

## **“Pagan Politics in the 21st Century: ‘Peace and Love’ or ‘Blood and Soil’?”**

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### **Abstract**

This essay begins by reviewing definitions and categories of modern Paganism (also variously termed contemporary or neo-Paganism) that the author first proposed in the 2005 book *Modern Paganism in World Culture* and then proceeds to discuss parallels with certain political trends in Europe and America today. Particular attention will be paid to how the rising tide of pro-nativist, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim sentiment in contemporary European and American politics mirrors certain views and values espoused by the more ethnically oriented forms of Paganism, even though this seeming convergence of interests between Pagans and rightists at the political level is undercut at the religious level by the right wing’s firm adherence to Christianity and rejection of religious diversity. The essay proceeds to examine how competing nineteenth century visions of ethnic-centered nationalism and universal humanism are replicated today in the more ethnic and traditional types of Paganism versus those that are more eclectic and universalistic in their outlook. Pagan responses to the events of August 1–12, 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia form the final topic.

Keywords: Paganism; Czech Republic; Charlottesville; right-wing politics; blood and soil.

### *Introduction*

I am very happy to be here in the Czech Republic, in the beautiful and historic city of Brno, for this small but interesting conference on

1. Michael Strmiska is an associate professor of world history at the Orange County Community College (SUNY-Orange).

“Paganism and Politics” in our small but interesting field of Pagan Studies. I am grateful to the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University for its sponsorship of the conference.<sup>2</sup>

### *Typologies of Paganism, Revisited*

I will begin with some discussion of typologies of Paganism, to lay the groundwork for exploring the political dimensions of modern Pagan religious movements. When I was asked to organize a volume on modern or neo-Paganism back in 2003 and serve as its editor, I set about writing an introduction for the book and immediately encountered a thorny problem that still perplexes me today: how to define Paganism.<sup>3</sup> For several years, I had been a participant in an online scholarly discussion network known as the Nature Religions List. The name of that network suggested one way to go, which was to identify Paganism as a “nature religion.” That seemed to me partly correct but not wholly adequate, as Pagans I had come to know in places like Lithuania and Latvia were just as concerned about preserving ethnic culture and identity through their religious activities as they were about worshipping or connecting with nature. Yet this did not mean that nature was irrelevant or unimportant to these more ethnically-minded Pagans, only that this type of religion could not be reduced to a single core element. I could see that modern Paganism, like the World Tree Yggdrasil in Norse mythology,<sup>4</sup> has roots that reach into different worlds, and has to be

2. This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper that was originally presented as one of the two keynote lectures at the conference “Paganism and Politics: Neo-Pagan & Native Faith Movements in Central & Eastern Europe,” 3-4 June 2016, Brno, Czech Republic. Special thanks to Aleš Chalupa, Matouš Vencálek, Miroslav Vrzal, and Šárka Vondracková and the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University for making the conference possible.

3. Michael Strmiska, “Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives,” in *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Michael F. Strmiska, (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clío, 2005), 154.

4. In the *Poetic Edda* poem *Grímnismál*, verses 29-35 focus on the world tree Yggdrasil, with verse 31 stating that “Three roots there grow in three directions, under the ash of Yggdrasil, Hel lives under one, under the second the frost-giants, [under] the third, humankind,” *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 56. The tree is also discussed in Snorri Sturluson’s commentary *The Prose Edda*, wherein Snorri writes, “The ash is the best and greatest of all trees; its branches spread out over the whole world and reach up under heaven. The tree is held in position by three roots that spread far out; one is among the Aesir, the second among the frost ogres where once was Ginnungagap; and the

understood as a pluralistic phenomenon capable of multiple applications and associations and widely differing, even contradictory interpretations.

And so, in my introductory essay for *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, I strove to lay out what I saw as the most characteristic types and tendencies in modern Paganism. I am pleased to see that the categories I came up with seem to have proven useful to other scholars exploring Paganism, as well as members of Pagan movements as well.

I described different types of Paganism as tending to divide into opposing or contrasting categories. The most important and fundamental divide is between more ethnic-centered forms of Paganism and more universalistic varieties. I found Pagans of a more ethnically oriented mindset tending toward the position that as Paganism was, in their view, an essentially ethnic or ancestral phenomenon; it was people sharing the same ethnic roots or ancestry who should participate in the same form of Paganism, while others of a more universalistic perspective conceived of their spiritual path or religious movement as something open to anyone from any kind of ethnic, national, or racial background. In between, I found those who believed that while some ethnic or ancestral connection might be the most direct and obvious pathway to Paganism, it was also possible for others without ancestral links to the ethnic identity underlying a particular Pagan tradition to come to feel a perfectly valid connection to it, and that this felt or chosen affinity was also a perfectly acceptable qualification for participation in Pagan activities and membership in a particular Pagan group or community.

The key issue is the understanding of ethnicity. Ethnic Pagans tend to see ethnicity, both at the level of ethnic traditions and ethnic identity, as something relatively fixed, closed and limited, whether referring to ethnic religious traditions of the past, which they feel are to be altered as little as possible, or the ethnic or racial profile of those accepted into their form of Paganism, or both. In contrast, universalistic Pagans are more likely to see ethnicity, in terms of both traditions and identity, as a starting place rather than an ending point, as the dominant flavor in a religious recipe that is open to the further spicing that may be added by diverse peoples of different social, national, ethnic and/or racial backgrounds.

third extends over Niflheim." Jean Young trans., *The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), 42–43.

In my discussion here today, I will refer to “ethnic Pagans” as those who tend toward the more limited and closed view of ethnic identity and ethnic tradition. This is in accord with how this matter is generally discussed, but we should keep in mind that not all ethnically oriented Pagans take such an inflexible and exclusive stance, and that universalistic Pagans also have an interest in ethnic traditions as important components of their Paganism. All contemporary Paganism is based to at least some extent on myths, stories, songs, and customs that derive from foundations of European ethnic culture. The key differences that divide ethnic from universalist Paganism lie in how the two camps define the membership range of their religious groups, that is, whether or not a particular ethnic or ancestral background is a necessary precondition for participation in a given Pagan tradition or movement deriving from past ethnic culture, and whether they allow alteration and expansion of such simultaneously ethnic and religious traditions.

A different but related distinction is that which lies between reconstructionist and eclectic Paganism. I characterized as reconstructionists those Pagans who believe that modern-day or contemporary Paganism should be reconstructed from what is known of past practices and beliefs to the greatest degree of accuracy possible, avoiding other religions and other influences such as modern culture as much as possible. In contrast, eclectic Pagans were presented as those who feel that such slavish imitation of the past is neither feasible nor desirable, and so modern Pagans should feel free to blend Pagan and other religious traditions, as well as to invent new practices, beliefs and concepts according to the needs and conditions of the current time and world-situation as well as particular social and cultural settings.

All of the above mentioned Pagan types can be further distinguished by matters of degree, in that ethnically oriented Pagans can be more or less ethnically centered, universalist Pagans more or less universalist, reconstructionists slightly to extremely reconstructionist, and eclectics partially to predominantly eclectic. These characteristics can also be combined in ways that may defy Aristotelian binary logic but which may well meet the needs of people with multi-dimensional and even self-contradictory life-situations and multiple intersecting identities. One might well find ethnic Pagans who are obsessed with racial purity but open to eclectic combinations of traditions, or Pagans who reject ethnic or racial limitations but who are totally devoted to museum-perfect reconstruction of past practices.

I have found that the four above-mentioned categories tend to come together and reinforce each other in two particular combinations. Universalistic Pagans tend to also be eclectics, and ethnically oriented Pagans tend to be reconstructionists. We can therefore imagine a spectrum or continuum from totally eclectic, open and universalistic Pagans on the far left to totally ethnic-centered, and reconstructionist Pagans on the far right. The choice of who to locate on the left and right of this spectrum is of course no arbitrary choice, as it also tends to match up with the political tendencies of these different types of Pagans.

I believe it may now be useful for us to conceptualize an intermediate category between a totally closed, ethnic reconstructionism and a completely open, eclectic universalism—a form of Paganism in which there is a predominant orientation toward a particular set of ethnic Pagan traditions, but with openness to combination with other ethnic or religious or spiritual traditions, openness to experimentation, invention and addition of religious elements where a need or lack is felt, and also openness to participation by people of any ethnic or racial background. I will provisionally label this as Open-Rooted Paganism, and I predict that this will become an increasingly popular configuration of Paganism in coming years, as it can provide both the clear sense of style, identity and orientation that is one of the most compelling features of ethnic reconstructionism without the racism and xenophobia that may attach to or be inspired by ultra-traditional ethnic Paganism, while also allowing for cross-fertilization between the ancient and the modern, the traditional and the invented, and a particular ethnic tradition and the diversity of other traditions whether ancient, modern or invented.

In writing my introduction to the *Modern Paganism* book back in 2005, I also reflected on the social and cultural conditions that have given rise to Pagan movements and related phenomena over the last two centuries. Modern Paganism may be said to be the child of an uneasy union between two star-crossed and oddly matched parents: nineteenth-century folk romanticism, with its emphasis on ethnic identity and folklore traditions, and twenty to twenty-first century post-modernism, with its collapse of dominant authority structures and cultural narratives opening a new horizon of religious pluralism, multi-culturalism and a trend toward tolerance of "difference" in Western societies. The partial demolition of formerly ubiquitous systems of belief and authority has paradoxically opened the way for reviving and retooling ancient and medieval structures and

narratives such as pre-Christian European myths, beliefs, and practices, alongside the diminished but still massive edifices of Christianity and more recently arrived religions such as transplanted and hybridized forms of Buddhism and Hinduism.

Pagan revival movements are usually informed by an awareness that structures, beliefs, and narratives that have been broken and repressed in earlier periods are no longer wholly intact, fully accessible, or entirely functional, requiring considerable revision, readjustment and re-imagining to render these often poorly preserved old traditions suitable for the current day and age. The various options for how to reconstruct and reinterpret the old, what to add and what to subtract, and who is to be understood as the proper participants in such old-new forms of religion are the questions that provide the defining distinctions between the above-mentioned categories. Since finishing the *Modern Paganism* book in 2005, it has become increasingly clear to me that Paganism and the categories and types that I developed to describe it are not innocent of social and political entanglements and ideologies but exist in a state of constant symbiosis and continual dialogue with social and political trends and tensions.

### *Paganism: European or Indigenous?*

The very term “Paganism” is a case in point. Michael York has made an interesting and important case in his book *Pagan Theology* for a very broad definition of Paganism as an umbrella term for all pre-Christian, pre-Islamic, nature-worshipping, non-monotheistic, and non-exclusive forms of religion worldwide, a definition that makes “Paganism” more or less synonymous with indigenous religions.<sup>5</sup> I think the more restricted and less elegant definition that I proposed, in which “Paganism” refers only or mainly to pre-Christian, indigenous religions of Europe and, with the additional qualifying adjectives of “neo-,” “modern” or “contemporary,” to their modern revivals and adaptations, has gained broader currency and generally proven more useful for social scientific understanding. Most scholars who apply themselves to the study of modern, contemporary or neo-Paganism are generally concerned with modern-day revivals of pre-Christian European religion rather than to indigenous religions

5. Michael York, *Pagan Theology: Paganism as a World Religion* (New York: NYU Press 2003).

of non-European peoples and regions. This is noted in a recent article by Ethan Doyle White, who goes on to propose a further fine-tuning of the geographical and cultural radius of the term to apply not only to modern revivals of pre-Christian, European religious traditions, but also to contemporary revitalization movements addressing pre-Christian, pre-Islamic and pre-Jewish traditions of the Near East and North Africa. This expansion allows for incorporating esoteric and syncretistic movements which draw on traditions from all across this broader geographical zone with its many historical interconnections and cultural cross-fertilizations. As White states his position,

I have argued that the most accurate way of analytically defining and understanding the contemporary Pagan milieu from a scholarly perspective is to view it as a "family" of related religious, spiritual, magical and esoteric movements, all of which are self-consciously inspired by those belief systems of Europe, North Africa and the Near East which were not Abrahamic but which existed prior to the Abrahamic religions' rise to dominance.<sup>6</sup>

Such an expansion of the geographic and cultural scope of the term Pagan to embrace not only modern revivals of pre-Christian European religion but also contemporary re-workings of pre-Abrahamic traditions of these other Europe-adjacent regions enables the term, and hence the field of study, to encompass such phenomena as the very interesting Canaanite revival movements investigated by Shai Ferraro in his groundbreaking work on new religious movements in Israel.<sup>7</sup> White's revamped definition also has the advantage of allowing for comparative analysis of religious movements similar in some respects, different in others, which have developed in adjacent regions as a result of having undergone parallel historical processes of displacement and destruction of locally-based polytheistic religions by the different varieties of Abrahamic monotheism.

I must say that in one sense I wish that York's broader, more universal definition had won out and my more restricted, Euro-centric one had faded away due to disuse, because that would have indicated that there really was substantial harmony and agreement between non-European indigenous religions and European-derived

6. Ethan Doyle White, "Theoretical, Terminological, and Taxonomic Trouble in the Academic Study of Contemporary Paganism: A Case for Reform," *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 18, no. 1 (2016): 44.

7. Shai Ferraro, "Baal in the Holy Land: Canaanite Reconstructionism among Contemporary Israeli Pagans," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 20, no. 2 (2016): 59-81.

Paganism and their adherents and practitioners worldwide, but this has not happened. The reasons are not hard to understand. Above all, it is primarily “white” people of European descent in Europe and heavily Europeanized areas such as the United States, Canada, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand who identify themselves as “Pagans” and practice Paganism and primarily non-white peoples of non-European descent in non-Europeanized areas of the world, or at least, peoples who resist the legacy of European domination even if they have been subjected to it, who identify themselves as “indigenous” and practice indigenous religions.

This is not to contradict the very important and quite legitimate point that York advanced that on the level of religious ideas and world view, there is considerable theological and philosophical common ground between Paganism and indigenous religions, in such matters as reverence for nature, a tendency to conceive and worship the divine in multiple forms (that is to say, polytheism), and an openness to other spiritual and religious traditions. The problem arises in the very different social and historical circumstances of European and European-descended peoples, and non-European, indigenous peoples who experienced colonization by Europeans. Though European Paganism and indigenous religions both suffered varying degrees of suppression, assimilation and attempted erasure of their religious and cultural traditions by the dominant Western religion of Christianity and Christian-oriented state authorities, modern-day Pagans in many countries, most of whom are of “white” European ancestry, enjoy far more favorable circumstances and far less social and political oppression than do many indigenous peoples, who face on a daily basis the debilitating legacy of centuries of racism and colonialism.

However, in a context in which we are focusing in on contemporary Pagan religions as they have developed in Central and Eastern Europe, it is important to note that the experience of Russian imperialism and Soviet Communism by the peoples of Eastern and Central Europe does indeed present certain parallels to the repression of indigenous peoples under Western colonialism.<sup>8</sup> The same could

8. Andrejs Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Georg von Rauch, *The Baltic States: The Years of Independence, 1917–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940–1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003);



also be said of the earlier suppression of Baltic Paganism by German armies and missionaries in the medieval period of the Baltic Crusades that raged over the lands of modern-day Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and ancient Prussia from about 1200–1410.<sup>9</sup> While Pagan and indigenous religious ideas and practices may be similar in many respects, their social and historical situations are not, particularly in the current time, and this basic, brutal reality undercuts any attempt to place the indigenous and the Pagan together in a single category.

If we accept that the term Pagan has a primarily "white," European reference, then we must ask, is modern Paganism, with its mainly European sources and traditions and its mainly white adherents, a primarily racist form of religion?

### *Modern Paganism and its Shadows*

There is a long and unpleasant history of linkages between modern Paganism and ethnic exclusion and even racism. This begins with nineteenth-century folk romanticism, moves forward to the Nazi movement's embrace of pre-Christian Germanic mythology in the 1930s to racist forms of Ásatrú from the late 1960s onward and on to the most recent link in this unpleasant chain, the twenty-first-century, mass-murdering right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik.<sup>10</sup> This Norwegian terrorist was not a member of any particular Pagan movement, but his thoughts and actions show the dangerous potential of Paganism interpreted through the lens of racial and religious hostility.

As best can be ascertained from a rambling manifesto and various internet communications composed prior to his arrest, Breivik's less than perfectly consistent ideology combined bits and pieces of Scandinavian Pagan lore with notions of Nordic racial purity, a warped understanding of Christianity as a religion centered on hostility to Islam, and an apparent desire to return to the "good old days" of Crusaders fighting Muslims in opposition to modern Norway's embrace of racial, ethnic and religious diversity. As the Norwegian

Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

9. Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, revised edition (London: Penguin, 1997).

10. Egil Asprem, "The Birth of Counterjihadist Terrorism: Reflections on some Unspoken Dimensions of 22/7," *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 17–32.

theologian Jone Salomonsen observed in a 2012 interview, “In pre-Christian Norse belief – which Breivik calls “Odinism” – he finds an alternative strength and masculine aggression, which can be used to defend Europe’s honour and supreme identity.” As such researchers into right-wing Norse Pagan movements as Jeffrey Kaplan and Mattías Gardell have documented, Odinism is the branch of Norse Paganism most directly connected with racist and white supremacist views.<sup>11</sup> Further on in the above-noted interview, Salomonsen reflects on how Breivik’s incorporation of Paganism into his personal racist ideology did not preclude a parallel involvement with Christianity, which Breivik subjected to a similarly racialized and militarized mode of interpretation. In fact, he saw them as complementary means of preserving European culture and identity. “In his universe, Christianity is a symbol for a strong Europe while local pagan traditions symbolize strong local identities.”<sup>12</sup> In a rather ironic manner, Breivik’s racial hostility and intolerance of ethnic diversity actually opens up a limited space for religious diversity and tolerance, with Paganism and Christianity co-existing in shared racist hostility toward non-Europeans and Muslims, the lion and the lamb lying down together in the bed of Breivik’s racism, so to speak.

This is the toxic ideological brew that drove Breivik to his July 22, 2011 mass murder of 69 young Norwegian political activists of a left-wing political party gathered for a summer training camp on the island of Utøya, after he first killed nine other people in Oslo. The young activists were slain specifically to protest their support for the kind of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious vision of Norway that Breivik found threatening.<sup>13</sup> He apparently hoped that his violence would inspire similar actions by others opposed to

11. Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013); Jeffrey Kaplan, “Odinism and Ásatrú,” in Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America: Millenarian Movements from the Far Right to the Children of Noah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 69–99.

12. The interview is included in Kristin Engh Førde, “Norse Gods in a Crusade for Europe,” *Science Nordic*, April 11, 2012, <http://sciencenordic.com/norse-gods-crusade-europe>.

Jone Salomonsen has further reflected on the import of this Norwegian national tragedy in “Graced Life After All? Terrorism and Theology on July 22, 2011” in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 54, no. 3 (2015): 249–259.

13. For a full account of the slaughter and Breivik’s racist motivations, see Åsne Seierstad, *One of Us: The Story of A Massacre in Norway – and its Aftermath*, trans. Sarah Death (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2015 [2013]).

the presence of Muslims and to those who accept Muslims and non-European immigrants in Norway and across Europe.

When I did separate surveys of political attitudes among members of Norse Pagan movements in America and in Iceland in recent years, one interesting difference I found was that the Icelandic Norse Pagans seemed much more concerned about this heavy baggage of racist and right-wing associations that modern Norse Paganism carries with it than did their American counterparts, and much more determined to resist such racist associations than were the Americans.<sup>14</sup> In his study of "Heathens Up North," Egil Asprem noted similar findings, in that Norwegian Norse Pagans seemed more attuned to this issue and more apt to oppose and denounce Nazi associations than their American counterparts.<sup>15</sup>

In my own acquaintance with Norse Pagans in other Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Norway, I have found the same strongly anti-racist, Nazi-rejecting attitudes as in Iceland, but in my interactions with American Norse Pagans I have often encountered an attitude of annoyance and exasperation at the very mention of such topics, as if these were matters of no relevance to modern American Heathenry.

If I tried to press the issue by pointing out that the Nazis had manipulated Norse myths and symbols as propagandistic support for their racist ideas and policies, and that modern American Norse Pagans might be accused of doing the same if they did not take a clear stance of opposition to racism and neo-Nazism in the current day, I would usually receive a reply to the effect that of course they were against Nazism, but that since Nazism had been defeated, there was nothing more to worry about in that regard, and that since the purpose of their religious group was to celebrate Norse-Germanic heritage, not to denigrate anyone else's heritage, religion or identity, they saw no need to take any special action to oppose racism or indeed,

14. Michael Strmiska (forthcoming), "Politics in Paganism: A Comparative Study of the Political Perspectives of Followers of Modern Norse Paganism in America and Europe." The surveys which this article centers on were conducted via the online survey company Survey Monkey. The book project which this article was to be part of has been canceled, but it is expected that the paper will be published elsewhere in the near future. An early working version of this paper was presented at the 2010 annual conference of the American Academy of Religion under the title, "Trans-Atlantic Tensions: Left-Wing / Right-Wing Tendencies in America and Europe."

15. Egil Asprem, "Heathens Up North: Politics, Polemics, and Contemporary Norse Paganism in Norway," *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 10, no. 1 (2008): 42-69.

even to discuss it. They seemed to either be blissfully unaware of current-day neo-Nazis and other such violent racist movements in the United States and elsewhere, or else curiously devoid of curiosity about such movements and worrisomely unworried about how these modern neo-Nazis and white supremacists might appropriate their religious traditions and identity.

This determined disinterest in the topic of racism echoes a common attitude among American conservatives that the biggest problem with racism in America is that people, especially “those people,” meaning black or African-Americans, keep talking and complaining about it, instead of simply putting it behind them—a point of view that overlooks the rather important point that racism and racial violence are continuing realities in American life.

I have also come to know Norse Pagans in American who are conscious of the problems of racism and Nazism and firmly oppose them as well as any linkage with their religion, but my awareness of an overlap between conservative American views of race and conservative Norse Pagan disinterest in racism was one of the disturbing experiences that first led me to investigate whether different types of Paganism correlate with corresponding differences in political attitudes.

The disinterest in confronting issues of racism and Nazism among conservative Norse Pagan resembles views and attitudes commonly articulated by right-wing intellectuals, indicating at minimum a certain commonality of interests and world-view, and suggesting at maximum a direct linkage between conservative Pagans and right-wing ideology. Right-wing ideologists and social critics often express a desire to return to a supposedly simpler time when there was greater ethnic, religious and lifestyle homogeneity and less need to acknowledge difference or respect minorities. In an interview in 2010, the Croatian Nouvelle Droite theorist Tomislav Sunić spoke as follows about his impressions of America during his time studying there in the 1980s:

I could not grasp, and still can't, coming from the communist universe, why a White nation of such an impressive size, loves to indulge in self-hatred, in feelings of guilt, while catering to the lowest dregs of its society. This was not the America I had dreamt of... I regret not being born two hundred years earlier, in the antebellum South.<sup>16</sup>

16. Alex Kurtagić, “Interview with Tomislav Sunić,” *Counter-Currents*, November 10, 2010, <https://tinyurl.com/tomislav-sunic>.

This aversion to diversity combined with a rosy-tinted nostalgia for a supposedly happier and more harmonious past has struck a transatlantic chord, uniting the successful, anti-immigrant presidential campaign of Donald J. Trump in the United States in 2016, the anti-immigrant Brexit vote requiring Britain to quit the open-border European Union, and the anti-immigrant policies of the Hungarian president Viktor Orbán and other European leaders promoting right-wing, populist policies focused on hostility to immigrant "Others."

This wish to return to a more homogenous past clearly corresponds to the desire of some ethnic Pagans for a more ethnically pure Paganism, if not indeed an idealized mono-ethnic society, and the wish of the most radical reconstructionist Pagans for a return to a supposedly pure and authentic set of religious traditions from an earlier time of purportedly homogeneous religious life. It is the more universalistic and eclectic Pagans who feel more comfortable with acknowledging ethnic, religious, cultural and gender diversity, and who see the embrace of such diversity not as a tragedy but as an accomplishment, not a loss but a gain.

### *The Never-Ending Nineteenth Century*

In the varying goals and sensibilities that prevail among the different types of Paganism, we can detect the notes of nineteenth-century melodies that still linger in the air and in the mind today. Nineteenth-century ethno-romanticism that went from collecting folk songs and fairy tales to calling for the overthrow of multi-ethnic, multi-national empires and the establishment of single-ethnicity states lives on in the more extreme versions of modern day ethnic Paganism. Nineteenth-century socialist utopianism, with its dreams of universal humanism and social equality rooted in the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, finds a modern echo in the more universalist forms of Paganism, which hope to develop open-ended, open membership forms of religion that mirror the open, pluralistic and tolerant societies that such Pagans tend to support.

With the advantage of hindsight, we know the malignant, authoritarian forms and destructive results that these nineteenth-century ideologies and social movements eventually led to. Dreams may not always come true, but nightmares sometimes do. Ethno-nationalism found an extreme and brutal expression in Fascism, Nazism, and the Holocaust. Socialist utopianism took an equally violent and repressive form in Soviet Communism. The varieties of Paganism

that we encounter today often express further permutations of these tendencies and ideologies, along with differences that can be quite significant.

*Paganism in Response to Regional Realities*

That modern Paganism is shaped by the dominant trends in its social and political environment can also be demonstrated in a different way. Different forms of Paganism are often marked by how they react *against* political tendencies and social factors perceived as having caused suffering and injustice in their respective locations. In Western European countries like Norway, Sweden, and Germany, which are still haunted by the specter of Nazism, we find forms of Paganism with a markedly anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist orientation, including a steadfastly anti-Nazi, quasi-utopian openness to social otherness and diversity. In Eastern European countries like the Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the memory of Russian and Soviet occupation and totalitarian oppression is burned into the collective psyche as something that fell well short of any kind of socialist utopia.<sup>17</sup> In this region, some remember the Nazis as the most valiant of anti-Communist forces, and so it is that we meet with forms of Paganism that center on preserving ethnic traditions that were harshly suppressed under Soviet rule and rhetoric and symbolism that may evoke earlier Fascist movements. We also encounter less desire to embrace diversity in such places, since for many Baltic Europeans, their most recent experience of diversity was the forced settlement in their towns and cities of ethnically Russian Soviet citizens in accordance with a Soviet policy of deliberate Russification that resulted in cities like Riga becoming Russian-majority metropolises.

Another way in which we can see the attitudinal divide between modern Paganism in Western Europe and North America and that of formerly Soviet or Communist Eastern and Central Europe is in how major events of the post-WW II era created certain trajectories of feeling and thought with continuing resonance today. In America

17. Piotr Wiench, "Neo-Paganism in Central and Eastern Europe," in *The Encyclopedia of Modern Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism*, ed. Shirley Rabinovitch and James Lewis (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 181–84, and "A Postcolonial Key to Understanding Central and Eastern European Neopaganisms," *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Kaarina Aitamutro and Scott Simpson (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 10–26.

and other Western countries, the 1960s were a watershed period of new freedom and rapid social change that empowered many leftist political movements, from the black power, civil rights and women's movements to the powerful protests that helped to bring an end to the Vietnam War. This was a time of openness, expansiveness, and a widespread denunciation of racism and militarism, all attitudes that can be seen feeding into the more universalist types of New Age religion and Paganism that began to blossom in the West in this period, beginning with Wicca.

However, not every American in the 1960s was a happy hippy embracing love and peace. There were also those who felt frightened and disoriented by the rapid social changes then underway and who were furious at the civil rights and anti-war movements for damaging things that they held sacred, from the long-privileged status of white Americans of European descent over those of darker pigmentation and non-European lineage to respect for the military as paragons of virtue and patriotism. Within American Paganism, these pro-white and pro-military sentiments would find expression in a right-wing version of Norse Paganism, which has from its first beginnings in the late 1960s attracted many followers with a socially conservative, militaristic and racist orientation. So, we see that the 1960s shaped two different Pagan trajectories in the Western countries, one line of associations and influences running from 1960s "peace and love" to twenty-first century Pagan universalism, and another running from resistance to 1960s movements against racism and militarism to lead to twenty-first century, right-wing forms of ethnic Paganism.

For the Soviet Bloc countries and Soviet Union republics, the 1960s brought the brief promise of the Prague Spring, only for it to be crushed underfoot by the grim reassertion of Communist authority, which was itself a replay of the brief period of openness in the mid-1950s following the death of Stalin and the denunciation of Stalinist repression by Nikita Krushchev that culminated in the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 and subsequent Warsaw Pact invasion and Communist suppression. It was the late 1980s period of *glasnost* and *perestroika* leading up to the full collapse of the Soviet Union and the reemergence of independent nations that provided ideological inspiration, a sense of patriotic purpose, and the opportunity to openly function for Pagan movements across Central and Eastern Europe. Ethnic Pagan movements such as Romuva in Lithuania and Dievturi in Latvia linked ethnic pride and resurgent nationalism with ancient

myths and folk songs and have given Paganism such a secure and respected status in the Baltic states that the current president of Latvia, Raimonds Vējonis (b. 1966, elected 2015), has listed his religion as “Pagan” on Facebook.<sup>18</sup> Vējonis does not appear to have any deep involvement in any particular Latvian Pagan community such as Dievturi, but the fact that he could describe himself as “Pagan” without facing a political firestorm indicates the extent to which Paganism has become an accepted albeit marginal form of religion in Latvia. The former Latvian president Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga was a serious scholar of Latvian folklore and mythology who contributed essays to the *Encyclopedia of Religion on Latvian myths and deities*<sup>19</sup> and recorded a CD of her favorite Latvian folk songs.<sup>20</sup>

*Trump, Orbán, and Brexit: A New Era of Ethno-Nationalism*

New political winds that began blowing in both Europe and the United States in 2015 and continue up to the time of writing (August 2017) signal a broad-based resurgence of right-wing, ethno-national sentiment that is likely to mobilize like-minded forms of Paganism. During my time in the Czech Republic teaching at Masaryk University in the fall of 2015, my left-leaning friends and I happily joked about the absurdity of the celebrity billionaire businessman Donald Trump, a man whom we tended to view as a buffoon, a bully, and an embarrassment, seeking election as president of the United States. We are not laughing anymore. Though Trump was given little chance of success by most observers, the man we considered a buffoon and a bully has indeed become the next president of the United States.

Post-election analysis of his popularity suggests that his greatest appeal was to less educated, older, white Christian Americans who saw the rising status of non-white Americans and the growing

18. Mike Collier, “Latvia Provides EU’s First ‘Green’ President—Raimonds Vējonis,” Public Broadcasting Network of Latvia (LSM-LV), September 5, 2015 <http://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/president/latvia-provides-eus-first-green-president-raimonds-vejonis.a132316/>

19. Vaira Vīķis-Freibergs, “The Major Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Latvian Mythology,” in *Linguistics and Poetics of Latvian Folk Songs*, ed. Vaira Vīķis-Freibergs (Montreal: McGill-Queensland, 1989), 91–112; “Saule,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 12, ed. Lindsay Jones, (Woodbridge, Conn.: Macmillan Reference, 2004), 8131–135.

20. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, *Vairas Dziesmas (Vairas Songs)*, CD, Riga: Lauska Records, 2000.



number of non-white and non-Christian immigrants as a threat to their place in society.<sup>21</sup> Such voters thrilled to his crude expressions of disdain for Muslims, Mexicans and immigrants and his dream of constructing a massive, hugely expensive, and highly militarized wall on the border with Mexico. Since taking office in January of 2017, Trump's popularity among his core followers of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-minority, white Christian voters seems unshakable.

Trump's proposal to seal off America as much as possible from its southern neighbor Mexico seems something of a homage to the razor-wire fence built by the Hungarian president Viktor Orbán in 2015 for the express purpose of preventing entrance into the country by Muslim immigrants and refugees arriving from Africa and the Middle East. When criticized by the European Union and human rights organizations for the harsh treatment of poor and desperate people, Orbán scoffed at such concerns and proudly proclaimed himself a champion of "illiberal" — that is, intolerant — democracy.<sup>22</sup> The "Brexit" vote in the United Kingdom in the summer of 2016 seems to have also been motivated by discomfort with diversity and immigrants and a dream of a supposedly simpler and happier Britain of the past that had, it was also supposed, been devastated by membership in the open-border European Union.

At the same time and in a quite parallel manner, the crisis of large-scale, mainly Muslim immigration from troubled regions of North Africa, the Middle East and Southwest Asia into Europe has led to the skyrocketing popularity of anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, far-right politicians of a sort who would once have only been minor fringe candidates in Europe. This includes such figures as Marine LePen in France and Norbert Hofer in Austria. The racist terrorist Breivik may well be smiling as he contemplates these political events.

Contemplating the potential areas of commonality between conservative, ethnic-oriented Pagans and right-wing, populist politicians, we might expect that in the future, we will see strongly ethnic-oriented Pagans lining up to support far-right political

21. Jason Le Miere, "How Trump Won: White Working Class Voters Motivated by Fear of Immigrants Not Economic Woes," *Newsweek*, May 9, 2017,

<http://www.newsweek.com/trump-voters-immigration-working-class-605930>

22. "Hungary's Politics of Hate," Istvan Rev, *The New York Times*, September 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/opinion/hungarys-politics-of-hate.html>.

groups that ban immigration and espouse “blood and soil” nationalism. Indeed, this might seem like a marriage made in heaven, but there is one little problem that may prevent the bride and groom from consummating their union with maximum felicity. Most if not all right-wing, anti-immigrant politicians tend to associate their nationalism with the Christian religion and to perceive the current wave of Muslim migration as a threat not only to European ethnic identity, but to Europe’s Christian identity. Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian Prime Minister and enthusiastic builder of razor wire fences, has been one of the most vocal champions of this viewpoint.<sup>23</sup> In the words of the British journalist Catherine Pepinster, herself a devout Catholic,

The Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, raised as an atheist when Hungary belonged to the Soviet bloc, now insists that Christianity is Hungary’s backbone and that this backbone must be stiffened to preserve the nation’s cultural identity and counter the Muslim threat. Hungary’s reworked constitution now includes “the role of Christianity in preserving nationhood” and he has stated he must protect his country’s borders from mainly Muslim migrants “to keep Europe Christian.”<sup>24</sup>

In his speech in Warsaw during a visit to Europe in July of 2017, Donald Trump espoused a similar equation of Christian religion and European identity. Speaking of Polish, and by extension, European history as a struggle between Christian faith and godlessness, Trump characterized the collapse of Soviet communism as above all, a triumph of Poland as a “faithful nation.” He then drew a very Orbánesque parallel with the current situation, declaring that Western—that is to say, Christian—civilization and values were now under threat from Muslim migration among other forces that needed to be resisted no less than the totalitarian communism of the past.

As I stand here today before this incredible crowd, this faithful nation, we can still hear those voices that echo through history. Their message is as true today as ever. The people of Poland, the people of Amer-

23. Robert Mackey, “Hungarian Leader Rebuked for Saying Muslim Migrants Must Be Blocked ‘to Keep Europe Christian,’” *New York Times*, September 3, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/04/world/europe/hungarian-leader-rebuked-for-saying-muslim-migrants-must-be-blocked-to-keep-europe-christian.html>.

24. Catherine Pepinster, “Shame on Those Who Preach Intolerance in the Name Of Christianity,” *The Guardian*, April 15, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/15/europe-migration-intolerance-christianity-easter-far-right-marine-le-pen-viktor-orban-theresa-may>.

ica, and the people of Europe still cry out "We want God"... Together with Pope John Paul II, the Poles reasserted their identity as a nation devoted to God... And you won. Poland prevailed... We must work together to confront forces, whether they come from inside or out, from the South or the East, that threaten over time to undermine these values and to erase the bonds of culture, faith and tradition that make us who we are. If left unchecked, these forces will undermine our courage, sap our spirit, and weaken our will to defend ourselves and our societies...

The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive. Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it?<sup>25</sup>

Since most Pagans vehemently reject such characterization of Europe as an essentially "Christian civilization," tending to see the past Christianization of Europe as a destructive, colonial intrusion into originally Pagan-majority societies,<sup>26</sup> this aspect of European right-wing politics is unlikely to be very attractive to or comfortable for them, however much they may dislike Muslims and Islam. I have noted elsewhere the varying attitudes toward Christianity – as well as Islam – that have been expressed in the past meetings of the pan-Pagan organization WCER (World Congress of Ethnic Religions), originally founded by the Lithuanian Pagan leader Jonas Trinkūnas in 1998 as the World Pagan Congress, more recently renamed the ECER (European Congress of Ethnic Religions).<sup>27</sup> There has often

25. "Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland, July 6, 2017," official text of speech, accessed August 17, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/07/06/remarks-president-trump-people-poland-july-6-2017>. For an incisive commentary, see Jamelle Bouie, *Slate* July 2017, "A New Warsaw Pact: The White Nationalist Roots of Donald Trump's Warsaw Speech," [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/politics/2017/07/the\\_white\\_nationalist\\_roots\\_of\\_donald\\_trump\\_s\\_warsaw\\_speech.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2017/07/the_white_nationalist_roots_of_donald_trump_s_warsaw_speech.html).

26. Michael Strmiska, "The Evils of Christianization: A Pagan Perspective on European History," in *Cultural Expressions of Evil and Wickedness: Wrath, Sex, Crime*, ed. Terry Waddell (New York: Rodopi Press, 2003): 59–72. A further exploration of issues and incidents raised in this article can be found in Carole Cusack, "Pagan Saxon Resistance to Charlemagne's Mission: 'Indigenous' Religion and 'World' Religion in the Early Middle Ages," *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 33–51.

27. Michael Strmiska, "Romuva Looks East: Indian Influence in Lithuanian Paganism," in *Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society: Ethnographies of Catholic Hegemony and the New Pluralism in Lithuania*, ed., Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 125–150.

been a split between WCER participants who have advocated harsh opposition toward Christianity and Islam, and others who have been more conciliatory and pragmatic, seeing peaceful coexistence as the best path forward for Pagan religions in today's world.

However, some right-wing Pagans might decide to overlook their disagreements with right-wing Christians about the basis of European culture and identity in favor of forming a tactical alliance with them, if their animosity toward Islam and Muslims trumps their uneasiness with leaders who espouse Christian identity constructs. Nevertheless, such a "marriage of convenience" of right-wing Pagans with right-wing Christians is likely to prove a "deal with the devil" if it opens the way for a redefinition of Europe as an essentially Christian civilization after decades of shrinking Christian affiliation, since the weakening of Christian dominance in Europe was among the factors that made the emergence of modern Paganism possible. A re-strengthening of European Christian identity as promoted by leaders like Orbán would seem unlikely to bode well for Paganism, which thrives in an atmosphere of tolerance and diversity – and declining enthusiasm for Christianity.

An extremely interesting dimension of this situation is how it problematizes the relationship of ethnicity, nationalism, and religion in Europe, and perhaps elsewhere as well. Conservative Christians in many countries may believe that being Christian is an essential aspect of authentic ethnic or national identity, but ethnic Pagans in those same countries will argue that it is Paganism that contains the true ethno-national essence. In Poland, for example, we can find Catholic Poles who prize their country's Catholic traditions and interpret Poland's painful history as an expression of collective Christian martyrdom, but we can also meet Polish Pagans who see themselves as upholding the essence of Polish identity by practicing and maintaining Polish ethnic customs and Polish Pagan spiritual traditions.<sup>28</sup> A similar situation of competition between Pagan and Catholic claimants to the "crown" of national identity applies in Hungary,<sup>29</sup> and other examples could be cited as well.

28. Scott Simpson, "Polish Rodnoverie: Strategies for (Re)constructing a Movement," in *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Kaarina Aitamurto and Scott Simpson (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 112–27.

29. Réka Szilárdi, "Ancient Gods—New Ages: Lessons from Hungarian Paganism," *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 11, no. 1 (2009): 44–57; Adam Koloszi, "Pagan Spirituality and the Holy Crown in Contemporary National Mythologies: Political Religiosity and Native Faith Movements in Hun-

For this reason, it is possible to imagine that it will not only be universalist Pagans on the left-wing side of the political spectrum who will choose to resist anti-Muslim hysteria and stand by the ideals of religious tolerance and multiculturalism, but also more right-wing oriented ethnic Pagans who fear religious repression under a resurgent European Christianity. We may in coming years see a second marriage of convenience after the above-noted union between right-wing Pagans and right-wing Christians, with the second union bringing together Pagans fearing or fighting religious repression by a Christian-oriented, right-wing government with Muslims and members of other religious minorities also suffering religious discrimination or persecution.

### *The Case of Russia*

Fortunately or unfortunately, this scenario of religious repression of Muslims *and* Pagans under a right-wing, Christian-favoring government is not just a hypothetical scenario. It has already become a reality in Russia – at least to some extent.<sup>30</sup> Since his rise to power in 1999, Vladimir Putin has closely allied his administration with the Russian Orthodox Church. Putin has overseen the revising of Russian regulations on religious life to favor Orthodoxy over other denominations and religious traditions, repeatedly vilified and massacred Muslims<sup>31</sup>--while at the same time catering to certain Muslim groups and leaders to secure their support-- and taken action to disadvantage minority religions in Russia, primarily targeting Islam, but with an increasing hostility toward other faiths as well, including Russian Paganism.

Kaarina Aitamurto, one of the most astute observers of contemporary Russian Paganism, noted in a 2015 article, "For the Pagan nationalist, the strong alliance between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church seems exclusive and discriminatory."<sup>32</sup> In an email

gary," in *Walking the Old Ways: Studies in Contemporary European Paganism*, ed. Adam Anczyk and Halina Gryzmała-Moszczyńska, (Katowice, Poland: Sacrum Publishing House, 2012): 81-97.

30. Wallace L. Daniel and Christopher Marsh, "Russia's 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience in Context and Retrospect," *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 1 (2007): 5-17.

31. James W. Warhola, "Religion and Politics Under the Putin Administration: Accommodation and Confrontation within 'Managed Pluralism,'" *Journal of Church and State*, 49 no.1 (2007): 75-95.

32. Kaarina Aitamurto, "More Russian than Orthodox Christianity: Russian

discussion in August of 2017, Aitamurto gave her further impressions, as follows:

For certain, I can say that Russian Pagans do not like the growing role of the Russian Orthodox Church [henceforth ROC]. However, after that there is, as is usual in Pagan communities, a wide array of opinions concerning the political development of recent years. Even though Pagans generally reject the increased control and even oppression of religious activity, they may not feel much sympathy for such groups as Jehovah's Witnesses. For some nationalists, they represent the alien, Western influences against which some protested already in the 1990s. For others, it is another Christian group and therefore, not liked very much.

There are also Pagans who support Putin... Numerous Pagans have gone to Ukraine to fight against the Ukrainian government. I expect that there are also Pagans who agree with the state politics against "sects," especially "foreign sects." Naturally, the attitudes depend on the extent in which Pagans themselves encounter restrictions or oppression. Until recently, Pagans were actually not so much of a target than, for example, such Christian groups as Jehovah's Witnesses or Muslims. One reason is that they were perceived as "one of us" by Russians. Another reason is that they have like-minded people and sympathizers in the army, the police, the security personnel. For example, one Pagan told me that occasionally some police/security officers are sent to surveil their activity, but usually they show their sympathy to Pagans, even participating in the festivities. However, this might be changing. As the ROC's power has grown, it has convinced the authorities to pay more attention to Pagans as well. Moreover, it seems that the ROC is more actively combating Pagans than earlier. Often this depends on local representatives of the Church. For example, a few years ago a new head of the ROC of St. Petersburg was appointed and he has taken Pagans as one of his main targets.<sup>33</sup>

Pagans in Russia may, in time, face a choice to ally themselves with an Orthodox-glorifying, minority-suppressing government, which would mean tacitly accepting the superior status of Orthodox Christianity as the favored religion in Russia as well as the favored bearer of Russian identity and accepting for themselves a status as a distinctly disfavored, second or third class religion, or to band together with other religious communities, including Muslim ones, in resisting disenfranchisement and petitioning for a government

Paganism as Nationalist Politics," in *Nations under God: The Geopolitics of Faith in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Luke M. Herrington, Alasdair McKay, and Jeffrey Haynes (London: E-International Relations Publishing, 2015),126-33, <http://www.e-ir.info/2015/11/08/russian-paganism-as-nationalist-politics/>.

33. Email communication to author, August 17, 2017.

policy of greater tolerance and equal treatment of non-Christian religions.

### *Left and Right and Pagan*

Having started this essay with a discussion of one set of problematic definitions, I will end the same way. In this essay, I have repeatedly referred to left-wing and right-wing politics and perspectives, and I now wish to clarify how these terms relate to modern Paganism. The terms "left" and "right" carry different political freight in different countries and regions, as do such terms as "liberal" and "conservative," but some general characteristics can be emphasized.

"Left-wing" generally refers to a greater concern with "social justice" in the sense of favoring government policies to reduce economic inequality in the society such as higher taxes on those with greater income and wealth; to support poor and minority populations with programs to subsidize housing, education, job training and other needs of the poor; to protect minorities against discrimination on the basis of national origin or ethnic, racial, religious or gender identity; and to save the environment from harm by industrial pollution, in order to ensure an inclusive and supportive society for all as well as a healthy natural environment. The left wing is most interested in the state as a provider of social services, a guardian of social and cultural diversity against racism and bigotry, and a protector of the environment. While favoring the active engagement of the government in the society in the ways mentioned above, the left wing is often critical of state security services from police to the military, when these are seen as adding to problems of inequality and bigotry when security services use force against the very populations that the left-wing hopes to support and succor, such as poor and minority populations, along with the use of force abroad which is often viewed as an unproductive continuation of past Western colonialism and imperialism. For the left-wing, those who speak out and work against injustice, inequality, pollution and bigotry are their greatest heroes.

In contrast, "right-wing" generally refers to a deep suspicion of the leftist construct of "social justice" and policies of progressive taxation, income redistribution, minority protection, and government regulation of industry. For the right-wing, the highest priority is a free-enterprise economic system with minimal taxation and regulation, with little concern for social and economic inequality or

environmental degradation, which are often seen as natural and inevitable. The disinterest in protecting or providing services to poor or minority populations is rooted in a belief that individuals must chart their own course and find their own way forward without depending on the state.

One of the most prominent and influential right-wing leaders in recent decades, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, went so far as to say “There is no such thing as ‘society’... There are individual men and women, and there are families.”<sup>34</sup> To be fair to the “Iron Lady,” Thatcher did not mean to reject the existence of human society but to critique individuals blaming social conditions for their own problems, and to also condemn overdependence on social welfare programs provided by the government.

The right wing often sees programs to benefit and support disadvantaged groups as disincentives to individuals to better themselves, believing that the best antidote to discrimination and social disadvantage is educational and professional attainment by deserving individuals who are able to heroically overcome social barriers and achieve power and wealth. State or public support for those who cannot achieve such success is not a major priority, with an implicit understanding that there are “winners” and “losers” in life, and that is not the business of the state to ease the pains of losers. A parallel disinterest in environmental regulation is grounded in a belief that business development is more important than environmental preservation.

The right-wing viewpoint is protective of the social and economic status quo, with little concern for racial, religious, economic, and gender inequalities that may be inherent in that status quo. The right-wing tends to take a positive view of police and military forces, which enforce the status quo at home and abroad, and resists any criticism of security forces, often expressing scorn for those who

34. These remarks, made in an interview with Douglas Keeay published under the title of “Aids, Education and the Year 2000!” in the magazine *Women’s Own* in October, 1987 and became so infamous that Thatcher felt it necessary to issue a clarification in the following year. Douglas Keeay, “Aids, Education and the Year 2000!,” *Women’s Own*. October 1987, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>.

Charles Moore discusses the controversy surrounding Thatcher’s “no such thing as society” statement in a September 27, 2010 article, “‘No Such Thing as Society’: A Good Time to Ask What Margaret Thatcher Really Meant,” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/charlesmoore/8027552/No-Such-Thing-as-Society-a-good-time-to-ask-what-Margaret-Thatcher-really-meant.html>.



criticize police practices or oppose military operations. For the right-wing, soldiers and police are often viewed as their greatest heroes, the very definition of patriotism.

These interlocking sets of ideas and attitudes also color left-wing and right-wing views of past history and national identity. Leftists tend to view their countries' past history, if not all history, as a struggle for human progress, viewed as the movement toward greater equality and social justice and a better life for all, including women and minority populations. From this perspective, the nation is a particular constellation within a larger galaxy of interconnected people and cultures. Cultural and intellectual achievements, like great works of art, literature and science are proudly valued as high points in national history, as is the overcoming of impediments to social progress. Making common cause with other nations for the sake of common interests such as reducing poverty and fighting environmental degradation through such venues as the United Nations is understood as a proud expression of solidarity with humanity worldwide.

Rightists tend to view their national history in more ethnic and militaristic terms, as the triumph of a particular people, whether defined in narrow, racial terms or in more broad and inclusive ones, over the challenges of centuries, above all, threats to national existence posed by war. Military victories and defeats are often regarded as the key moments in history when national identity was forged in the fire of battle, and commemorations of past wars and soldiers' deaths are viewed as highly significant occasions for national celebration and mourning. From this vantage point, the nation is, above all, a proudly armed fortress protecting a noble people of unique character and heritage from the threats posed by other nations, cultures, and religions, though nations possessing similar characteristics may be viewed in more friendly terms. For rightists, participation in projects of international cooperation other than military alliances is regarded as problematic, if sometimes necessary, since other nations, especially those with markedly different racial, religious, or cultural demographics are generally viewed with suspicion, and the diversity of worldwide humanity understood as something best celebrated from a distance.

From this list of left-wing and right-wing ideological and attitudinal predispositions, we can see how modern Pagans or neo-Pagans also tend to fall into left- and right-leaning categories. This is not surprising, since, as noted earlier, these left-right political categories

have been with us with in one variation or another since the nineteenth century, which is also the period when modern Paganism developed. That is, Paganism has long been cooking in the same ideological broth as left-wing and right-wing politics, and this being such, it has naturally partaken of some of the same flavors and spices as left-wing and right-wing ideologies and politics. So it is that more universalistic and more eclectic Pagans tend to lean to the left, advocating an inclusive, open Paganism receptive to people of different ethnic backgrounds and to receiving influence from different religious or cultural sources. This does not, however, preclude a strong commitment to a particular ethnic tradition as a foundational element. There is also greater acceptance of innovation and invention within the religion, which aligns with leftist faith in human progress. More universalistic and eclectic Paganism also tends to disdain warrior elements, mirroring left-wing anti-militarism. This is “peace and love” Paganism.

More ethnically oriented, reconstructionist, and/or traditionalist Pagans tend to lean to the right and to romanticize the “land of the ancestors” as a single, ethnically pure entity, whose traditions they wish to protect from other cultural and religious influences and their carriers. This is “blood and soil” Paganism, reflecting right-wing emphasis on protecting ethnic homelands against immigrant intrusions. Such Paganism is less welcoming to new religious elements, and more likely to feature warrior gods and traditions, mirroring the right-wing affinity for the military. Such a “militarized whiteness,” in which devotion to military weapons, training and trappings mixes with a dedication to white European identity, is particularly evident among right-leaning forms of Ásatrú or Heathenry in America, as I have elsewhere observed along with other scholars such as Matthías Gardell, Jennifer Snook, Karl Seigfried and Thad Horrell.<sup>35</sup>

35. Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood*; Jennifer Snook, *American Heathens: The Politics of Identity in a Pagan Religious Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015); Jennifer Snook and Ross Haenfler. “Cultural-defense and Strategies of Racial Exclusion Among Heathens: Mainstreaming Racism in the Era of Trump.” Paper presented at for the annual conference of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, Montréal, Quebec, August 16, 2017; Thad Horrell, “Heathenry as a Postcolonial Movement,” *Journal of Religion, Identity and Politics* (2011), <http://ripjournal.org/2011/heathenry-as-postcolonial-movement/>; Seigfried, Karl E. H., “Covering Ásatrú: Reporting Rhetoric,” *The Norse Mythology Blog*, October 23, 2015, <http://www.norsemyth.org/2015/10/covering-asatru-reporting-rhetoric.html>.

As noted earlier, these different forms of Paganism may easily overlap and blend, and individual Pagans may mix and match elements from either end of the spectrum as well as intermediate points between. However, the constant churning of left-wing and right-wing political arguments and perspectives in most modern societies cannot help but pull most modern Pagans into either a left-wing or a right-wing orbit, even if they prefer to not be labeled as such and wish to claim an innocent, apolitical status.

These Pagan-political correlations also demonstrate a certain gendered quality in that some of the most leftist forms of Paganism are explicitly female-oriented and some of the most right-wing forms, highly masculinized with plenty of militaristic machismo. Consider Starhawk (Miriam Simos), Wicca and the Reclaiming Movement, and you see a focus on goddesses, peace and the abundance of nature correlating with the strong influence of feminism, a questioning of traditional gender norms, and a distinctly leftist political outlook, with Starhawk an antiwar, environmentalist and social justice activist of the highest order.<sup>36</sup> Consider Stephen McNallen and his right-leaning branch of American Ásatrú, or the Rodnoverie movement in Russia,<sup>37</sup> and you find a marked emphasis on war gods, weapons, and whiteness, along with male leadership, and traditional gender roles, in accordance with right-wing ideology, with McNallen a military veteran who has often advocated anti-immigrant and white supremacist views.<sup>38</sup>

It is worth noting that anti-rightist, anti-racist Norse Pagans have banded together to create a network called Heathens United Against Hatred (HUAR), which stands in adamant opposition to the "white and right" Norse Paganism of American Heathens like McNallen.<sup>39</sup>

36. Wendy Griffin, ed., *Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, Identity and Empowerment* (Lanham, Md.: Altamira, 2000); Starhawk, *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising* (Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers, 2000) and "Towards an Activist Spirituality," *Reclaiming Quarterly* Fall 2003, <http://www.reclaiming.org>; Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism: The Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

37. Kaarina Aitamurto and Alexey Gadukov, "Russian Rodnoverie: Six Portraits of a Movement," in *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Kaarina Aitamurto and Scott Simpson (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 146-163.

38. Michael Strmiska (forthcoming), "Politics in Paganism: A Comparative Study of the Political Perspectives of Followers of Modern Norse Paganism in America and Europe."

39. The organization's web site is <http://heathensunited.org/>.

This illustrates how the left-wing/right-wing tension can become an energizing, centrifugal force within particular Pagan movements.

There is one political topic on which left- and right-leaning Pagans, from the most eclectic and universalistic on the left to the most ethnic and reconstructionist on the right, might be expected to agree: the importance of protecting the natural environment of the earth in a time of rising concerns about such environmental threats as climate change and fracked-gas extraction. All modern Pagans claim to revere the gods and goddesses of nature and the sacredness of natural forces and processes. Though it has not happened yet, this eco-religious commonality has the potential to bridge differences between left- and right-leaning forms of Paganism, as the environmental philosopher and scholar of Ukrainian Paganism Adrian Ivakhiv observed in 2005.<sup>40</sup>

### *Charlottesville Interlude*

As I was putting the final touches on this article in August 2017, an event occurred that dramatizes the symbiotic relationship between right-wing, racist politics and right-wing, racist Paganism while also illustrating the capacity of more left-leaning Pagans to oppose and denounce such expressions of racism and far-right ideology. On August 11–12, 2017, the small American city of Charlottesville, Virginia, a “college town” known for its liberal and tolerant attitudes, became the site of a “Unite the Right” rally bringing together thousands of members of racist, far right-wing, and white supremacist organizations, from the Ku Klux Klan to neo-Nazis to newer groups formed only in the last few years, such as the Proud Boys, as well as neo-Confederate groups like the League of the South.<sup>41</sup>

Some of the assembled right-wing associations preferred the labels “white nationalist” and “alt-right,” but all of these differing groups shared a vision of an America in which white people of European

40. Adrian Ivakhiv, “Nature and Ethnicity in East European Paganism: An Environmental Ethic of the Religious Right?,” in *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 7, no. 2 (2005): 194–225.

41. Alexis Gravely, Daniel Hoerauf and Tim Dodson, “Torch-wielding white nationalists march at U. Va.,” *The Cavalier Daily*, August 12, 2017, <http://www.cavalierdaily.com/article/2017/08/torch-wielding-white-nationalists-march-at-uva>; Maggie Astor, Christina Caron and Daniel Victor, “A Guide to the Charlottesville Aftermath,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/charlottesville-virginia-overview.html>.

descent are to be privileged over and protected against people of non-white, non-European ancestry. This white supremacist dream had obviously found symbolic, electoral expression in the replacement of a president of African-American, black lineage with one of German-American, white ethnic background, with Donald Trump enjoying enthusiastic support among far-right, racist groups like the KKK.<sup>42</sup> The ostensible purpose of "Unite the Right" was to protest the pending removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee from a prominent position in a park in the city center. As Lee was the commanding general of the pro-slavery Confederacy during the U.S. Civil War and a hero to many white supremacists and racists, many in the town wished to take down the statue by virtue of its being a symbol of the white supremacy, racism and African-American slavery that the Confederacy had fought to defend.<sup>43</sup>

On Friday night, the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, the assembled racist and right-wing forces marched across the university campus holding torches and chanting the Nazi era slogan of "Blood and Soil" in what would seem to have been a twenty-first-century homage to the Nuremberg Rallies of mid-1930s Nazi Germany. Bearing flaming torches and chanting "You will not replace us! Jews will not replace us!" on their way to the statue of Robert E. Lee, the right-wing marchers stopped to make their presence known outside a campus church where anti-racist clergy had gathered for a non-violent worship service and training session. The torch-bearing right-wing crowd outside the church created such a sense of intimidation and menace that those in the church were instructed to leave through a back door in order to make their escape without harm.<sup>44</sup>

42. Peter Holley, "KKK's official newspaper supports Donald Trump for president," *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/11/01/the-kkks-official-newspaper-has-endorsed-donald-trump-for-president/?utm;> Alan Rappeport and Noah Weiland, "White Nationalists Celebrate 'an Awakening' After Donald Trump's Victory," *The New York Times* November 16, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/us/politics/white-nationalists-celebrate-an-awakening-after-donald-trumps-victory.html>.

43. Jennifer Schuessler, "Historians Question Trump's Comments on Confederate Monuments," *The New York Times*, August 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/arts/design/trump-robert-e-lee-george-washington-thomas-jefferson.html>.

44. "Charlottesville: far-right crowd with torches encircles counter-protest group," *The Guardian*, August 12, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/12/charlottesville-far-right-crowd-with-torches-encircles-counter-protest-group>.

On the following day, Saturday, the 12<sup>th</sup> of August, the right-wing protesters marched in quasi-military formation through the streets of the city bearing Nazi and Confederate flags and other signs and symbols of Nazism, white supremacy and the Confederacy. Some bore Pagan symbols drawn from Norse-Germanic tradition or from Nazi versions of such, such as the *Schwarze Sonne*, “Black Sun” symbol that Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler had engraved into the floor of his SS castle fortress Wewelsburg.<sup>45</sup> Most of the right-wing marchers were young, white and male. Many wore the red “Make America Great Again” baseball hats that were hallmarks of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign.

The right-wing protestors were met on Saturday by anti-racist counter-protesters who had come out to assert an alternate vision of America, one grounded in a more left-wing vision of positive, peaceful coexistence of people of diverse backgrounds and a firm rejection of racism and white supremacy. Some of the leaders of the counter-protesters were clergymen and women of different faiths committed to non-violence, the same who had been meeting in St. Paul’s Memorial Church the evening before. They led groups that assembled peacefully, carrying signs and banners opposing Nazism and racism and upholding peace, love, unity, diversity, tolerance and other such anti-racist ideals. A separate, smaller group of counter-protesters represented the “Antifa” (Anti-Fascist) movement, which is committed to resisting Fascist and neo-Nazi movements wherever they appear, and comes prepared to use force and engage in fighting in the streets if necessary.<sup>46</sup>

Many of the Unite the Right participants were dressed in military fashion, suggesting that they were either veterans of the U.S. military, or at least liked the look. They were carrying handguns and semi-automatic rifles, as is allowed under the very permissive gun ownerships laws that prevail in many parts of America. As journalist David Frum commented in the newsmagazine *The Atlantic*,

45. Hatewatch, “Flags and Symbols Used at Charlottesville,” *Hatewatch*, Southern Poverty Law Center, August 12, 2017, accessed August 22, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/08/12/flags-and-other-symbols-used-far-right-groups-charlottesville>.

46. Michelle Goldberg, “The Public Face of Antifa,” *Slate*, August 22, 2017, accessed August 24, 2017, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2017/08/daryle-jenkins-has-stepped-up-to-explain-the-shadowy-groups-violent-tactics-to-the-world.html>.

Charlottesville this past weekend was crammed with anti-social personalities carrying sub-military firearms... [It] marks a new era of even bolder assertion of the right to threaten violence for political purposes. Gun carriers at the so-called "Unite the Right" rally acted more like a paramilitary force than as individual demonstrators. They wore similar pseudo-military outfits, including body armor. They took tactical formations to surround the site of the expected confrontation. According to Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe, "They had better equipment than our state police had."<sup>47</sup>

Other white supremacists came bearing cruder weapons like brass knuckles, clubs, and sticks along with shields and helmets. Some of the Antifa were also armed, not in the quasi-military manner of the protestors, but with cans of Mace and pepper spray, bricks, sticks, and baseball bats, as well as urine-filled bottles for hurling at the rightists. The peaceful other counter-protesters were completely unarmed, holding to their commitment to non-violence.

When the chanting of slogans turned to shouting matches that became in-your-face confrontations, violence erupted to varying degrees of severity, ranging from pushing and shoving to the throwing of bottles to fist-fights to beatings with sticks, bats and clubs. In some instances, the non-violent counter-protesters were defended by Antifa members against menacing movements by the right-wing protesters. Police at the site of the confrontations initially did little to separate the two sides, which to some observers suggested an unwillingness to stand up to the heavily armed far-right forces, possibly even some sympathy for their cause.<sup>48</sup>

The police eventually stepped in to separate the opposing groups, but then came the ugly culmination of the day's tensions. At about 1:45 in the early afternoon, a supporter of the right-wing cause drove a speeding car straight into a group of counter-protesters, crushing 32-year-old counter-protester Heather Heyer to death and sending nineteen others to the hospital for treatment of injuries.<sup>49</sup> The driver

47. David Frum, "The Chilling Effects of Openly Displayed Firearms," *The Atlantic*, August 16, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/open-carry-laws-mean-charlottesville-could-have-been-graver/537087/>.

48. A.C. Thompson, Robert Faturechi, and Karim Hajj, "Police Stood By as Mayhem Mounted in Charlottesville," *Pro Publica*, August 12, 2017, <https://www.propublica.org/article/police-stood-by-as-mayhem-mounted-in-charlottesville>.

49. Christina Caron, "Heather Heyer, Charlottesville Victim, Is Recalled as 'a Strong Woman'," *The New York Times*, August 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/james-alex-fields-charlottesville-driver.html>.

of the car was James Alex Fields, Jr., a 20-year-old man with a history of enthusiasm for Nazism.<sup>50</sup>

The march of the heavily armed, hate speech-chanting, right-wing and racist groups in Charlottesville had been long planned and was well-organized. It was intended to show to all the world the power of far-right, white supremacist forces in American life. The presence of the counter-protesters, from the non-violent clergy to the Antifa with their sticks, bricks, and cans of Mace demonstrated no less forcefully that there are also many Americans who oppose these supporters of racism and bigotry.

Though at the time of writing, it is too soon to be certain on many points concerning the Charlottesville events, there is sufficient evidence to state that at least some of the right-wing, racist protesters and marchers were Pagans and that, as noted above, Norse-Germanic Pagan symbols were utilized by right-wing marchers. There does not seem to have been any parallel usage of Pagan symbolism by the anti-racist counter-protesters. Cara Schulz, reporting for the Pagan news service *The Wild Hunt*, interviewed several Heathens (Norse-Germanic Pagans) who had come to the rally to support the right-wing cause, while finding several other Pagans in opposition.<sup>51</sup>

There was a vigorous denunciation of Charlottesville racism and white supremacy by Pagans on social media, including this statement on August 14, 2016, by Robert Schreiwer, a leading member of the Troth, the largest Heathen or Norse-Germanic Pagan umbrella organization in America, which has in recent years taken increasingly forceful actions to oppose racist versions of Heathenry.

The events in Charlottesville are so shocking and repugnant that they cannot go without comment or action...That some of our symbols were visible among the forces of hatred at this event makes it that much more loathsome. The Troth holds fast to its policies of inclusion, which means we stand against those who would sully our deities' reputations by utilizing our symbols, and, by extension, our religion, to

50. Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Brian M. Rosenthal, "Man Charged After White Nationalist Rally in Charlottesville Ends in Deadly Violence," *The New York Times*, August 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/us/charlottesville-protest-white-nationalist.html>; Jonah Engel Bronwich and Alan Blinder, "What We Know About James Alex Fields, Driver Charged in Charlottesville Killing," August 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/james-alex-fields-charlottesville-driver.html>.

51. Cara Schulz, "Charlottesville: events, reactions, and aftermath," *The Wild Hunt*, August 16, 2017, <http://wildhunt.org/2017/08/charlottesville-events-reactions-and-aftermath.html>.



advance causes of racism and bigotry. This applies to the rise of fascist elements in the US, Canada, Europe... everywhere. Let us continue to assert our viewpoints and beliefs and to bring our deities and our ancestors -- regardless of origin -- bright fame. Hail The Troth! (Note: This statement has the official backing of the High Rede of The Troth. This is an official response.)<sup>52</sup>

The Pagan blogger Stella Hellasdottir published an impassioned commentary that lamented the white supremacist usage of a key Norse Pagan symbol, the Oðal rune.

As I absorbed articles and scrolled past images of the Charlottesville Racists this week, I was more than disturbed. I was one angry Heathen. Three people were killed last weekend, by fear and terrorism. Ignorance and toxic rage marched in the streets carrying burning torches... [There were] flags emblazoned with hate speech and stolen symbols. In the center of some of those flags, I saw the Elder Futhark rune Othala...

Once again, white supremacists and neo-Nazis have seized our spiritual identity and twisted our hearth culture for their nefarious purposes. The National Socialist Movement (founded by former members of the American Nazi Party) changed their symbol from the Swastika in November of 2016. The replacement they chose was Odal; also known as Othala. Symbols like Othala, which has been a powerful force in my life these last few years, are toys to them. They have misappropriated this rune in an attempt to soften the image of Nazis, as ridiculous as that sounds. The Swastika is too powerful a symbol of genocide, and the "Odal" is less widely known... They want the "Alt Right" to be mainstream so that they can eventually function in the United States as a political party. The election of a President who accepts their support and refuses to condemn racism with his own words makes this no laughing matter.

In today's political atmosphere, there can be no quarter for those who would defile the runes. I always approached this symbol of ancestral heritage from a place of love. The message and the power of Othala have nothing to do with the color of my skin. My ancestors come from across the seas, from several different lands. I honor them by recognizing that the fabric of our democracy, the Wyrð of the United States of America, is woven from threads of every color. My personal practice, the way I live my Heathenry, is firmly opposed to racism.<sup>53</sup>

52. Robert L. Schreiwer, Troth Facebook page, August 15, 2017, [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10213676234361434&id=1271899092](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10213676234361434&id=1271899092).

53. Stella Hellasdottir, "No Frið For The Charlottesville Racists," *Hugin's Heathen Hof*, August 15, 2017, <http://www.heathenhof.com/no-frith-charlottesville-racists/>. This essay was reposted on the website of Heathens United Against Racism

Of course, the conscious effort by right-wing racists in Charlottesville to associate themselves with Paganism by the display of Pagan religious symbols does not by any means demonstrate that Paganism was the religion of choice of all the right-wing and racist protesters on display in Charlottesville, only that it was part of the mix, possibly only a very small part. Even so, it is no less disturbing than Anders Behring Breivik's appropriation of Norse Pagan myths and symbols prior to his homicidal right-wing rampage six years earlier. For this author, who has been both a supporter and a chronicler of Norse Paganism for twenty-plus years, and who has often warned of the dangers posed both by those who would link this form of Paganism with Nazism and racism, and those who would ignore or excuse the linkage, Charlottesville represents a troubling confirmation of long-held fears.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the forceful denunciation of such linkages by Heathens and Norse Pagans like Robert Schreiwer and Stella Helasdottir and by such organizations as the Troth and Heathen United Against Racism in their responses to the Unite the Right rally is most encouraging to anyone who sees racism and Nazism as incompatible with true spirituality.

### *Final Thoughts*

Starting from a shared love of ancient European religious traditions of nature-worship and polytheism rooted in particular ethnic cultures, left-wing and right-wing Pagans diverge markedly in their views of the world and the place of modern Paganism within it. On the one side, there is a paramount concern for Paganism to serve as the vehicle for the continuation and preservation of European ethnic heritage, whereas on the other, modern Paganism is seen as combining a basis in European heritage with an openness to modern ethnic diversity, multiculturalism and other spiritual traditions. At one end of the spectrum, the ethnic and religious heritage of Paganism is to be protected by avoidance of other ethnic and religious traditions and identities; on the other end of the spectrum, the ethnic and religious heritage of Paganism is seen as a religious path that starts with earth-centered spirituality and its past expressions in particular

(HUAR), an anti-racist forum for Norse Pagans opposed to neo-Nazi and racist appropriations of Norse-Germanic Paganism, [www.heathensunited.org](http://www.heathensunited.org).

54. Michael Strmiska, "On Becoming a Pariah: One Scholar's Journey from Apologist to Critic to Persona Non Grata," paper presented at the Contemporary Paganism and Alternative Spiritualities in Europe (CPASE) conference in Stockholm, Sweden, August 2012; see also Strmiska's blog, *The Political Pagan*, accessed at <http://thepoliticalpagan.blogspot.com/>.

European forms, but may lead to further destinations that need not be bound by a single or racial ethnic identity, but may incorporate others – and Others – as well.

Both left-wing and right-wing ideologies and political movements can have their dangerous extremes, as twentieth century world history has amply demonstrated. However, with reference to the left-wing and right-wing tendencies within modern Paganism, it is the right-wing tendency that seems to reveal the most troubling manifestations. Heavily ethnically oriented Pagans may develop an increasingly racialized concern with whiteness and Europeanness that can mutate into devotion to white supremacy, just as individuals who already have racist and white supremacist attitudes and beliefs may be attracted to ethnic Paganism as a vehicle for their racial animosity and desire for ethnic exclusivity. The Norse Pagans who turned out in Charlottesville to support racists and white supremacists are a case in point. The welcome they received from the assembled racists and white supremacists is no less significant.

Modern Pagans cannot help but reflect the social conditions and political tensions of the societies in which they live. Pagans on the right will no doubt continue to march to the tune of "Blood and Soil," while those on the left will dream of "Peace and Love."

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