the so called Lebensreform ("Life reform") a neoromantic protest movement that spread in Germany among the middle class that started to experience the feeling of detachment from nature and a natural way of life caused by an increasing level of industrialization and urbanization of the society. Groups embracing the back-to-nature philosophy of Lebensreform were experimenting with various alternative lifestyles such as vegetarianism or nudism and supported ideas of sexual liberation and living in self-sustaining small agrarian communities in the heart of nature.⁶⁸

The values of this counter-culture, so different from the ordinary life of the mainstream society, were particularly appealing to the youth. One of the most illustrative examples was Wandervogel, a scouting-like association of loosely connected groups of young boys and girls (usually aged 12 – 19), inspired by the romantic idea of escaping society (or rather the reality of societal and cultural crisis of that time) and turning towards the inner self, strengthening both mental and physical capacities by living a healthy lifestyle, abstinence from alcohol consumption and nicotine. Travels, hiking and camping under an open sky, as well as romantic-driven interest in the history of their own country, peasant culture, folklore, folk music and dances were on their agenda at the first stage.⁶⁹ Wandervogel wasn't a neo-pagan group, but their worldview resonated somehow with esoteric currents of that time, making their wandering a spiritual journey that diverged from the path followed by the generation of their parents, including the Judeo-Christian basis of mainstream

⁶⁸ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Okultní kořeny nacismu: Tajné árijské kultury a jejich vliv na nacistickou ideologii*, transl. Miloslav Korbělík, Praha: Eminent, 2005, p. 43.

⁶⁹ Tomáš Kasper, *Dějiny německého hnutí mládeže v českých zemích – analýza, prameny, interpretace*, Liberec: Technická univerzita v Liberci, 2008, pp. 6 – 29.

culture. They were particularly receptive to proto-heathen inspirations such as the artworks of Hugo Hoppener (1868 – 1948, known under the pseudonym Fidus), a symbolist painter and illustrator and a passionate promoter of Lebensreform philosophy, who portrayed Sun worship, runic symbols representing mystical experience and similar motives.⁷⁰

World War I had a deep transforming effect on the movement's ideological perspective. Even though many wandervogels lost their lives on the home front, war was generally regarded positively, as a long-awaited solution to the political and cultural crisis. The aftermath of WW I brought radicalization of yet latent nationalistic tendencies and social mobilization. Wandervogel no longer wanted to focus on the reform of the individual, but on the reform of the society. Their old model of functioning was replaced by a new one, where discipline and following the charismatic (and mostly adult) leader played a major role. They implemented stricter regulations that corresponded to their newly defined goals – they shifted from hiking to marching, from a healthy to an ascetic lifestyle similar to life in a military camp. Their activities remained apolitical in the sense that they did not acknowledge the traditional system of political parties; these were regarded as dividing the society rather than leading towards its greater unity. Their own political vision put in first place a new society that would be harmonic, organic, with a common national identity.⁷¹

At this point, Wandervogel merged with the *völkisch* movement that was growing in popularity especially during the interwar period, but its origins can be traced back to the 19th century, a period of socio-political and economical twists that caused territorial fragmentation of the central European area and gave an impulse to the quest for a reinforced national identity. This phenomenon was incredibly diverse, ranging from individual artists and lone searchers of spiritual identity, to religious communities or political parties. The idea behind the *völkisch* movement was Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744 – 1803) concept of *Volk* (folk) as an organic communion of people bound together by the ties of common culture, language and history. This unique relation gives basis to the intellectual, moral and even spiritual unity of countless generations across time and space, and therefore cannot be translated merely as a “nation” which describes rather socio-political connections. Instead, the term should be understood as an expression of a collective soul of such a community.⁷² Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855 – 1927), who was one of the leading *völkisch* thinkers and also a supporter of Nazism, went even further with interpreting the concept of *Volk* in racial terms.

⁷⁰ Richard Rudgley, *The Return of Odin: The Modern Renaissance of Pagan Imagination*, pp. 161 – 162.

⁷¹ Tomáš Kasper, *Dějiny německého hnutí mládeže v českých zemích – analýza, prameny, interpretace*, p. 7.

⁷² Anthony James Gregor, *Totalitarismus a politické náboženství: Intelektuální historie*, transl. Jana Ogrocká and Jiří Ogrocký, Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2015, pp. 222 – 223.

In *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), he developed the idea about Teutonic Volk having a specific “religious instinct” or “inborn religious tendencies” that he identified with “racial soul.”⁷³

The *völkisch* milieu incorporated religion mainly in two ways: either as an Aryan interpretation of Christianity⁷⁴ or as a revival of pre-Christian Germanic faith, anticipated by Lebensreform initiatives. One of the first organized groups that tried to reconstruct a native German faith according to historical sources was launched by Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1882 – 1962). Hauer was an Indologist and worked in the department of the history of religions at the University of Marburg. He shared his teacher Rudolf Otto’s perspective on religion as originating from non-rational, ecstatic experience⁷⁵, and, being in close contact with Carl Gustav Jung (mostly during the pre-war period), he formulated his theories enhanced by psychological dimension.

Hauer claimed that Indo-Germanic spirituality and thinking are not compatible with Christianity, and that “all races have their own mental-spiritual, species-specific images”, which means that there is an “inherited tendency in man towards predetermined religious forms”⁷⁶ based on race. Hauer then defined race as a mental and spiritual idea (*seelisch-geistige*)⁷⁷ besides its obvious biological character.

In 1933, Hauer established the German Faith Movement that associated several *völkisch* groups of mainly non-Christian or anti-Christian orientation. The dogmatic teaching of this movement wasn’t very elaborated, the main focus seems to have remained on the Sun worship. However, Hauer aimed considerably higher – he hoped to offer a religious alternative that would become the official religion of the Third Reich. His experiment did not last too long though, as the Nazi authorities were not very supportive of his ideas and the movement itself soon split into separate fractions again due to a lack of a common vision.⁷⁸

3.2. Esoteric and occult forms of religiosity in the 1st half of the 20th century

The fascination with history, folklore, mythology and the need to redefine national identity in turbulent times resulted first in a diversity of *völkisch* ideas

⁷³ Samuel Koehne, “Were the National Socialists a Völkisch Party? Paganism, Christianity, and the Nazi Christmas”, *Central European History* 47 (2014): 760–790, p. 764.

⁷⁴ See sections 3.2 and 3.3 of this chapter.

⁷⁵ Stefanie von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival*, pp. 265 – 266.

⁷⁶ Petteri Pietikainen, “The Volk and Its Unconscious: Jung, Hauer and the 'German Revolution'”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 35.4 (2000): 523-539, p. 533.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 526 – 527.

on somewhat mystically united Germanic/Teutonic⁷⁹ people, and then escalated into the feeling that this unity is in danger, exposed to destructive and vicious foreign influences, and needs to be protected and preserved at any cost. At this point, the *völkisch* milieu absorbed pieces of different esoteric teachings together with a new wave of interest in occultism;⁸⁰ their followers strived to unveil the hidden truth about an alternative religious history in which Judeo-Christian tradition (as an imported element alien to Germanic culture) played the role of the oppressor of the unique, pure and, in fact, superior Germanic religiosity.

This superiority was often explained by racial differences, and a comprehensive justification for the superiority of the Germanic race was found in Theosophy. This internationally popular occult teaching, largely based on the writings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831 – 1891), represented snippets of beliefs ranging from spiritism, Gnosticism or Rosicrucianism, to eastern mystery cults and pre-Christian mythologies. Being brought together, they provided a basis for complex theories of cosmogony and anthropogony.⁸¹ The theosophical concept of human origins and evolution is framed within the image of seven consecutive cosmic evolution cycles that emanate from the creative powers of God and illustrate periodical progression and decline of the universe. In each of the cycles, human evolution proceeds analogically to the cosmic cycles: seven succeeding root races (and their respective seven subraces) experience their rise and fall. There were four root races known so far, living on the now lost continents: the Astral, Hyperborean, Lemurian and Atlantean races. Humanity today represents the fifth race, Aryans, who find themselves somewhere in the middle of the cyclic process, which equals to gradual degeneration. The sixth root race that will emerge from the fifth one will restore the advanced spiritual level of mankind, necessary for further evolution; this race should arise from carefully selective breeding.⁸²

The theosophical racial interpretation of human evolution fell on fertile ground, especially in Vienna's intellectual circles, where it inspired a number of occult currents; among them Armanism, Theozoology and later Irminism. All of them are ideological systems that can be grouped under the generic term Ariosophy (the esoteric wisdom of the race of Aryans).

⁷⁹ I refer here to the terms "Germanic" or "Teutonic" as frequently used in the discourse of that time to distinguish between the contemporary use of "German" (i.e. citizen of Germany) and wider term for people of Germanic descent, inhabitants of then multinational German Empire (1871-1918) and Austria-Hungary (1867-1918).

⁸⁰ Goodrick-Clarke defines occultism as a western esoteric tradition that combines Hermeticism, kabbalah, alchemy and Neoplatonism. The focus lies on gnosis, an esoteric knowledge of the divine nature of both world and man. See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Okultní kořeny nacismu*, p. 37.

⁸¹ Described by H. P. Blavatsky in the first two volumes of *The Secret Doctrine* (1888).

⁸² Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Okultní kořeny nacismu*, pp. 38 – 42.

Guido von List (1848 – 1919), was the first one to integrate occultism and theosophy into *völkisch* ideology. His father being a prospering Viennese tradesman, List was going to inherit a family business, but his early ambition was to become an artist and historian. As he was saying, he could “read the history from the folklore and the landscape.”⁸³ And indeed, his vivid imagination enabled him to reconstruct a coherent esoteric history of the so called Aryo-Germans, neglecting any evidence-based facts. He used the term Aryo-Germans instead of *völkisch* term Teutons to highlight their identity with the fifth root race as defined by Blavatsky.⁸⁴ Based on List’s reading of *Germania* by Tacitus, the three main Aryo-Germanic tribes, Hermiones (also Irminones), Ingaevones, and Istaevones represented a tripartite system in which Hermiones were the class of priest-kings (*Armanenschaft*), while the other two belonged to the class of warriors and farmers/tradesmen. List Germanized the name Hermiones to Armanen, and he attributed to them the role of spiritual teachers - initiated adepts who kept passing the secret knowledge of theosophic teaching from generation to generation. This gnostic wisdom had authorized them to take over the political and legislative power, thereby they assumed the functions of kings and aristocracy. With the coming of Christianity in the Early Middle Ages, they sunk into clandestinity to escape persecution and continued to pass the knowledge under the cover of esoteric societies such as Rosicrucians, Freemasons fraternities, or knightly orders (namely Knights Templar).⁸⁵

List called his esoteric doctrine Armanism which he complemented by claiming that the original Germanic religion was the exoteric part of this teaching, intended for commoners and peasants in the form of rituals, mythology and folklore. This exoteric form was named Wotanism after the highest god of the continental Germanic pantheon, Wotan, whom List understood as a solar deity and identified him with God the Creator from Blavatsky’s writings. This choice was far from incidental. According to the *Poetic Edda*, Odin (Wotan) acquired an esoteric knowledge (symbolized by the rune magic) by sacrificing himself by hanging nine days from a tree, pierced by a spear, and he also gained the skill of foreseeing the future by sacrificing his own eye. List himself was suffering from cataract and lost his sight for almost one year after having had a surgery in 1902. In the meantime, he was studying German linguistics and runology.⁸⁶ Wotanism was, in fact, a mystery cult focused on living in harmony with nature, understanding the mystical unity of man and the universe, and also the unity of nation and race. The gradual development of these views in line with the *völkisch* roots of his thinking culminated in List’s request in establishing a new pan-Germanic empire with

⁸³ Ibid., p. 59.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 81.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 86-88.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

highly hierarchical organization, in which non-Aryo-Germans would be subdued to the ruling elite who would have maintained its racial purity by strict observance of the racial laws.⁸⁷

However, List himself was more of a thinker than an activist, and the only attempt to give organizational shape to his ideas was the founding of the High Armanen Order (*Hoher Armanen Order*, 1911) adopting the pattern of knightly orders with List (adding 'von' to his surname at this point) as a Grandmaster.

List was joined by Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874 – 1954), his friend and disciple, in designing his project on socio-political reform. Being a former Cistercian monk, Liebenfels had an extensive knowledge of the Bible, which he interpreted in his own specific way, that later became known as Theozoology. According to him, the core of the Old Testament was a narrative about the gradual degradation of Aryan race caused by interbreeding with different lesser races or even animal species, which resulted in the emergence of sub-human races. These sub-humans stand in direct opposition to the godlike Aryans, whose origins can be traced back to astral deities. They had lost their divine powers due to racial mixing, but segregation through a eugenics programme will restore them in future. In Liebenfels dualistic perspective, the nature of the world is an incessant battle between the forces of Good and Evil, the latter being represented by non-Aryans. Jesus Christ was also of Aryan origin and Liebenfels called him by his Gothic name *Frauja* in his writings. Christ's original message to the world, later distorted by Christians, was basically a call for "the sacrificial extermination of the sub-men,"⁸⁸ through which the salvation will be achieved. Liebenfels thus anticipated an apocalyptic battle in which racially purified Aryans would establish themselves as a governing elite all over the world.

Both List's and Liebenfels' ideas continued to mutate and surface as a source of inspiration for organized groups and quasi-secret fraternities such as the Thule Society or the Edda Society. The most eccentric contributor to Ariosophy was after all Karl Maria Willigut (1866 – 1946), who was notorious for his close cooperation with the Nazi party - namely with Heinrich Himmler, the head of SS, who hired Willigut in 1933 as chair of the department of prehistory in Ahnenerbe, an academic institute dedicated to research in Aryan history and culture, without taking into consideration Willigut's lack of formal education.⁸⁹ Willigut's visionary insight into Germanic history was as intuitive as List's reading of history from the Austrian landscape: he believed to have belonged to a secret royal bloodline that connected him directly to the ancestral memory of

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 95.

⁸⁸ Samuel Koehne, "Were the National Socialists a Völkisch Party?", p. 767. Goodrick-Clarke mentions that Liebenfels' plans to eliminate the sub-humans included their deportation to Madagascar, enslavement, or making them a burnt offering to the God. See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Okulní kořeny nacismu*, p. 136.

⁸⁹ From an early age, Willigut pursued a military career, eventually achieving the ranks of lieutenant and later colonel. See Richard Rudgley, *The Return of Odin*, pp. 219 – 220.

his Aryan forefathers (one of them being Wotan, though he was “not a god, but a man with remarkable characteristics”⁹⁰ according to Wiligut). With his medium-like ability to immerse himself into this collective memory, he could have direct access to all historical events and facts from prehistory to his days. He was able to go back in time to reconstruct also the Germanic mythological past, in which – around 230,000 years ago – the world was populated by supernatural beings known from the Old Norse mythology as giants and dwarfs, and some thousands years later also by Wiligut’s ancestors. They founded the city that today goes by the name Goslar (located in Germany), and made it the center of Irminism, their indigenous religion based on the cult of *Krist*, who was, in fact, a Germanic god. Irminism entered into conflict with Wotanism, a rival religion that prevailed at the end, but Wiligut’s ancestors had secured the survival of Irminism by transmitting it as secret knowledge from father to son. This Germanized version of Christianity charmed Himmler to such an extent that he gave Wiligut’s opinions priority before scientific findings, and frequently employed him as consultant in regard to the making up of SS rituals,⁹¹ symbolism, and paraphernalia.⁹²

3.3. Positive Christianity

Even though there exists a direct link between the heathen revivalist tendencies and their esoteric forms that were promoted by some members of the Nazi elites, it would be far too simplistic to state that the Nazis were neopagans. First of all, Point 24 in the NSDAP Program from 1920 summarizes the official standpoint on religious matters by claiming “freedom for all religious confessions in the state so long as they do not endanger its existence or offend the ethical and moral feelings of the Germanic race” and declaring that “the Party as such stands for a positive Christianity, without binding itself confessionally to any one denomination.”⁹³ Three years later the Party issued an official commentary of the Program, written by Alfred Rosenberg in his function of the leading ideologue of NSDAP at that time. In his Commentary (revised by Hitler himself), he expands these somewhat vague statements and clarifies the term “positive Christianity”: “positive” here apparently means

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 224.

⁹¹ Wiligut helped Himmler to turn the Wewelsburg castle, which belonged to SS, into a cult site. He performed there rituals specially for the SS elite. These rituals included pagan-style weddings, harvest and solstice celebrations attended by the small circle of SS men and inhabitants of the neighbouring village. The SS rituals remained enclosed within this small community without being implemented on a larger scale. See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Okultní kořeny nacismu*, p. 246 - 247.

⁹² Richard Rudgley, *The Return of Odin*, pp. 222 – 233.

⁹³ Samuel Koehne, “The Racial Yardstick: “Ethnotheism” and Official Nazi Views on Religion”, *German Studies Review* 37.3 (2014): 575–596, p. 576.

“anti-Jewish”, a form of Christianity that is purged of Jewish elements. The whole Old Testament was rejected (for the promotion of a basic misconception about the meaning of original sin that was, in fact, a sin against the blood which caused racial degeneration, among other reasons) and the suitable parts of the New Testament were interpreted as a testimony of Jesus’ struggle against Jews, while Jesus himself was of Aryan, not Jewish origin. His death on the cross was the result of his anti-Jewish actions, and made him a symbol of Nordic heroic fighter instead of a passive sacrifice.⁹⁴

Rosenberg later developed these ideas in his work *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930), where he clearly showed his inspiration by Hauer’s German Faith Movement and Chamberlain’s notion of racial soul. He praised their *völkisch*, racial neo-paganism in opposition to Christianity. He claimed that Christianity had hindered the cultural dominance of Germans; in particular, he expressed his disagreement with the cosmopolitan mentality of Catholicism.

The NSDAP authorities, however, distanced themselves from the theses of *The Myth*, which was published as a private work, not as an official publication of the NSDAP.⁹⁵ In fact, Rosenberg’s neo-pagan beliefs represented a small percentage of a wide range of opinions held by members of the inner circle of the Nazi party. Many of the prominent Nazis were practicing members of Christian churches and, despite the esoteric SS rituals introduced by Himmler, they had their children baptized like Goebbels or had their wedding in church like Goering. Hitler’s own views were probably driven by pragmatism and opportunism rather than by any kind of religious zeal. His primary goal was to initiate a mass movement, not to spread an esoteric teaching reserved for elites. Christianity was still able to address a broader audience than any kind of explicit neo-paganism, and while the Nazi ideology owed a lot to the idea of *völkisch* or Aryanized version of Christianity that, together with their large support of Germanic folklore traditions and customs (with the aim to fuel the sense of reinforced national identity), created the impression of anti-Christian feelings, Hitler proclaimed the true revival of neo-paganism to be a dead end: “It seems to me that nothing would be more foolish than to reestablish the worship of Wotan. Our old mythology ceased to be viable when Christianity implanted itself.”⁹⁶

The attempts to reconcile National Socialism and Christian churches had been made with more or less success since the NSDAP’s rise to power in the early 1930’s. The lack of unified state religion in Germany, where Catholicism and Protestant denominations were equally represented, certainly posed a challenge to establishing their peaceful operational coexistence. From the side

⁹⁴ Samuel Koehne, “Hitler’s Faith: The Debate over Nazism and Religion”, ABC *‘Religion and Ethics’* (2012): <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/hitlers-faith-the-debate-over-nazism-and-religion/10100614>.

⁹⁵ Richard Steigmann-Gall, “Christianity and the Nazi Movement: A Response”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 42.2 (2007): 185 - 211, p. 203.

⁹⁶ Richard Rudgley, *The Return of Odin*, p. 163.

of the Nazi Party, the importance of defining the role of religious institutions in the new totalitarian political system required negotiations with the Catholic Church in the first place. As a result, a concordat between the Holy See and the Third Reich was signed and ratified in 1933, following the victory of NSDAP in German federal elections. The concordat was meant to grant freedom of religion and to determine that the Church would be able to maintain control over Catholic educational institutions, unobstructed contacts between the Holy See and German Catholics would be preserved, Catholic organizations and associations would be under protection, and the Church would retain rights to issue printed matter such as pastoral letters and similar items. The main interest of the Nazi Party was to prevent the Church from accessing any political power and to keep a strict division between state and religious institutions, which was validated by Article 32.⁹⁷

Despite of this mutual agreement, the relations between Nazi Germany and the Holy See quickly started to deteriorate after a series of persecution against the clergy (accused of financial corruption or sexual abuse), the closing of catholic schools, and the banning of organized groups' activities. This approach towards the Catholic Church nevertheless showed the growing anticlerical tendencies of the Nazi elites rather than opposition to Christianity as a religion, even though it's worth remembering that the doctrines of National Socialism and Catholicism were, in theory, incompatible in terms of different views on nationalism and racism.⁹⁸

These events culminated in 1937 with the papal encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*, written in German by Pope Pius XI., who addressed the imminent perils of Nazi ideology, pointed out that the treaty from 1933 had been breached and contested the concept of religion advocated by the Nazi elites, which he saw not only as neopagan, but also as “an idolatry of race and blood.”⁹⁹ He then “carefully reaffirmed the doctrines of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and of original sin, and proclaimed once more, in contradiction to Rosenberg's thesis, that the Old Testament was an integral part of God's revelation.”¹⁰⁰

The encyclical triggered a furious reaction on the side of the Nazi authorities, who immediately ordered the destruction of all the printed copies and banned its reading in churches.

⁹⁷ Terezie Radoměřská, *Poměr mezi katolickou církví a národním socialismem v Německu v předvečer II. světové války*, Praha 2010 (diploma thesis), pp. 32-33.

⁹⁸ Richard Steigmann-Gall, “Christianity and the Nazi Movement”, p. 192.

⁹⁹ William M. Harrigan, “Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939”, *The Catholic Historical Review* 51. 4 (1966): 457-486, p. 461.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

3.4. National Socialism as political religion

The eclecticism of the religious opinions held by National Socialists has been a subject of a lively debate since the 1930's. Some contemporaries didn't see much difference between the neo-paganism advocated by part of the Nazi elites and Aryanized Christianity that was advertised as the official religious standpoint of the Party. A closer examination of the beliefs that were being supported among ordinary people would reveal a wide range of religious practices that wouldn't be decidedly associated with either of these two. An example can be taken from the private and public celebration of Christmas, the latter being reported as soon as in 1920 in Munich. *Völkischer Beobachter*, the NSDAP's newspaper, referred to the celebration both as *Weihnachtsfeier* (Christmas festival) and *Julfest* (Yule being the name of pagan celebration of winter solstice); the day of the festival was December 22. According to Koehne, "Christ was not mentioned" in the report and the purpose of the celebration was seen to be "bringing together the loyal and worthy core of a movement to which the German future must belong."¹⁰¹ On the contrary, a year later, the same celebration's key feature was a politically oriented speech of Adolf Hitler who spoke against the "mammonistic materialism" that had stripped Christmas of its true spiritual meaning, which was "the fault of the cowardly Jews, who nailed the world's liberator to the cross."¹⁰² Opulent public events, bonfires, Christmas decorations (where traditional nativity scenes were adorned with swastikas) and markets, together with charity activities sponsored by the Party, were meant to unlock the propagandist potential of Christmas that lay in the public display of national and class unity allegedly brought on by National Socialism. Private celebrations, on the other hand, followed a similar pattern: German women (in their role of guardians of the hearth and home) were encouraged to bake rune-shaped solstice cookies or to decorate Christmas trees with lights in the form of swastikas or with chocolate SS men, and to sing specifically arranged Christmas carols that praised the birth of National Socialism rather than the birth of Jesus Christ.¹⁰³ Christmas celebrations acquired yet another meaning during the war years when they were transformed into a sort of a cult of the dead, expressing the hope in the resurrection of the German fallen soldiers.¹⁰⁴

One of the first analysts of the religious features of National Socialism was Anton Hilckman (1900 – 1970), a conservative German philosopher, who in 1932 described Nazism as "non-religious religion" or "religion of politics" because of its clear aspiration to represent not only a political movement, but also a philosophy that would provide answers to all aspects of life. The dogma of this

¹⁰¹ Samuel Koehne, "Were the National Socialists a Völkisch Party?", p. 777.

¹⁰² Joe Perry, "Nazifying Christmas: Political Culture and Popular Celebration in the Third Reich", *Central European History* 38.4 (2005): 572-605, p. 578.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 596 – 597.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 604.

new faith (or a “substitute for religion”) would be a “deification of the Nordic or Germanic race” that became an absolute value encompassing all the core ethics and morals. He also argued that it’s an individual (as a representative of his race), not God, who is the focus of this new quasi-religion.¹⁰⁵

The motives of racial teaching, based on superiority or even sacralization of race, and the concept of religion oriented to this world rather than to a transcendent one are common traits in all of the heterogenous religious inspirations of National Socialism. Seen through the prism of its eschatological interpretation of history as leading towards a creation of an ideal society in a world organized according to a new political order, and given that its ultimate goal can be understood as the salvation of a nation (even though it was “salvation by race rather than grace”¹⁰⁶), Nazism has been perceived by some scholars as a form of millenarianism¹⁰⁷ that established its own credo and rituals, and even had martyrs¹⁰⁸ and holy scriptures.

However, did the Nazis really want to replace the existing traditions with their own, new idiosyncratic teaching? Alfred Rosenberg explained in his Commentary to the NSDAP Program that religious tolerance was only a temporary strategy - in the long run, all worldviews other than National Socialism would have to be repressed for the sake of true ideological unity of the nation.¹⁰⁹ He didn't explicitly speak about the Nazi ideology as a religion, but certainly juxtaposed these two notions in terms of their function, and obviously didn't advocate the plurality of religious views because of the totalitarian character of National Socialism that claimed the ownership of the individual in his entirety.

Emilio Gentile tried to clarify this approach in his theory of the sacralization of politics. For Gentile, this process takes place whenever the political dimension becomes institutionally separated from the established religious tradition and then acquires its own religious dimension by transforming a political entity such as a nation, state, race, class, party or movement into a transcendent entity.

¹⁰⁵ Emilio Gentile, *Politická náboženství: Mezi demokracií a totalitarismem*, transl. Hana Mondelli Lhotáková, Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury (CDK), 2008, p. 123.

¹⁰⁶ Samuel Koehne, “Hitler's Faith”.

¹⁰⁷ The notion of eschatology oriented to this world as formulated by Joachim of Fiore in the 12th century was probably projected onto National Socialism through Protestant theology, as indicated M. Babík: “Joachim thus oriented the transcendent eschatology of Augustine *ad saeculum*: translated the otherworldly *civitas Dei* into an achievable ideal society, divine providence into human progress, and religious faith into knowledge of the future (...) Joachim's assimilation of eschatology with history, a process that may be described either as secularization of the sacred myth of salvation or as sacralization of secular affairs, represents, next to the Bible, the second principal origin of modern salvationisms such as Nazism and Bolshevism.” See Milan Babík, “Nazism as a Secular Religion”, *History and Theory* 45.3 (2006): 375-396, pp. 388 – 389.

¹⁰⁸ Samuel Koehne, “Nazism, Political Religion, and ‘Ordinary’ Germans”, *Agora* 49.3 (2014, draft version): 21 – 8, p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Terezie Radoměřská, *Poměr mezi katolickou církví a národním socialismem v Německu v předvečer II. světové války*, p. 20.

Such an entity is then placed into a more or less elaborated system of beliefs, myths, values, rituals and symbols, and thus becomes the object of worship. Claiming the right to define the meaning and the ultimate goal of human existence is the natural consequence.¹¹⁰ When a political system becomes sacralized, it's mandatory for both individual and community to obey unconditionally its ideological monism. This *political religion*, as Gentile calls it, is as a result intolerant, dictatorial, radical and wants to pervade all aspects of life of the individual and society. Political religion can arise from an established religious tradition and can use it directly or indirectly to create its own system of beliefs, myths, values, rituals and symbols.¹¹¹

Gentile's identification of National Socialism with political religion is sometimes contested by scholars trying to shed a new light on the controversy of Nazism that was "too dogmatic to pass for genuine science and too blasphemous to pass for genuine religion."¹¹² In the context of the study of German neo-paganism, we can nevertheless conclude that genuine efforts to revive it were not the priority of the Nazi ideology.

4. American developments

4.1. Post-war developments and Else Christensen

Else Christensen (1913-2005), or the "Grand Mother" of contemporary Odinism, was the one who introduced this new religious movement to the American subcultural scene. The term Odinism as such was in use long before she founded her Odinist Fellowship (1969) thanks to an Australian propagator of Anglo-Saxonist neo-paganism, Alexander Rud Mills (1885 - 1964); his internationally influential alternative of Wotanism¹¹³ could hardly be differentiated from the racially oriented forms of anti-Christian esotericism, of which he was very well aware. Mills had been in an intensive contact with British and German National Socialists during his European travels in the early 1930's, and upon his return to Australia, he published his major work, *The Odinist Religion. Overcoming Jewish Christianity* (1939), that became widespread in the Anglo-American heathen circles¹¹⁴. His renown is often credited to Christensen, who derived lots of her ideas from the Mills' writings and subsequently inspired also one of the first post-war British Odinist groups, the Odinic Rite. Kaplan

¹¹⁰ Emilio Gentile, *Politická náboženství*, p. 10. Paraphrased and translated by author.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 12. Paraphrased and translated by author.

¹¹² Milan Babík, "Nazism as a Secular Religion", p. 379.

¹¹³ I use the generic term Wotanism to denote the forms of German neo-paganism centered around the cult of Odin/Wotan as discussed in the previous chapter.

¹¹⁴ Stefanie von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival*, p. 48.

doesn't seem to overemphasize that much when he argues that the "primary area of differentiation between Odinists and Ásatrúers is a knowledge of Mills."¹¹⁵

Mills' "Odinist religion" incorporated concept of the superiority of Anglo-Saxons, who were descendants of a common ancestor (named George); their European homeland was a true "birthplace of civilization"¹¹⁶ from where their cultural hegemony expanded to the rest of the world (having built the Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilizations among others) during the Golden Age before the coming of Christianity. Mills rejected Christianity as a malevolent Jewish attempt to dominate the world.

In 1934 Mills founded the first Odinist group in Australia, the Anglecyn Church of Odin, which he restored as the First Church of Odin in the 1950's after the initial lack of favorable outcomes, partly inflicted by the fact that Mills was heavily compromised by his sympathies with National Socialism (that was rather fruitless in the Australian context though¹¹⁷) and his support or membership in various radical right movements¹¹⁸. For Asprem¹¹⁹, Mills' Odinism was rather a racist political program than religion, and as such was assumed by Christensen in 1960's.

Else Christensen spent her young years in Copenhagen, Denmark, where she became acquainted with anarcho-syndicalist and National Socialist political activism. In the aftermath of World War II, Else and her husband left for England and then Canada, fleeing persecution for their wartime actions. Else developed connections with various radical groups across the US border, especially the American Nazi Party. By that time, she had adopted the racially motivated teaching of Mills which she combined with Francis Parker Yockey's (1917 – 1960) concepts of a "culture-soul" as attached to a specific religious expression, and "culture-parasitism" of non-white races¹²⁰ flavored by Jungian psychology that highlighted the warrior aspect of the Odin/Wotan archetype.

¹¹⁵ Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America*, p. 16.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ S. Koehne calls the promotion of Nazism in Australia "a failure", see Samuel Koehne, "Never Forget That You Are a German": Die Brücke, 'Deutschtum' and National Socialism in Interwar Australia", *Australian Historical Studies* 44.1 (2013): 151-152, p. 152.

¹¹⁸ Namely the so called Australia First Movement (AFM) that wanted to preserve "White Australia" and also fought against the British imperialism following the slogan "Australia first". Kristy Campion, "A 'Lunatic Fringe'? The Persistence of Right Wing Extremism in Australia", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13.2 (2019): 2-20, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Egil Asprem, "Heathens Up North: Politics, Polemics, and Contemporary Norse Paganism in Norway", *The Pomegranate* 10.1 (2008): 41-69, p. 46.

¹²⁰ Yockey believed that whereas all cultures share some common features, what makes them different from each other is the "characteristics of their individual souls". The Western (i.e. European) culture of white people is the most gifted one in terms of a unique cultural expression, and other cultures (of Jewish, Asian or black people) are only parasiting on it, slowing down its progress. See M. Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, p. 169.

Christensen contended that capitalism, communism, and Christianity are responsible for the rapid deterioration of the Aryan culture, acting as pathogens that caused a “spiritual malady” of the Aryans. To cure this malady, she prescribed Odinism as the manifestation of the Aryan folk soul. Coming back to their spiritual roots would lead to a reinforced racial identity and in the end would serve as a vehicle for true spiritual liberation.¹²¹ Odinism, as a belief in the ancient Aryan gods, arose from the collective unconsciousness of Aryan folk, in which they had materialized as archetypes, genetically transmitted mental patterns. The natural impulse of every Aryan should be to fight against the racially impure elements that aim to disrupt the process of spiritual healing.

For Christensen, this process should not have been realized only on a spiritual level. Instead, she campaigned for a peculiar sort of a moderate social revolution; not by overthrowing at once the existing social order, but step by step, by building small, separatist, self-sufficient communities based on a tribal social structure professing the back-to-nature principle of ecological awareness, sustainable production, non-consumerism, and a system of social solidarity where the young, elderly and disabled are voluntarily cared for and protected by the rest of the “tribe”. Christensen was convinced that her idea was nothing more than a revival of the ancient Norsemen social order, thus she called it neo-tribalism or tribal socialism in her writings. Obviously, these tribal communities would not allow any racially impure elements, and for this purpose their members would – again on a voluntary basis – avoid interracial marriages. By a gradual, non-violent expansion (“leading by example”¹²²), these Aryan communities would establish a network of autonomous units that would offer a viable alternative to the existing federal system of government, infiltrated by non-Aryan destructive powers. Christensen saw the attempt to establish an authoritarian *völkisch* state with a centralized government as a mistake that National Socialism had made and that shouldn’t be repeated¹²³. She proclaimed that the Odinist groups should cooperate in a stealthy, unobtrusive way to avoid attracting too much attention from authorities, the

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 170 – 171.

¹²² Ibid., p. 175.

¹²³ The call for a decentralized society clearly echoes her primary inclination to anarchism that she considers “a fundamentally Aryan ideology of freedom”, *ibid.*, p. 173. However, the idea of self-sustained rural communities is nothing new in the light of Christensen’s Nazi background: it was actually part of the plan of the Third Reich to expand the *Lebensraum* (“living space”) of the Aryans by building of small communities of armed, militant farmers on Crimea peninsula that would be a heart of the German territory on the East and would reinforce the agrarian nature of the new German society (a “source of endless youth and perpetual renewal of the vitality of Germany” as expressed by Himmler with his enthusiastic *völkisch* mysticism. Himmler, being partly the author of the idea, saw this project as a culmination of his endeavors in service of the Third Reich. See Heather Pringle, *Velký plán: Himmlerovi vědci a holocaust*, transl. Václav Viták, Praha: BB/art, 2008, pp. 230 – 231.

majority of whom were Jewish, as they would obstruct all of the joint efforts. Therefore, her ideas were not disseminated by any explicit actions, but rather via *The Odinist*, a journal she had founded, and also by an extensive prison outreach program.

With the emphasis on a socio-political dimension, apparently little room was left for developing the religious aspect of Christensen's Odinism. Her Odinist Fellowship didn't appoint any religious experts of the *godi* type and celebrated only four main ceremonies a year (corresponding to later *sumbel* rituals), with the addition of the celebration of Adolf Hitler's birthday.¹²⁴

4.2. Jung's essay on Wotan

Carl Gustav Jung (1875 – 1961) is well known as a psychotherapist and founder of the school of analytical psychology, though his contribution to the shaping of neo-paganism is less advertised. The key idea that influenced the concept of gods as understood by modern pagans was the theory of archetypes, particularly cherished by the US heathens.

In terms of the Jungian interpretation of the human psyche, the individual mind operates on conscious and unconscious level, but apart from individual unconscious there is another, deeper layer of the mind, the collective unconscious; a reservoir of shared human experience that is expressed in archetypes - mental images, or imprints of formative and creative psychic forces that are inherited, and thus the patterns of the ancestral mind are revived in present-day individuals. Conscious representation of archetypes can be seen in mythology, conceived by Jung as an encrypted summary of the human experience and a bridge that connects the past, present and future.¹²⁵ Gods, in their mythological frame, represent personified archetypes. In Jung's view it is therefore undeniable that gods exist as part of the human psyche and only "a mind that is still childish thinks of the gods as metaphysical entities existing in their own right, or else regards them as playful or superstitious inventions."¹²⁶ Although the analytical psychology of today focuses rather on the archetypes manifested on the individual level, Jung's original concept involved also archetypes operating on a larger scale – archetypes that would

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 175 – 176.

¹²⁵ Carrie B. Dohe, "Wotan and the 'Archetypal Ergriffenheit': Mystical Union, National Spiritual Rebirth and Culture-Creating Capacity in C. G. Jung's 'Wotan' Essay", *History of European Ideas* 37.3 (2011): 344 – 356, p. 352.

¹²⁶ Carl G. Jung, *Essays on Contemporary Events: The Psychology of Nazism. With a New Forward* by Andrew Samuels, tr. by R. F. C. Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 16.

be specific to a certain nation, or even race, whose character and behavior would be derived from its dominant archetype.¹²⁷

In his essay *Wotan* (1936), Jung identified the chief god of the Germanic pantheon with an archetype that emerged from the national collective unconscious to explain the contemporary events in pre-war Germany. He defined Wotan as the “god of storm and frenzy, the unleasher of passions and the lust of battle; moreover he is a superlative magician and artist in illusion who is versed in all secrets of an occult nature.”¹²⁸ He emphasized Wotan’s wild, ecstatic side (giving him the epithet *furor teutonicus*¹²⁹) that corresponded to the irrational aspect of the rising National Socialism. According to him, Wotan was a “fundamental attribute of the German psyche”¹³⁰ that has been dormant for centuries, first suppressed by Christianity, and then by the accentuated rationality of the post-Enlightenment era. This created an inner tension between the hidden, unrecognized, raw, and barbaric element on one side and the formally accepted, civilized, sensible element on the other side. As a result, Jung characterized the German psyche as “restless (...), fragmented, and mirroring modern western society.”¹³¹ To avoid the destructive impact of any archetype, one must be aware of its existence and learn how to understand and integrate it into the psychological wholeness of the self – otherwise the archetype can burst out unexpectedly and violently make its way through, which is exactly what happened in Germany, where the whole nation became “seized” by the Wotan archetype that turned their psychodynamic potential into a battle frenzy.

Following his observations of individual patients during his psychotherapeutic work, Jung argued that the possible outcome of this archetypal possession is twofold: either it will lead to a mental breakdown with schizophrenia as a probable result, or it will help the patient to expand his consciousness on his way to individuation, a process of becoming a whole personality by the reconciliation of the conscious and unconscious aspects of psyche. Such a possession by an archetype thus includes both positive, creative potential and imminent danger of uncontrolled disintegration.

When Jung first drafted his essay (which he edited after the WW II), he paralleled this experience with the current situation of the Nazi “experiment”

¹²⁷ Carrie B. Dohe, “Wotan and the ‘archetypal Ergriffenheit’”, p. 352.

¹²⁸ Carl G. Jung, *Essays on Contemporary Events*, p. 13.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16. Jung might reference here Adam of Bremen, a chronicler from the 11th century, whose annals *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* contain a laconic description of the god, saying that “Wodan id est furor” (Odin is a fury/a frenzied one), but more importantly, the term *teutonicus* reveals the linkage of this archetype to a race rather than a nation.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹³¹ Carrie B. Dohe, “Wotan and the ‘archetypal Ergriffenheit’”, p. 345.

as he called it. When asked what his opinion on Nazism was, he suggested that “it might bring some new thing of value into the world or it might just carry off people to their madness”¹³² and contended that “there was nothing so evil that out of it something good could not come.”¹³³

The question of Jung’s attitude in regards to the ideas of National Socialism has been thoroughly discussed. Jung was familiar with the ideology of the *völkisch* movement, which was proven by his friendship with Jakob W. Hauer, references to Houston S. Chamberlain in his works, and inspiration by Martin Ninck (1895 - 1953), all of whom being proponents of the concept of racial soul bound to a specific religious expression. However, as many scholars agree, his initial tendency to see rather the possibly positive aspect of Nazism as creative power took a different turn during the war years. After that, he reinterpreted the message of *Wotan* as a warning before the negative aspects of being seized by this archetype, and as a prophecy about the upcoming dangers of the possible return of *Wotan* that would lead again to a catastrophe on a global scale.¹³⁴

4.3. Millenarian visions of the forthcoming Apocalypse

Millenarianism is, by definition, the concept of the approaching end of history derived from the biblical millennium, a thousand years of peace and prosperity that will follow after a series of cataclysmic events leading to a deep transformation of the existing reality. In the US, millenarianism has a long history within traditional Christian denominations, whose majority interpret it as anticipation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, who will then rule over the new kingdom of God established on Earth. However, with the upsurge of new religious movements, the notion has been widened to include all beliefs in the upcoming reinstatement of a Golden Age (with or without Christian undertones) that will be a desired result of the apocalyptic battle between the forces of Good and Evil. Accentuating the motif of the final battle instead of the consequent period of peace has become a major feature of many groups that Kaplan characterizes as “apocalyptic millenarians”.¹³⁵ This term can be applied

¹³² William Schoenl and Danielle Peck, “An Answer to the Question: Was Jung, for a Time, a “Nazi Sympathizer” or Not?”, *Jung Journal* 6.4 (2012): 98 - 105, p. 98.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹³⁴ As W. Schoenl and D. Peck pointed out, Jung’s favorable attitude especially during the period of 1933 – 1936 probably owed a lot to his pragmatism, with which he opposed the “Jewish” psychology of S. Freud to his “Aryan” viewpoints to bring his analytical psychology to the German market where he wasn’t very well established yet. See William Schoenl and Danielle Peck, “An Answer to the Question”, p. 100.

¹³⁵ Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America*, pp. xiv – xv.

to some of the NRM's whose primary characteristics oscillate between religious and political or social movements; these groups are inclined towards a more earthly understanding of their role as active contributors to the final drama (in secular terms – to the creation of a new and better world), which they try to accelerate by violent actions.

Bromley, who calls these NRM's "prophetic movements", asserts that regardless of what the dominant aspect is, "these groups not only mount radical resistance to the dominant social order, they also sacralize that resistance. (...) they threaten the logic and organizational forms through which the dominant social order is maintained. Since the prophetic movement-society tension level is high, there is an increased, although not deterministic, potential for violence."¹³⁶ Moreover, the violence is collective, aiming to cause multiple deaths¹³⁷, albeit directed either internally (for example, in the form of mass suicide of the group members¹³⁸) or externally (as terrorist attacks¹³⁹). Apart from the apocalyptic visions, there are more critical factors leading up to the group's endorsement of violence; according to the model proposed by Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh, it can be a combination of "charismatic leadership, high levels of internal control, and intense internal solidarity that produces isolation from the surrounding society."¹⁴⁰

Among the groups with such a set of characteristics, and whose influence can be detected in the background of the evolution of contemporary Odinism, the Christian Identity movement is one of the most interesting ones from the religious perspective. The term "group" is probably not very accurate here, as Christian Identity is rather a loose association of different types of communities (its ideology being widespread among prisoners for example) and individuals belonging to several other religious or nonreligious groups at the same time. Christian Identity has been pivotal on the American radical right scene since the 1960's, albeit its origins can be traced several decades earlier. The core ideology lies in a "bizarre and peculiarly American style"¹⁴¹ interpretation of Genesis.

¹³⁶ David G. Bromley, "Violence and New Religious Movements", p. 145.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ The most publicized case being probably the one of the Heaven's Gate movement – an American UFO religion whose 39 members committed mass suicide in 1997 following the observation of Hale-Bopp comet that, as they believed, carried a spacecraft on its tail. The spacecraft was supposed to transport them to the Kingdom of Heaven, and the only way to get on the board was to leave their physical bodies behind. See Hugh B. Urban, *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements: Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2015, pp. 16 – 19.

¹³⁹ For instance, the nerve gas attack in Tokyo subway in 1995, attributed to a Japanese NRM Aum Shinrikyo. D. G. Bromley, "Violence and New Religious Movements", p. 144.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁴¹ Carol M. Swain, *The New White Nationalism in America: Its Challenge to Integration*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 48.

Adam and Eve are not regarded as the first people, but as the first white people. Before this couple, the world had been populated by the so called Pre-Adamite human-like creatures whose descendants are today all non-white people. Jews are a special category, as they are the progeny of Cain, who (being himself the result of sexual encounter between Eve and Satan) coupled with a Pre-Adamite woman. This reading of the Bible based the Christian Identity's call for a racial holy war, in which the white people (basically Anglo-Saxons and other Europeans), representing Christ should fight against Jews, blacks and other non-white races representing Satan. The war, which is actually already in progress in our time, will culminate in an apocalyptic battle that will bring the end of the old world which will be replaced by a new one, where white people will live in peace under the rule of Christ.¹⁴²

To be better prepared for the approaching Day of Judgment, some fractions of the movement decided to live in a "survivalist mode",¹⁴³ i.e. to create isolated units separated from the corrupt society. These small communities should be as self-sufficient as possible to survive the forthcoming shortages of resources during the total war and the inevitable collapse of the world.

The question of violence that necessarily occurs as part of this concept of a racial holy war¹⁴⁴ is treated differently by different adherents of the movement. While some take it literally and engage in various hate crimes and terrorist attacks, others consider this call for violence as mere "symbolic battle cry"¹⁴⁵ that serves as a warning before the actual racial war that will break out if white people continue to be oppressed by the government that justifies it by racial equality. Among the blend of followers that proclaim themselves to be part of Christian Identity movement are also the Aryan Nations group, displaying explicit neo-Nazi views, and the Church of Israel led by Dan Gayman, known also as one of the prominent figures of white supremacy ideology.

4.4. White supremacy as political ideology

The millenarian visions discussed in the previous sub-chapter represent only a small portion, or a specific religious interpretation of a much wider and in majority secular racist worldview that has been part of American right-wing politics at least since the Civil War (1861 – 1865). The abolition of slavery provoked protest movements against the recognition of social, economic and

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 49 – 50.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁴⁴ In the internal Christian Identity terminology, the racial holy war is referred to under the acronym RAHOWA.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

political rights of black people, and together with the deeply ingrained conviction about the superiority of white people, a new form of supremacist ideology started to spread primarily among the working class and the lower middle class. One of the first groups labeled as “white supremacists” was the Ku Klux Klan with peak levels of activity in the 1870’s, 1920’s and 1960’s. Even today, white supremacy as a political ideology assembles different groups and supporters who believe that the white race is superior to other races and ethnic minorities and, as expected, Jews, and as such is entitled to world dominance.¹⁴⁶ The non-whites are nevertheless the subjects of favoritism from the side of the governmental structures, seen as dominated by Jews. The concept of the ZOG (Zionist occupied government) is a conspiracy theory that gives basis to the white supremacists’ perception of themselves as victims of discrimination which secures better access to services, housing, jobs or any other resources to non-white people. This unfair treatment is facilitated also by wealthy white people who are regarded as those who benefit from the system by supporting it.¹⁴⁷ White supremacists in general complement their ideology with appropriate violent actions, believing that “extreme measures are required to reverse the trend”¹⁴⁸ (of the discrimination of the whites).

McVeigh identifies four main branches of contemporary white supremacy: Ku Klux Klan groups, neo-Nazi organizations, skinheads, and followers of Christian Identity. While the religious forms of the ideology derive legitimacy of their actions from biblical exegesis or the belief in the divine origin of white race as opposed to satanic/sub-human origins of non-whites, the secular forms lean on pseudoscientific explanation of the superiority of the white people. The difference between races is thought to be given by the process of human evolution, in which distinct “ecological circumstances” conditioned a “racial hierarchy in terms of innate intelligence, the ability to delay gratification, to control emotions, and to plan for the future.”¹⁴⁹

Even the secular groups have their sacred scripture though. Being called “the right-wing extremist bible”, the *Turner Diaries* (1978) by William Pierce¹⁵⁰ (1933

¹⁴⁶ The term is often confused with “white nationalism” that is prevalent in mass media today, but bears a bit different connotations though. In short, a white nationalist doesn’t have to believe that based on its superiority, the white race should dominate the world – often a “mere” racial segregation is the proposed solution. The goal of white nationalists is to preserve the white race, not to exterminate the others, albeit the difference is often disputable.

¹⁴⁷ Rory McVeigh, “Structured Ignorance and Organized Racism in the United States”, *Social Forces* 82.3 (2004), pp. 895 - 936, pp. 898 – 899.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 898.

¹⁴⁹ Carol M. Swain, *The New White Nationalism in America*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰ William Pierce was a professor of Physics at Oregon State University and founder of National Alliance, a secular white supremacist organization. Pierce himself later founded a kind of religious concept called “cosmotheism”, but his religious views didn’t gain much

– 2002), who published under the pseudonym Andrew McDonald, is a novel describing a racial war of the “Aryans” against non-whites. The war is initiated by a series of revolutionary actions, carried out by the American Aryans, first of them being a bomb attack on the FBI headquarters (representing the ZOG). Subsequent assassinations of federal officials, politicians, Jews, ethnic minorities and white “race traitors” culminate with the “Day of Rope”, meaning the hanging of all non-whites in the streets followed by a nuclear attack on the state of Israel. At the end, the whole world is purged of non-whites and dominated by the Aryans.¹⁵¹

The *Turner Diaries* inspired a number of right-wing terrorists (Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber among others) not only on theoretical level, but also by disclosing instructions on how to construct a fully functional truck bomb.¹⁵² The echoed motif of the Apocalypse giving birth to a new and better world seems to work well even without any religious undertones.

5. Summary

5.1. Case studies synthesis

In the course of this paper we traced the ideological development of Heathenry measured by the level of political engagement and activism. We started from the European nature-oriented youth groups experimenting with alternative lifestyles and spirituality, whose interest in the history and culture of their own country, inspired by the 19th century Romanticism, culminated in their active support of nationalism on the eve of WW II. Then we continued by examining the occult esoteric doctrines of the first half of the 20th century and their so far unthinkable combination of paganism and Christianity, whose concept of national identity based on diverse racial teachings was successfully exported overseas in the 1960’s. Finally, we analyzed the cultural and socio-political context in which the contemporary American Heathenry has been shaping its beliefs from the 1970’s to the present time, demonstrating the thin

popularity and he was being frequently accused of having founded the group only to be able to escape tax payment for the National Alliance to which he included his Cosmotheist Church as a sister organization (after he had failed to register the National Alliance as educational organization). As Kaplan sums up, the main principle of cosmotheism seemed to be “Thou shalt not deny Dr. Pierce tax exempt status”. J. Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America*, p. 35.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Grumke, “Globalized Anti-Globalists: The Ideological Basis of the Internationalization of Right-Wing Extremism” in Sabine von Mering and Timothy W. McCarty (eds.), *Right-Wing Radicalism Today: Perspectives from Europe and the US*, London – New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 15 – 16.

¹⁵² Carol M. Swain, *The New White Nationalism in America*, p. 39.

line that can sometimes exist between religious and political movements when the political interests prevail, and consequently, the way in which the original concept of religion of nature can transform into an ideological tool of right-wing terrorism.

We can't say, of course, that either Ásatrú or Odinism followed exactly the same path as described, i.e. the path of systematic radicalization. Contemporary Heathenry is a remarkably multifaceted religious and social phenomenon (and so is any other NRM), and the four case studies were selected to show a specific process, a way of becoming what these heathen groups are today, in order to extract the features that may be crucial to understand the shaping of their political views, whereas other heathen groups may deem these features much less important. Among other things, the case studies aim to demonstrate that the evolution of the radical right-wing ideology within Heathenry is not a strictly linear process. Instead, certain motifs, topics and inspirations tend to be recurring at times under analogous circumstances.

Coming back to the typology of neo-pagan movements as either (1) a revival of a spiritually oriented religion of nature with a universalist worldview or (2) a reconstruction of the ancestral faith closely tied to the nationhood that is the driving force behind political activism¹⁵³, it's apparent that Ásatrúarfélagið falls into the first category. Despite his initial contacts with Nýalssinna, Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson rejected its strongly nationalistic views derived from theosophy. As discussed in Chapter 3, many of the first attempts to reconstruct or revive the ancient Old Norse beliefs were inspired by the theosophical theories of racially biased cosmogony and anthropogony, which escalated first into defending the imagined superiority of one race over the others, and then into the call for a racial war as portrayed in Chapter 4. By rejecting this unwanted heritage, Beinteinsson turned towards a universalist approach without having compromised the aspects of locality and local identity that naturally form an important part of an indigenous religious tradition. Locality means that Ásatrúarfélagið is inherently linked to Iceland, and given the geographical isolation of this island and the strong emphasis on the social dimension of Ásatrú, it may be only logical that the Icelandic Ásatrúarfélagið is primarily the religion of Icelanders and the group is not trying to expand elsewhere. By "Icelanders" we mean the citizens of Iceland, not necessarily people of Icelandic descent.

In comparison to the Odinist groups that we analyzed, there is no concept of the "Others" (be it other races, nations or ethnic minorities etc.) threatening or discriminating the ethnic Icelanders. In practical terms, and without questioning the theoretical base for the universalism of Ásatrúarfélagið, the reason behind this may be simple – the Icelandic population has always been fairly homogeneous when it comes to its ethnic composition (the ethnic

¹⁵³ See Chapter 1.1.

Icelanders make up 93% today).¹⁵⁴ The failure of the Nýalssinna leader Þorsteinn Guðjónsson to spread his right-wing views in Ásatrúarfélagið may be partially explained by the fact that in the local context, there was not much to fight against.

The emergence and viability of Ásatrú in Iceland can be thus regarded as a result of the global growth of religious plurality and searching for alternative spiritualities, not as a reaction to social tensions, which is the case of some of the Odinist groups.

The American counterpart of Ásatrúarfélagið, Ásatrú Folk Assembly, is far more ambiguous, and any classification, either as type 1 or type 2, may be irrelevant. The American forms of Ásatrú and Odinism didn't emerge as separate phenomena, but have been sharing common grounds since the very beginning, both absorbing elements of the common cultural environment and of Else Christensen's teaching, although McNallen purposefully differentiated AFA from the Odinist Fellowship by placing emphasis on ritual practice and spirituality (in which AFA became akin to the groups like Ásatrúarfélagið) instead of political goals.¹⁵⁵ However, AFA's infamous metagenetics theory owes a lot to the Jungian concept of archetypes (and, following Jung's own sources of inspiration, to the *völkisch* concepts of racial soul) that are hereditary in nature¹⁵⁶, and it can hardly be denied that its core is considered racist even by many other Ásatrú groups. It's a refined and delicate form of racism though, given that it supports the elitist nature of AFA (and Ásatrú in general, that should be restricted to white people only), but being far from disparaging or intimidating other ethnicities, it supports their right to keep and express their cultural and religious uniqueness too. The respect for other ethnic groups is reflected in the AFA's political views (though not activism) that adopted Else Christensen's system of tribal socialism, but without references to the ZOG conspiracy or the violent radicalism of Wotansvolk and similar groups. So far, the idea of Christensen's system was transferred to the level of organizational structure of AFA with its independent kindreds. On the other hand, McNallen quite openly claims that the US is the living space of white people, and as Gardell says, "while McNallen opposes the construction of a global monoculture and the American melting pot by promoting ethnic separatism and cultural diversity, it is also evident that, from his point of view, other ethnics better be separate somewhere else."¹⁵⁷

In line with this, AFA strives to keep a high profile among the other heathen groups by emphasizing the Ásatrú ethics (defined as Nine Noble Virtues that summarize the heathen code of conduct), yet it can't be overlooked that for McNallen, the core principle is the warrior ethics, which is another common

¹⁵⁴ <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/iceland-population/>. Accessed 8 August 2019.

¹⁵⁵ Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 81 – 82.

¹⁵⁷ Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, p. 283.

feature with Odinism. McNallen distances himself from the “soft virtues” of a “typical (Wiccan) neopagan” which means “cooperation, kindness, and being mellow”¹⁵⁸, and instead, he promotes the “hard virtues” of Ásatrú: “courage, honor, guts, endurance and control.”¹⁵⁹ The warrior aspect is reportedly understood as a sort of spiritual motivation, not as an encouragement to paramilitary actions, which goes hand in hand with the image of AFA as apolitical and not condoning any form of violence. But either way, they do support the idea of ethnic separatism - and the inherent warlike potential has been made obvious by McNallen’s paraphrasing of David Lane’s 14 words: “Some like the number 88 (...) Some like 14, as in ‘14 words’. I like it shorter... eight words: ‘The existence of my people is not negotiable.’”¹⁶⁰

AFA’s contacts with Wotansvolk and other radical groups have a long history both at the ideological and personal levels.¹⁶¹ However, its dubious middle position between proclaimed universalist and intrinsic nationalist/racist perspective makes AFA’s coexistence with other heathen groups quite complicated.

The case of Wotansvolk is far more straightforward. The primary motivation of David Lane wasn’t to create a religious community, but a paramilitary group whose ideology would be consistent with the secular white supremacy movement, both of them joining forces in working towards the same goals. The goal of Wotansvolk is fairly mundane in the end, but expressed in religious language, which is reinforced by McVan’s addition of elaborated ritual system. The deep transformation of the current social order they want to achieve is conditioned by the outbreak of the apocalyptic war, in which Wotansvolk wants to play an active role. Having rejected all the Christian connotations, Lane found a viable alternative for his Apocalyptic visions in the Old Norse myth of Ragnarök that describes the final battle between opposing forces¹⁶² leading into the destruction and rebirth of the whole cosmos. By using the Ragnarök pagan imagery, he was able to turn both the Christian Identity’s RAHOWA and the secular message of the *Turner Diaries* into a fundamentally heathen millenarian vision, where the concept of spiritual warrior no longer seems to have enough meaning unless implemented on practical level. Lane’s view on Wotan the frenzied warrior as a role-model for Wotansvolk members has much to do with Jung’s Wotanic archetype, though Lane praises its prophecy about

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 260.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 283.

¹⁶¹ For example, the sister of McNallen’s wife married Joseph Turner (known by the nickname Jost), leader of the National Socialist Kindred, a group that tried to combine National Socialism with strongly racist version of Odinism. See J. Kaplan and L. Weinberg, *The Emergence of a Euro-American Radical Right*, p. 153.

¹⁶² The Christian notion of the forces of Good and Evil is not fully applicable to the Old Norse model, as these categories are rather relative in the Norse mythology. The appropriate labels may be “forces of Chaos” against “forces of Order.” Even this can indeed be subject to discussion, as the Chaos is often also represented by Odin.

the second coming of Wotan (and justifies by it the violent actions of Wotansvolk) and overlooks the warning. In one of his works he addresses the supposed “race traitors” with these words: “Judges, lawyers, bankers (...) and other assorted treasonous swine take note, Wotan is coming. Your wealth, your homes, your women, and your lives are at risk when you commit treason. Pray that you die quickly. One day Wotan will feed your repulsive carcasses to the vultures and bury your bones under outhouses that our folk may forever pay fitting tribute to your memory. That day is called Ragnarok.”¹⁶³ It is also typical that Lane considers the rich white people and representatives of the government as much enemies as the non-whites and finds a large fanbase among prison gangs where Else Christensen started her missionary work.

According to the model of radicalization of NRMs (Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh) mentioned in Chapter 4, charismatic leadership is one of the attributes of such movements. David Lane’s self-perception as the one whose task is to save the white race bears strong messianic traits. He believed he was chosen to fulfill this “mission” by a secret society of Aryan masters called “The Watchers”, who are “noncorporeal, immortal Aryan supermen who guide the elect to influence the world history and ensure racial survival.”¹⁶⁴ Lane’s interest in theosophy, esotericism and occultism of the same type as discussed in Chapter 3 is evident. What is worth mentioning is that the sources of inspiration for his messianism were both contemporary millenarian movements in the US and Liebenfels’ belief in Frauja, saviour of the Aryan race who will fight side by side with his folk in the cataclysmic battle.¹⁶⁵ Unlike in many other NRMs, no real personality cult developed around Lane. Being the leader of Wotansvolk, he himself rejected the idea of expanding his leadership (thus becoming too much of a public figure) to organize centralized opposition to the government. His working method was the so called “leaderless resistance”¹⁶⁶ that preferred small units with no more than 5-6 members operating independently in guerilla-like mode over a bigger group with complicated structure, because the latter would attract unwanted attention from the authorities and could be more easily persecuted. The influence of Else Christensen is again recognizable in this anarchist style of gradual taking over the system. Her idea of tribal society, so appealing to McNallen’s AFA, is however regarded as a mere temporary compromise, an intermediate stage forced by the current reality of racially heterogeneous society, whereas the ultimate step is to create a true Aryan society entitled to the world dominance. This illustrates the ideological shift

¹⁶³ Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America*, p. 99.

¹⁶⁴ Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, p. 201.

¹⁶⁵ A concept that was formulated by Guido von List already in 1911, and the WW I seemed to confirm the prophecy. See Nicolas Goodrick-Clarke, *Okultní kořeny nacismu*, pp. 120 – 123 and 137.

¹⁶⁶ The author of this concept is Louis Beam, a member of Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations and Christian Identity. See J. Kaplan and L. Weinberg, *The Emergence of a Euro-American Radical Right*, p. 73.

between the white nationalism of Else Christensen¹⁶⁷ and the white supremacy of Wotansvolk. Lane himself saw in his version of Odinism primarily a means to achieve Wotansvolk's goals ("...when I decided some twenty years ago that a religion was a necessary and vital weapon in our struggle against genocide, (...)").¹⁶⁸

Vigrid is in many respects very similar to Wotansvolk, albeit it's far less original in regard to beliefs and ritual practice. As far as we can see from Chapter 2, Vigrid represents rather a reconstruction of the National Socialism than Old Norse religion. Religion serves a definite purpose as a tool to consolidate national identity based on belonging to the Nordic race. There are basically only two innovations to the original Nazi ideology; first, the anti-immigrant campaign that responds to the increasing immigration to Norway during the last three decades¹⁶⁹ and newly placed the Norwegian government on the top of the list of enemies (which is nevertheless fully in line with the Wotansvolk's campaign against the ZOG), and second, the interconnectedness with modern-day subcultures. Vigrid is firmly rooted in the European cultural milieu, where many of the neo-pagan groups started as a by-product of a specific subculture rather than of revolutionary movements (as is the case of many American NRMs). If we understand subculture as an expression of certain norms and values that differ from the mainstream culture, but not necessarily oppose it (and with the potential of being incorporated into it at some stage), this definition also applies to the German Youth Movement (illustrated in Chapter 3 by the Lebensreform and Wandervogel groups) that influenced the early forms of Heathenry. However, Vigrid doesn't seem to have inherited any of their genuine love for nature and hunger for spiritual growth. Instead, the group took the black metal underground scene as a source of inspiration.

According to K. Granholm, the use of pagan/heathen imagery in black metal is to a great extent due to its commercial potential. As part of the effort to bring something new to the existing musical genres and to draw a distinction between the mainstream pop/rock music and themselves, the black metal musicians were searching for their authentic expression in Satanist symbols and imagery (in the first wave of black metal in 1980's) that gave their music and lyrics a flavor of something exotic, rebellious, shocking and even forbidden, in short, something that is not for everyone¹⁷⁰. However, by the 1990's, Satanism as a sort of fashion wave has already lost a lot of its exclusivity and novelty. Therefore, with the second wave of black metal, Satanism was replaced by Heathenry that fulfilled the same function (hence was selling better than the

¹⁶⁷ As pointed out in Chapter 4, Christensen didn't acknowledge the supremacist tendencies of many Odinit groups. She was prone to admit that human beings are diverse by laws of nature, and this should be respected. Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, p. 174.

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.davidlane1488.com/wotan.html>

¹⁶⁹ Somalia, Iran, Iraq or Pakistan being the most common non-European countries of origin.

¹⁷⁰ "If our music causes people to commit suicide, that's good. It weeds out the weak" (Varg Vikernes). Egil Asprem, "Heathens Up North", p. 54.

outdated Satanism).¹⁷¹ For Granholm, black metal is not only a music genre, but a complex cultural system that provides a coherent worldview through a “set of ideology, meaning, practice and traditions”¹⁷² in which religion plays a secondary role. This cultural system (subculture) is thus able to absorb a variety of religious views. For instance, Varg Vikernes rejects any label, saying that calling him Satanist, Odinist or even Nazi is pointless, as he can’t fully identify himself with any of these. When confronted about his neo-Nazi attitudes, he said “We’re not Nazis. The Nazis only hated the Jews, we hate everyone.”¹⁷³ This indeed resembles far more the pose of the adversarial and rebellious nature of black metal than Vigrid’s neo-Nazism. However, Vigrid’s background is - through Vikernes - linked to the same “occulture”¹⁷⁴ as black metal, therefore it’s no coincidence that Granholm’s theory is applicable even to Vigrid’s understanding of religion: its secondary function is to contribute to the process of the building of national identity. In this light it’s hardly surprising that Vigrid combines elements of Heathenry with Christian practice in a way that is similar to the Nazis - for both, the end justifies the means.

B. A. Dobratz argues that new social movements with subcultural orientations (and especially those with ethnic, separatist or nationalist outlook) offer collective identity as a framework for the individual identities of its members, which fulfills their need for “an integrated and continuous social self.”¹⁷⁵ It’s natural then that these movements aim primarily at the youth (whose quest for “belonging” plays an important part here), just like many radical NRMs or terrorist organizations do, Vigrid included (“The Jews are today the dominant power in the world. Dear Norwegian youth, wake up!”¹⁷⁶). Unlike its American counterparts, Vigrid’s success in recruiting the militant youth is disputable, as its short political career shows. Today, their Christensen-inspired vision of decentralized Norway seems to spread mainly online. One of the possible reasons might be the conservatism of its political vision that, in the words of Michael Aquino (one of the leaders of the Church of Satan), “proposes 1930’s solutions to 1970’s problems.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ Which resolved the “paradoxical problem of needing to be marginal while commercially viable at the same time.” Kennet Granholm, “Sons of Northern Darkness”, p. 537.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁷³ Egil Aspren, “Heathens Up North”, p. 54.

¹⁷⁴ Term introduced by Christopher Partridge: it describes the blend of esoteric, occult, pre-Christian motifs in the contemporary subcultural milieu.

¹⁷⁵ Betty A. Dobratz, “The Role of Religion in the Collective Identity of the White Racist Movement”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40.2 (2001): 287 – 301, p. 287.

¹⁷⁶ *Jødene i dag har de dominerende makt i verden. Kjære nordiske ungdom: Våkne opp!* <https://www.vigrid.net/reset13.htm>. Accessed 7 August 2019.

¹⁷⁷ J. Kaplan and L. Weinberg, *The Emergence of a Euro-American Radical Right*, p. 116.

5.2. Conclusion

The analysis and synthesis of the case studies from the perspective of the shaping of their political dimension highlighted a specific feature that is common to the heathen groups across time periods and spatial distribution. The attitude towards the question of race/ethnicity has been reappearing like a leitmotif in the evolution of contemporary Heathenry and continues to stir up controversies and conflicts within the heathen groups themselves¹⁷⁸, meaning that every heathen group and every individual member has, at some point, to think of whether or not their ancestral faith is conditioned by belonging to a specific race, how this race is defined, or how/if it constitutes the potential base of the legitimacy of their beliefs – religious as much as political ones. According to their approach to the issue of race and ethnicity, F. Gregorius discerns 3 types of contemporary Heathenry¹⁷⁹:

1. *Racial Heathenism* - primary motivation is the struggle for preservation of the race
2. *Genealogical Heathenism* – emphasizes kinship with other people of the same ethnic group
3. *Cultural Heathenism* – genetic factors are not relevant, cultural identity is the focus

Throughout this paper, we were using the terms “race” or “ethnicity” without any further specification of their past and current meaning. In modern-day scientific discourse, race is a term that is sometimes used to describe biological aspects of human beings (physical appearance being one of them) that make them a distinct social group, whereas ethnicity refers rather to a group of people with common cultural background, history and traditions. The term race is nevertheless problematic, given that the frame of reference is more or less provided by other social groups who determine what the differing aspects are (and what they differ from). Today, the preference is thus given to the term “ethnicity” to avoid describing social groups as mere ensembles of biological determinants.

¹⁷⁸ Based on the interview with a member of Czech Ásatrú community (interviewed by the author in January 2017), the Czech branch of AFA terminated cooperation with McNallen’s AFA because of the contrasting views on the question of race/ethnicity. The official website of Czech Ásatrú contains information about the split-up, but without explaining the concrete reason: <https://ethnicasatru.org/369-co-je-to-asatru>.

¹⁷⁹ Fredrik Gregorius, “Modern Heathenism in Sweden: A Case Study in the Creation of a Traditional Religion” in Kathryn Rountree (ed.), *Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe: Colonialist and Nationalist Impulses*, New York – Oxford: Berghahn, 2018, pp. 64 – 85, p. 66.

In the context of radical right-wing movement (heathen groups included) the understanding of both terms, however, underwent significant transformations. For National Socialists of the first half of the 20th century, race was determined both biologically and culturally and was understood also as a psychical quality, therefore this notion can be interpreted with often contradictory results. For instance, the Slavs were seen as a lower race (compared to the Aryans) because of their inherently primitive nature, “based on their supposed preference for fishing, hunting and gathering rather than a settled agricultural way of life”,¹⁸⁰ Jews were “feeble, tarnished and defective” and blue-eyed and fair-haired Aryans, on the other hand, were considered intellectually and spiritually the most developed race, “courageous, decisive, free and active”.¹⁸¹

Modern-day neo-Nazis and white supremacists often make use of the same terminology, but in practical terms, they have broadened and simplified the definition of race/ethnicity to “white people”, accepting Eastern Europe and Russia as part of their vision of a “white homeland”.¹⁸² This ideological shift also plays an important role in their understanding of nationalism. Strictly speaking, groups like Wotansvolk or Vigrid are not nationalists.¹⁸³ They promote interests not of their nation states and the system of values these states represent (for them, these values are Jewish anyway, as the structure of the nation state is infiltrated by ZOG), but of a pan-Aryan (read “white”) society that is not geographically, linguistically or culturally restricted. Gardell labels this type of nationalism as *racial nationalism*, which he contrasts with the so called *ethnonationalism*.¹⁸⁴ This approach justifies the acceptance of globalization to a certain extent and enables a high level of internationalization of the radical heathen groups.¹⁸⁵

The supremacist idea of a pan-Aryan nation that surpasses the geographical limits of nation states is in many cases reinforced by the tendencies of the religious movements to deify the race itself, i.e. turning the race itself into a specific religious category that justifies its superiority.¹⁸⁶ Regarding Heathenry, this tendency has been well documented since the National Socialists introduced their own form of political religion, using neo-pagan symbolism as

¹⁸⁰ Bettina Arnold, “‘Arierdämmerung’: Race and Archaeology in Nazi Germany”, *World Archaeology* 38.1 (2006): 8 – 31, p. 19.

¹⁸¹ Josep R. Llobera, *The Making of Totalitarian Thought*, Oxford: Berg, 2003, p. 141.

¹⁸² Thomas Grumke, “Globalized Anti-Globalists”, p. 15.

¹⁸³ Not in the traditional sense (referring back to the 19th century phenomenon), in which nationalism is promotion of the idea of independent, self-governed nation state and its interests. Today, there are many different categories of nationalism(s) though, and its definition becomes broader.

¹⁸⁴ Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁵ This applies to both Odinit groups analyzed in the case studies. Wotansvolk’s kindreds are operating all over the world, using internet for expanding their ideas and for networking activities. Vigrid is strongly pro-Russian, developing contacts with like-minded radical groups there.

¹⁸⁶ Stefanie von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival*, p. 129.

means of expression. Even the ethnocentric, not supremacist heathen groups like McNallen's AFA follow the same trend.

The importance of the concept of race/ethnicity, its place in the heathen worldview and the function attributed to it in regard to the group's relation to the existing social order is thus directly linked to the level of radicalization of the heathen groups. The attitude towards race/ethnicity may be considered a decisive factor in the process of building either the religious or political identity of the heathen groups.

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