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The creativity of Polish Native Believers on the Internet. The Rodzima Wiara religious organization's official online media

ABSTRACT

The creativity of Polish Native Believers associated in the religious organization of Rodzima Wiara [Native Faith] in the online media is surprisingly modest. The religious group referring to pre-Christian beliefs cannot or does not consider it necessary to use the potential of this means of communication. In this way, they give up the opportunity for social integration and dissemination of knowledge about their activities, creed and culture. The absence of this religious organization of social networking sites results in the fact that its website, <https://rodzima-wiara.org.pl/>, is their only official medium.

KEYWORDS: native faith, Internet media, Rodzima Wiara, churches and religious organizations, Paganism, Neo-paganism

STRESZCZENIE

Kreatywność polskich rodzimowierców w internetowej przestrzeni medialnej, czyli oficjalne media internetowe Rodzimej Wiary

Kreatywność polskich rodzimowierców z Rodzimej Wiary w mediach internetowych zaskakuje skromnością. Odwołująca się do przedchrześcijańskich wierzeń grupa religijna nie potrafi, bądź nie uważa za konieczne, wykorzystania potencjału tego środka komunikowania. Rezygnując tym samym z integracji społeczności oraz upowszechniania wiedzy na temat swoich działaniach, wierzeń i kultury. Cechujący ten związek wyznaniowy brak obecności w tak licznych współcześnie serwisach społecznościowych – skutkuje tym, że strona internetowa <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/> jest jedynym medium własnym Rodzimej Wiary.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: rodzimowiercy, media internetowe, Rodzima Wiara, kościoły i związki wyznaniowe, paganie, neopaganie

Introduction

The importance of the Internet in the activity of Polish Native Believers¹ was pointed out already in 2009 by Andrzej Zwoliński, who stated that the movements, which formerly would have had a local character and a marginal range of influence, now, thanks to the telecommunications technologies (including the Internet), reach spatially and culturally distant areas with their mission.”² The creativity of the Polish Native Believers in the online media space results from the awareness of the opportunities offered by this relatively new medium, which results in the creation of websites, blogs, forums, profiles and groups in social media.

1 Translator’s note: The Polish terms “rodzimowierstwo” and “rodzimowierca”, corresponding to similar ones in other Slavic languages, have no established rendering in the English language literature. Different authors and the adherents themselves refer to this religious phenomenon as Slavic Paganism or Slavic Heathenism, *rodnoverie*, Native Faith, and by other similar terms, while the members of this religious movement may be referred to as: Native Believers, Native Slavic Believers, *rodnovers*, Slavic Heathens, and even the Polish words *rodzimowierstwo* and *rodzimowierca* may be preserved due to the subtle specificity of the Polish variant of this religion (Simpson 2012, 2013, 2016) – Karolina Socha-Duśko

2 A. Zwoliński, *Leksykon współczesnych zagrożeń duchowych*, Kraków 2009, p. 493.

However, should all Internet media characterized as native-religious, through the identification of the authors, the subject matter, and the publication of links with legally operating native denominations, be considered as native faith media? According to the author, they should not, because this term should be applied only to the original, official media of registered churches and religious organizations operating in Poland. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present the official online media of the Rodzima Wiara [Native Faith] religious organization as well as to demonstrate that these media are original content.

The starting point was to identify the official online media of Rodzima Wiara, a religious organization registered in the twentieth century and still active today. Content analysis used in scientific media studies was originally applied to the Internet, which made it possible to establish the official media of two already mentioned native religious organizations, and then the same method of content analysis was applied to media research.

Rodzimowiercy, as the name suggests, is the religious group which reconstructs the Slavic pre-Christian beliefs, nurturing, developing and promoting pre-Christian feasts, rituals, traditions, and customs.³ The author intentionally uses the term *rodzimowiercy* [for Native Believers – transl.] in favor of the terms *Pagans* and *Neo-pagans* herein.

Note that Internet media of churches and religious organizations operating in Poland are community-based media, that is, they are created and addressed *by* and *to* members of a community, organization, social group, etc. (in this case, *rodzimowiercy*), but also those Internet users who are interested in this type of media content.

Polish Native Believers. An overview

We have failed to establish whether every Polish *rodzimowierca* is a Pagan and whether every Polish Pagan is a *rodzimowierca*. The already cited A. Zwoliński refers to them as Pagans and classifies the native religion churches and other organizations as Pagan religious groups. Olga Pawlik,

3 The author is aware of the simplification and the differences between the discussed denominations; however, the article focuses on online media, and consequently, such a generalization is considered reasonable. In the literature, a similar generalization regarding those denominations is seen, for example, in A. Zwoliński, who characterized the group data collectively, saying that “new religious groups have undertaken to revive the Pagan religion in Poland”, A. Zwoliński, *Leksykon współczesnych zagrożeń duchowych*, Kraków 2009, p. 356. For more on the organizations, cf.: T. Mędzelowski, *Mniejszości religijne w Polsce po 1989 roku w ujęciu filozofii polityki*, Tarnów–Nowy Sącz 2013 and <https://rkp.org.pl/>, <http://www.slowianskawiarra.pl/>, <https://rodzimawiarra.org.pl/>.

the author of the article entitled “*Idziemy drogą przodków*” – *odwołania do przeszłości w Rodzimym Kościele Polskim*” [“We follow in our ancestors’ footsteps” – references to the past in Rodzimy Kościół Polski]⁴ states that explaining whether *rodzimowiercy* are Pagans, or optionally Neo-pagans, causes difficulty even to the Native Believers themselves. Depending on their understanding of words such as *Paganism* and *Neo-paganism*, they either accept or absolutely reject identification with Pagans or Neo-pagans and thus preclude the use of the terms *rodzimowierca*, *Pagan* and *Neo-Pagan* interchangeably as synonyms, or they accept it. The reason for the rejection of the term *Pagan* by many Native Believers lies in the pejorative connotations of the word *pagan*, while the prefix *neo* – is said to be rejected due to the fact that it *implies newness*, which also is not acceptable for some of *rodzimowiercy*, who identify with pre-Christian roots.

What is more, Pawlik uses the terms *rodzimowiercy*, *neo-Pagans*, and *Pagans* interchangeably, affirming and disseminating the very conviction that *Neo-Pagan* and *Pagan* are synonymous with *rodzimowiercy*; and vice versa.

In Poland today, there are three Native Faith churches and religious organizations.⁵ However, as already noted, the subject of the analysis will be the media of Rodzima Wiara, which was registered on 3 March 1996. The seat of the organization is in Wrocław, and the founder is Stanisław Potrzebowski, who is also the head of the organization. To enter the organization, one must submit “A declaration of intent to join the Native Faith”, wherein, alongside with one’s personal data, one must declare the acceptance of “the principles of the Native Faith and the will to join the Native Faith.”⁶ The structure of the organization includes Branches, Districts and Communities.⁷

The official medium of Rodzima Wiara

The chaos alluded to on the occasion of the general description of Native Faith seems to emerge also in the subject of the media it produces. There are no unquestionable listings of official Rodzima Wiara media, which

4 O. Pawlik, “*Idziemy drogą przodków*” – *odwołania do przeszłości w Rodzimym Kościele Polskim*, in „Etnografia Polska”, vol. LIX, 2015, iss. 1-2, p. 100, online: http://rcin.org.pl/Content/61315/WA308_80483_P327_Idziemy-droga-przodk_I.pdf, (access: 06.05.2018).

5 Rodzimy Kościół Polski [Native Polish Church] and Zachodniosłowiański Związek Wyznaniowy „Słowiańska Wiara” [“Slavic Faith” – West Slavonic religious association].

6 https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/images/pliki/oswiadczenie_woli_rodzima_wiara.pdf, (access: 31.12.2018).

7 T. Mędzelowski, op. cit., p. 65.

should carry out basic functions: informative, practical, educational, cultural and integrative.

Agnieszka Bukowska-Pastwa, whose article, *Być poganką. Być poganinem. Odrodzenie neopogańskie we współczesnej Polsce* [To be a Pagan woman. To be a Pagan man. The Neo-pagan revival in contemporary Poland] became the inspiration for the author, undertook the analysis of Internet postings by users in various online media, out of which only one, the official website of the Rodzima Wiara organization, can be classified as an official medium of Polish Native Believers, who are the subject of this article.

The official medium of the organization is the website available at <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/>. Let us recall that this is the only online medium investigated in the research by Agnieszka Bukowska-Pastwa, where she did find answers to her questions about the Neo-pagan revival, *rodzimo-wierstwo* and its relationships with Paganism.

The site has a blog-like structure and is marked with the dates 1996-2019. The copyright belongs to Rodzima Wiara. The main slogan of the site is *Rodzima Wiara. Tysiące lat tradycji* [Native faith. Thousands of years of tradition]. At the top, 7 tabs are found:

1. *Rodzima Wiara*; categories:
 - a) *Kim jesteście?* [Who are we?] (Information on the organization and an attachment with a link to dated March 26, 1996, Certificate of registration in the Register of Churches and other religious organizations dated March 26, 1996);⁸
 - b) *Dlaczego istniejemy?* [Why we exist?] (An article concerning the philosophy, the ancient ancestors, the Arya, the ancient Polish faith, which is a “natural religion founded together with the Nation, with all the Balto-Slavic-Arya, is a source of power and spiritual rebirth”);⁹
 - c) *Jak do nas dołączyć?* [How to join us?] (requirements, namely: “The native Slavic faith may include people who: are of Slavic origin, respect the traditional Slavic traditions, recognize the native worldview, and hail the ancient Slavic Gods” in addition to two documents: “Wyznanie wiary”, the signing of which results in the adoption of the Lekhite Creed, but without entering the organizational structure and the “Declaration of intent to join the Native Faith”);¹⁰

8 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/rodzima-wiara/kim-jestesmy.html> and <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/images/pliki/zaswiadczenie-o-rejestracji-rodzima-wiara.pdf>, (access: 07.05.2018).

9 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/rodzima-wiara/dlaczego-istniejemy.html>, (access: 07.05.2018).

10 *Wyznanie wiary*, https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/images/pliki/wyznanie_wiary_rodzima_wiara.pdf and *Oświadczenie woli przystąpienia do Rodzimej Wiary*, <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/>

- d) *Skrócone wyznanie wiary* [Shortened creed] (“Profession of native faith” and “Basic principles of native faith”);¹¹
 - e) *Poszerzone wyznanie wiary* [Extended creed]¹² (includes 16 pages of text entitled “Native faith”; extended creed);
 - f) *Świat i my* [The world and us] (Hymn RV X 129, preceded by the statement that “For Aryo-Slavic Native Faith, this anthem on the origin of all that is, is of fundamental importance”).¹³
2. *Obrzędowość* [Rite]; categories:
- a) *Jare Gody* [Vernal Equinox] (scenario for the celebration of the holiday with words to recite and detailed instructions for four priests¹⁴ and the participants, in addition to detailed instructions for the priests, for example, “the priest walks around the ceremonial circle with a knocker making noise to drive evil forces, then sprinkles salt around”);¹⁵
 - b) *Kupała* [Summer Solstice] (scenario for the celebration of the holiday with words to recite and detailed instructions for four priests);¹⁶
 - c) *Święto Plonów* [Autumn Equinox] (scenario for the celebration of the holiday with words to recite and detailed instructions for four priests);¹⁷
 - d) *Dziady* [Ancestors’ Day] (scenario for the celebration of the holiday with words to recite and detailed instructions for a priest);¹⁸
 - e) *Szczodre Gody* [Winter Solstice] (scenario for the celebration of the holiday with words to recite and detailed instructions for four priests and three carolers: the Goat, the Old Man, and the Tree-carrier);¹⁹

images/pliki/oswiadczenie_woli_rodzima_wiara.pdf. The statement, apart from name, surname, and contact information, requires providing the Social Security number PESEL. Cf. <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/rodzima-wiara/jak-do-nas-dolaczyc.html>, (access: 07.05.2018).

11 *Rodzimowiercze wyznanie wiary, Podstawowe zasady rodzimej wiary*, <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/rodzima-wiara/skrocone-wyznanie-wiary.html>, (access: 07.05.2018).

12 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/rodzima-wiara/poszerzone-wyznanie-wiary.html?showall=1>, (access: 07.05.2018).

13 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/rodzima-wiara/swiat-i-my.html>, (access: 07.05.2018).

14 Translator’s note: Priests in native faith as referred to as *żercy* (sacrifice-makers) – KSD.

15 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/obrzadowosc/jare-gody.html> (access: 18.12.2018).

16 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/obrzadowosc/kupala.html> (access: 18.12.2018).

17 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/obrzadowosc/swieto-plonow.html> (access: 18.12.2018).

18 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/obrzadowosc/dziady.html> (access: 18.12.2018).

19 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/obrzadowosc/szczodre-gody.html?showall=1> (access: 18.12.2018).

3. *Książnica* [Library]; categories:
 - a) *Articles* (33 articles about Native Faith);²⁰
 - b) *Pieśni i wiersze* [Songs and poems] (Here is a surprise, because in addition to 16 songs and poems, there is an audio version of a song entitled *Dzieci bogów* [Children of the Gods]);²¹
 - c) *Wywiady* [Interviews] (5 interviews);²²
4. *ECER* (Information about the European Congress of Ethnic Religions and a link to the Congress' website <http://eccer-org.eu/>).²³
5. *Forum*²⁴
6. *Galeria* [Gallery];²⁵ categories:
 - a) *Wiece i konferencje* [Rallies and conferences]; (12 categories with photos dated 2003-2018);²⁶
 - b) *Obrzędy* [Rites] (27 sub-categories, with photos dated 2009-2018);²⁷
 - c) *Wyprawy* [Trips] (3 subcategories, with photos dated to 2008-2013);²⁸
 - d) Inspirations (6 subcategories, including pictures of tattoos, sculptures, paintings, and graphic arts).²⁹
7. *Contact*; categories:
 - a) *Naczelnik* [Chief] (contact form, the address of the head of the organization, his phone number);³⁰

20 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/ksiaznica/artykuly.html> (access: 18.12.2018).

21 *Dzieci bogów*, audio, K. Adamczyk, *Dzieci bogów*, music J. Adamczyk, performed by the authors, 2.53, <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/ksiaznica/piesni-i-wiersze/272-dzieci-bogow.html> and <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/ksiaznica/piesni-i-wiersze.html>, (access: 18.12.2018).

22 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/ksiaznica/wywiady.html> (access: 18.12.2018).

23 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/europejski-kongres-religii-etnicznych-eccer.html>, (access: 18.12.2018).

24 The content of the *Forum* which has been used by Agnieszka Bukowska-Pastwa, shall receive more attention later in the article.

25 The category contains a total of 1,863 images.

26 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/galeria/wiece-i-konferencje.html>, (access: 18.12.2018).

27 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/galeria/obrzedy.html>, (access: 18.12.2018).

28 <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/galeria/rodzimowiercze-wyprawy.html>, (access: 18.12.2018).

29 The *Inspirations* category comprises 6 sub-categories <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/galeria/inspiracje/inspiracje.html> (access: 31.12.2018).

30 The Chief of the Native Faith since the establishment of the religious organization has been Stanisław Potrzebowski, PhD, founder of the association, as well as co-founder of the European Congress of Ethnic Religions (ECER), <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/kontakty/naczelnik.html> (access: 31.12.2018).

b) *Oddziały* [Branches] (email addresses of the representatives of the 5 branches of the organization).³¹

Going below, we find the same content discussed in the aforementioned tabs, i.e., *Who are we?*, *Why do we exist?*, *How to join?* (Here there is a modification of the title by removing “us”), then, there are the latest materials published on 1 of 34 pages of the site. It is surprising from the point of view of the expectations of the modern Internet user that the official website does not include links to social media accounts or YouTube channels. There is, however, information categorized as *Partners and Associates*, among them: the Toporzół publisher, ECER (a separate tab, as already noted, is devoted to this Congress), the NIKLOT Association for Tradition and Culture, the Triglav publishing company, Об’єднання рідновірів України, and Союз Славянских Общин Славянской Родной Веры.

Native Faith Forum, an interactive medium

Agnieszka Bukowska-Pastwa used the opinions published by the users of the <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/> website in her research and then the article. Since the author’s analysis of the website mentioned by Bukowska-Pastwa showed that the only place where users had the opportunity to post is the *Forum*, we shall assume that the content published in this part of the website has been used in her research.

It should be emphasized that providing a place to exchange ideas, opinions, and views, shows not only openness, but also courage of the organization. This separate part of the website has the essential function of integration. Let us look at the topics that were included in the interactive part of the official medium.

The dates of the first and last post of the topics allow us to conclude that the *Forum* is active, while the numbers of responses makes it possible to determine which topics have aroused the greatest interest of users. The most popular section on the *Forum* is “*Trodden earth*” with 2,242 responses, while more than a thousand responses are found in the *Native activities* (1,204) and *Native philosophy* sections (1,180). The following positions are occupied, respectively, by: *Rites* (688), *Native religious past* (408), *Announcements* (324), *Native culture* (270), and *Native faith unofficially* (48). After careful consideration it should be stated that there is no direct relationship between the number of responses and the number of threads,

31 The *Branches* category includes e-mail addresses of the representatives of the 5 branches: Mazovia (Warsaw), West-Pomerania (Szczecin), Pomerania (Koszalin), Warmia and Masuria (Olsztyn) and Krakow <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/kontakty/oddzialy.html> (access: 31.12.2018).

which means that the number of threads is not reflected in the popularity of the subject, as opposed to the number of responses, which, apart from the duration of the debate, demonstrates the attractiveness of the subject. The longest two themes were continued for more than nine years: *Native philosophy* and *Native faith activities*,³² while the subject, which was discussed for the shortest period and generated the least threads and least response was *Native faith unofficially*.

Forum Rodzimej Wiary. Content

No.	Topic	Number of threads	Number of responses	Date of publication of the first post	Date of publication of the last post
1.	Native philosophy	64	1180	29.11.2009	04.08.2018
2.	Native faith activities	104	1204	29.11.2009	04.08.2018
3.	Ceremonies	68	688	01.12.2009	02.08.2018
4.	Native religious past	35	408	25.02.2010	31.05.2018
5.	Trodden earth	197	2242	29.11.2009 ³³	26.02.2018
6.	Native culture	45	270	10.02.2010	20.03.2018
7.	Native faith unofficially	10	48	20.06.2011	04/01/2017
8.	Announcements	84	324	29.11.2009	02.08.2018

Own study based on data from <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/forum/4-forum-rodzimej-wiary.html> (accessed: 24.05.2018).

The lack of links to other online media on the official website is considered the rationale for seeking to stop for further official media of the religious organization.³⁴

32 Note that each topic contained threads. The presented results refer only to the topics. Research of the topics require extensive development; hence they are not included in this article.

33 The *Forum* contains information about one thread, *The Slavic MYTH*, which was started on 01.01.1970, however, the fact that the *Forum* analyzed had not existed then, and there was no Internet at that time, and the thread contains no content and due to the fact that the administrator has disabled the possibility of public comments in the thread, we do not recognize this date as the one of publication of the first post in the topic, Cf. <https://rodzimawiara.org.pl/forum/19-udeptana-ziemia/964-slowianski-mit.html> (access: 31.12.2018).

34 The author found a Facebook named Rodzima Wiara (published in the category of *Community*), however, due to a lack of clear links with the official website of the organization (there is a link to Wikipedia in the *Information* section), we do not include this page in the list of online media of the Rodzima Wiara religious organization. There is more doubt as to whether the Rodzima Wiara YouTube channel should not be included as a means of communication of the organization. The reason for doubt is that the channel's avatar is an image that appears on the official website as well, but there is no information about any relationship with the organization on the original page. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the *Rodzima Wiara* YouTube contains 3 audiovisual materials: *Kupala 2011* and *Fragment Hymnu Wszechsłowiańskiego (jp/w.II)* published on 4 September 2012 on top of a film *Słowiański pogrzeb żery Dobroslawa (Rosja)* [Slavic

Conclusion

Native Believers' lack of understanding of the mechanisms of how to get around the online media reality results in the fact that they have only one means of communication (website) and are absent on social networking sites. Diversity of media and attention to their content is an indicator of coordinated actions of those responsible for informing, educating and integrating the community. An interesting source, especially for researchers interested in *rodzimowiercy's* opinions and views (and not only) is *Forum Rodzimej Wiary*, at the official Rodzima Wiara website, which serves the function of a social networking site.

Given the fact that today social media is one of the more common sources of information for journalists, the absence of a religious organization in the online media market and social media sites is surprising.

The question whether Polish *rodzimowiercy* will take advantage of all the possibilities offered by the Internet remains an open question.

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