

# Playing the Game of Truth

## The National Heritage Regime in Poland and Contemporary Paganism

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### Introduction

Just before midday on the first Tuesday after Easter,<sup>1</sup> great throngs of people came to the two neighboring hills in Kraków: the Lasota Hill and the Krakus Mound. They moved from one to another, flocking around the attractions. On the Lasota Hill, housing the annual indulgence<sup>2</sup> celebration called Rękawka, visitors looked inside the medieval church of Saint Benedict and bought sweets, toys, or religious paraphernalia from the stands set up in front of the church. On the Krakus Mound, where the “Traditional Celebration of Rękawka” was organized, they looked at a reconstructed early medieval Pagan<sup>3</sup> temple, watched food being offered as sacrifice for the souls of ancestors, and could take a peek into a diorama of “the Slavic Netherworld” built at the bottom of the Krakus Mound. For the duration of the afternoon, the audience moved freely between the Catholic church and the re-enacted early medieval world. Circumventing both hills and meandering between them, visitors were combining two religious realities: that of Roman Catholics, who believe in the dominant religion in Poland, and that of marginalized Pagans, who regard Rękawka as an opportunity to cement their place within public space. When I asked one of the re-enactors organizing the part of Rękawka taking place on the Krakus Mound how people could move between two religious realities so freely, reconciling a Roman Catholic indulgence celebration with a re-enactment of Pagan beliefs, he answered that “in Kraków we don’t only have Catholicism. Not only that. Because that is not what the city grew from.”

During my fieldwork, I often heard from re-enactors organizing the early mediaeval part of Rękawka that Kraków's history had its roots in the Pagan and not in the Christian past. Their strong conviction and determination to defend this view directed my research, prompting me to investigate the complex way in which contemporary Pagan heritage is constructed and introduced into the public sphere. Significantly, this whole process takes place in circumstances (political, social, and historical) that favor Christian heritage (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2019) and thus require some skillful management and assessment of potential gains and losses. In order to describe how the introduction of the contemporary Pagan heritage to Kraków's heritage-scape (see Winter 2016) is managed, I use the notion of the "game of truth," coined by Michel Foucault in his reflection on the "regimes of truth" (1995, 1997). I apply the term "regime of truth" to describe competing visions of national heritage and the role religion plays within it; the concept of the "game of truth" allows me to present how re-enactors lead their grassroots battle to challenge the dominant Roman Catholic heritage.

The organizers of the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka want to make the heritage they create recognizable in the public sphere, as "heritage has become a way of talking about and organizing the relationship between people and significant aspects of their culture, and between people and their environments" (De Cesari 2012: 400). However, due to its hegemonic nature and the tendency to undermine "alternative and subaltern ideas about 'heritage'" (Smith 2006: 11), it has begun to be perceived in terms of a "heritage regime" (Bendix, Eggert, and Peselmann 2012), a concept based directly on the Foucauldian regime of truth. Within one such regime, there are many games of truth, the rules of which are produced historically, socially, culturally, and politically (Lorenzini 2015: 5). In the game of truth, victory is principally achieved by claiming "the truth" and forcing other players to act according to it. In this case, re-enactors struggling to have the place of Pagan heritage recognized in the public sphere participate in the game of trying to undermine the dominant Christian heritage regime of truth by playing their own trump cards of locality and performativity. Thus, they demonstrate the connection Pagan heritage has to the place, to evoke the Pagan past in performances in order to offer a project of Kraków's heritage. Since these cards are not strong enough, contemporary Paganism undergoes a process of culturalization in the course of the game, because two different religious truths cannot be acknowledged by all players. As Michael Lambek noticed, various religious truths existing in parallel may remain incommensurable.<sup>4</sup>

Importantly, the truth produced by Roman Catholicism transcends the religious domain. In Poland, it also affects politics and, consequently, the formation of national heritage, since the relations between the Roman Catholic Church, national identity, and state politics are very close (Kubik 1994;

Porter-Szűcs 2011; Zubrzycki 2006; Pasięka 2015). This situation constitutes a specific context for the analysis of the position of non-Roman Catholic religions in Poland (Pasięka 2015) but also for the Catholic Church's investment in creating collective memory (Bogumił and Głowacka-Grajper 2019) and religious heritage (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2019). National heritage in Poland is state-governed, closely related to and inspired by the worldview embraced by the ruling right-wing Law and Justice Party<sup>5</sup> and the contemporary state historical policy.<sup>6</sup> Nowadays, the government actively strengthens this connection. The present heritage discourse in Poland is therefore built on Christian values and promotes an interpretation of Poland's past that is biased toward Roman Catholicism, which results in a specific combination of heritage and religious regimes of truth. Consequently, Roman Catholicism constitutes the main normative framework (Pasięka 2015: 217) for interpreting Polish heritage.

The complicated position the organizers of the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka occupy in the game stems from the privileged status of the Roman Catholic Church and thus from the constraints early medieval re-enactors and contemporary Pagans experience when participating in national heritage formation. Although Pagan heritage as such exists in the public sphere, it is represented in museums, cultural institutions, and school textbooks as a remote element of the Polish, pre-Christian past, portrayed in the limited and often folklorized form of legends and tales. Only rarely is it depicted as the heritage of a particular historical period that produced its own social structures, culture, and religion and provided the preliminary foundations for the emergence of the Polish state. Pagan religious heritage—understood both in terms of the past and as a contemporary religion—is excluded from the public sphere almost completely. The aim of the described game of truth is thus to present Pagan religious heritage and also the Pagan past as alternatives for the dominant vision of Roman Catholic heritage and the Christian history of Poland.

I analyze the grassroots management of Pagan heritage in terms of game of truths. In order to develop this concept further in the chapter, I present the scene of the game, the players, the stakes of the game, the two trump cards of locality and performativity used by the players, and finally the game result. Significantly, the notion of a “game” is not only a metaphor for organizing the description of the ethnographic material, but an analytical tool that, on the one hand, reveals the complex relations between various regimes of truth and their influence on bottom-up initiatives and, on the other hand, allows us to investigate how regimes of truths are challenged in social practice. As I will demonstrate, the stakes in the game are high, as is the price to pay for remaining in it. It becomes apparent that in the present circumstances, the very fact of being in the game is a win for contemporary Pagans.

## Two Rękawka Celebrations

Rękawka is one of the most famous festivals in Kraków. Its participants and organizers, as well as ethnologists (Seweryn 1961; Pisarzak 1978; Oleszkiewicz 2016), describe it as an event deeply rooted in Kraków's history. Today Rękawka consists of two parts, one being a Roman Catholic indulgence celebration, the other an early medieval historical re-enactment of Slavic rituals and some martial skills. Both parts refer to the historical Rękawka celebration that, as sources confirm, was held on the Krakus Mound (albeit intermittently and with significant changes) at least since the sixteenth century (Seweryn 1961). The Roman Catholic part of Rękawka, taking place next to the Saint Benedict church, is organized by the Saint Joseph parish in the Podgórze district and remains an exclusively Catholic celebration. It consists of an indulgence holy mass and a small fair around the church, featuring carousels, stalls with sweets, and toys “made in China.” Before 2001 it was the only Rękawka event, but it has since been overshadowed by the historical re-enactment fair called “the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka.”

Both parts of Rękawka are held on the Tuesday after Easter, which binds the event tightly to the Christian ritual year. An interpretation developed (mostly) by nineteenth-century ethnologists states that the Rękawka fair is of Pagan origin and that the Saint Benedict church was erected in order to combat the Pagan cult on the Krakus Mound (Potocki 1861: X; Gloger 1903:



**Figure 6.1.** Saint Benedict church on the Lasota Hill, Rękawka, Kraków, 2018. © Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska.

161). Despite the efforts of Christians, Pagan elements did, in time, appear within the Catholic ritual; according to ethnologists studying the Rękawka fair, they could be observed in the celebration until the entire event was banned by the Austrian authorities in the second half of the nineteenth century, during the partitions of Poland (Seweryn 1961; Pisarzak 1978). Nowadays, elements that were identified as Pagan in the nineteenth century have been reintroduced in the form of historical re-enactment.

The idea of bringing back Pagan elements to Rękawka lay at the very core of the organization of the event on the Krakus Mound. The initiative came from the Podgórze Cultural Center (Centrum Kultury Podgórze) and the “Krak” Vistulan Warrior Host (Drużyna wojów wiślańskich Krak) and was supported by the district authorities. This part of Rękawka is financed partially from the district budget, partially by sponsors solicited by the re-enactors (local bakeries, Podgórze entrepreneurs). The budget of the celebration is, however, quite limited, and the success of the whole fair—as with many other historical re-enactment events—strongly depends on the goodwill and involvement of the re-enactors, who come to Rękawka from various regions of Poland. For them, the event opens the annual re-enactment season (from April to October) and also provides a unique opportunity to re-enact early medieval Slavic rituals in the exact place where they are believed to have been performed. The Traditional Celebration of Rękawka is an example of an amalgam of grassroots and top-down initiatives. The city of Kraków officially takes patronage over the re-enactment part of the event, which grants it a certain level of recognition. Thus, accepting the city label is a conscious element of managing the celebration, since its organizers aim at advertising Rękawka to a wide range of audiences. The other part—held by the Saint Benedict church—is not financially supported by Kraków’s authorities or mentioned in the advertisement campaign organized in the city. However, since the state national heritage policy is implicitly predicated on Roman Catholicism, the event next to the Saint Benedict church has become an element of Kraków’s heritage-scape. The script for the Roman Catholic part of the event repeats the form of many other indulgence celebrations and consists of a solemn liturgy in the church and a small fair around it. The fair at the bottom of the Krakus Mound is much more complex. It is prepared by the Krak Host, whose members are granted full freedom in this respect. Each year, the event has a different theme; in 2018 it was the Slavic Netherworld.

## **Players in the Game of Truth**

“After the anniversary of the Baptism of Poland two years ago, there appeared an idea to show more Slavic gods, to put more stress on it. You know,

Christianity was everywhere and our times [early Middle Ages] nowhere. So we had this idea to show it. This year we still continue realizing it, and we chose the Slavic Netherworld for this year.” I had this conversation a day after the Rękawka fair, in a bar in the Podgórze district. My interlocutor was a re-enactor, tired after a long day of enacting the Pagan past and a night spent with his friends at the bottom of the Krakus Mound. The interview concerned the various leading themes of subsequent Rękawka celebrations. A few other meetings with members of the Krak re-enactment group confirmed that the general motivation for presenting Pagan religion is its almost complete absence in the public sphere. The organization of the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka remedies this situation to some modest degree, since—as one member of the group told me—“this is what we can do.”

Although Rękawka is organized under the patronage of a local cultural center, the conceptual work remains in the hands of the Krak re-enactment group. Its members (with the help of fellow re-enactors from various parts of Poland) are the ones who organize and perform the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka. They constitute a group of very different people, unified in their interest in Kraków’s early medieval history and their conviction that this history should be widely known. Thus, they dedicate their time and energy to promote it during re-enactment events and also through cooperation with museums and cultural centers. They describe themselves as a democratic group in which decisions are made collectively; unlike most re-enactment groups, they do not have a leader. The script for Rękawka celebration is the result of their collective efforts. Anyone can propose an idea for the leitmotif for next year’s celebration, and—as one of the members of the Krak Host told me—this is the reason why it sometimes takes a lot of time to agree on a leading theme.

Although the group’s members share an appreciation for the Pagan culture and work toward introducing Pagan heritage to the public sphere, not all of them are contemporary Pagans. Some members are Roman Catholics; some declare themselves as atheists. Nevertheless, they all participate in the kindling of the “sacred fire” at the top of the Krakus Mound and perform the pre-Christian past together. Other re-enactors who take part in Rękawka are also of different denominations. However, their engagement in early medieval history results in a very particular attitude toward Paganism, perceived both as a historical and contemporary religion.

These re-enactors endeavor to have Paganism acknowledged as the actual root (or at least one of the roots) of Polish culture. Connection to place and to its local history is crucial in understanding contemporary Paganism and the idea of its heritage. While there are religious movements in Poland that embrace beliefs like Celtic or Wicca, which are geographically and cultur-

ally foreign, what Rękawka's re-enactors refer to is a religion researchers of contemporary Paganism in Poland define in terms of ethnic Paganism (Filip 2011). It is exceedingly focused on the bond with the local—in this case Slavic—gods, with ancestors, and with links to the place in which these ancestors lived. Its believers call this religion *Rodzima wiara*, meaning “Native Faith,” or *Rodzimowierstwo*, which stands for a particular Native Faith creed (see Simpson 2012). Scott Simpson, who investigated *Rodzimowierstwo*, noticed that “although nativeness is strongly linked to the past, it need not be frozen in time, but may be an element in an active process of indigenization of new influences” (2017: 66). Such an approach enables contemporary Pagans to regard the roots of Polish culture differently than in the official state-governed project of national heritage. Contemporary *Rodzimowiercy* “represent continuity with history, but this continuity attaches to a different set of anchor points than those emphasized by the Roman Catholic mainstream of Polish society” (Simpson 2017: 69).

Significantly, *Rodzimowiercy* understand contemporary Paganism as a continuation of the old faith, which provides them with a link with the past (Simpson 2017). It is a value contemporary Pagans share with early medieval re-enactors. These two groups—re-enactors and *Rodzimowiercy*—overlap to a significant degree, although not entirely (see Simpson 2012). Consequently, the group attempting to introduce Pagan heritage to the public sphere is not composed exclusively of *Rodzimowiercy*. It also includes historical re-enactors who dedicate their time and energy to the period of the early Middle Ages. The present work follows Simpson's practice of referring to the ones who do not follow the Pagan creed but feel a certain affinity with Pagan culture as *rodzimakulturowcy*. It is a term coined analogically to *Rodzimowiercy* but pertains to culture rather than faith. The author explains it as “Native Culture, following on the model of Native Faith” (Simpson 2017: 84); yet I would rather translate it as “cultural *Rodzimowiercy*.” Sometimes it is also justified to use the broader notion of “cultural Pagans,” since a certain reverence is quite often manifested by re-enactors toward other religions, such as Viking or Celtic. While cultural Pagans express general attachment to the pre-Christian past, cultural *Rodzimowiercy* also emphasize connections to places, evoking a particular space-time that embraces not only people from the past, but—through the link with locality—also in the present.

## The First Trump Card in the Game: Locality

Locality is therefore the first card to play in the game of truth. Rękawka organizers ostensibly refer to Kraków's origins, since the Krakus Mound in the

Podgórze district is where the city's history (allegedly) began. This area of Kraków is located on the bank of the Vistula River opposite to its most popular tourist attractions: the Old Town and the Kazimierz district. At the end of the eighteenth century Podgórze was an autonomous town, and it was incorporated into Kraków's borders in 1915. The present district boundaries do not correspond to the former town borders, which encompassed the western part of the contemporary district. The history of the area is a troubled one, especially in the twentieth century. In the early 1900s, Podgórze was a prosperous industrial district inhabited by a large Jewish community. During World War II, Kraków's ghetto was established there, together with the nearby Konzentrationslager Plaszow. Consequently, Podgórze became a recognized Holocaust site. The postwar Communist era was not particularly propitious for the district either, and in the first years after the political transformation, Podgórze remained in the shadow of other rapidly developing tourist sites in Kraków. Very recently, however, the district underwent a thorough transformation (Niedźwiedź 2007) and has since become a tourist attraction, a fashionable location featuring museums, restaurants, and bars. The growing popularity of the district has also encouraged the development of Podgórze's own identity and the construction of its heritage, based on certain (though not complete) autonomy from the heritage-scape of Kraków in general.

The results of Kraków's official conceptualization of Podgórze's heritage are apparent in the recently opened (in April 2018) exhibition in the Podgórze Museum.<sup>7</sup> The exhibition is entitled *The City under the Krakus Mound*, and although it presents the history of one district, the title could also refer to Kraków as a whole: the Krakus Mound is the alleged place of the burial of Kraków's legendary ruler Krakus, who is believed to have founded the city. The hill has become a symbol of Kraków and remains one of the places connecting the city's present to the remote past and its legendary beginnings. In spite of the mound's close association with Paganism, this religion is ignored in the above-mentioned museum exhibition; the pre-Christian religion is only presented as a clouded past, so distant and blurred that it escapes historical knowledge and belongs to the mythical realm of Krakus. The Pagan history is presented simply as a period preceding the Christian era, which began Kraków's "actual" history and continues until today. The Jewish history of Podgórze is also treated as a mere addition to the dominantly Roman Catholic historical narrative. The exhibition thus reflects the premises of the national heritage project, which situates Roman Catholicism at its very center. There is even a short animated movie shown in the historical part of the exhibition, with the Saint Benedict church appearing from the shadows at Podgórze's landscape and a huge, bright sun shining all over the screen

when the whole temple finally emerges at the foreground of the picture. Interestingly, the role of Roman Catholicism is not particularly emphasized in heritage events organized in Podgórze outside of the museum, since it constitutes a default element of local heritage (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2019). It is the Jewish heritage that gains more and more attention in the district, and tour guides focus predominantly on the ghetto area, Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory Museum, the former concentration camp in Płaszów, and other sites related to Jewish history. The Pagan heritage is only present in the public sphere during a single (if spectacular) event in the district: the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka.

Contemporary Pagans all over the world see their religion as the continuation of the faith of their ancestors (see Butler 2015). Therefore, the concept of nativeness seems to be crucial for the interpretation of present Pagan religions. Rodzimowiercy seek a connection with the elements of the landscape that they perceive as native. As Marion Bowman observed during her research in Glastonbury, contemporary spirituality is often strongly related to a particularly powerful place. She describes this phenomenon in terms of "topophilia" (Bowman 2000: 91). This notion helps to understand the importance the Krakus Mound holds for contemporary Pagans. They regard it as a meaningful place where their ancestors observed rituals and placed offerings for the gods. Rodzimowiercy also choose this place for the offering. Moreover, they built a sacred circle at the bottom of the hill, on the premises of an old quarry, which used to be a labor camp during World War II. There they welcome the spring, celebrate the summer solstice, and perform rituals to honor the dead. Although there are no historical sources describing local Pagan rituals, and scholars as well as believers try to reconstruct them using comparative methods and referencing other religions of the time, contemporary Pagans feel that the very act of performing rituals (different as they may be from the old ones) in the same place is enough to establish a connection with the past. Topophilia is thus closely related to the idea of nativeness in Rodzimowierstwo—it connects the faithful to a local place, to the local spirits of ancestors. As one of the re-enactors put it, "You know, there are medieval cemeteries, here, under the Krakus Mound, there in Płaszów, you see. They have been discovered by archaeologists, investigated. And they are our ancestors, they rest here, here . . . You ask me if the place is important. For me yes, it is, you have all these people here, they were living here, they died here, so . . . yes." As we were talking in Podgórze, each word "here" was emphasized by a move of his hand pointing to the vicinity of the Krakus Mound. Furthermore, "here" has a long history that needs to be re-created and performed in order to be recognized as local heritage.

## **The Other Card to Play: The Performativity of Rękawka**

Re-enactors who organize the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka are aware that the event will not gain recognition in terms of an actual religion. Moreover, such festivals are only seldom visible in the public, overshadowed by the omnipresent Roman Catholicism. This situation does not prevent re-enactors from endeavoring to make the Pagan religious heritage more popular. They therefore devote their time to create an attractive and memorable event evoking interest in the early medieval past. Re-enactors choose a very powerful tool to be noticed: performative enactments of the past. Presenting Pagan religious heritage in the form of historical re-enactment may be interpreted as another element used to gain an advantage in the game of truth.

Each year, the space around the Krakus Mound is organized in a similar fashion. The hill can be accessed only from one direction, which is why, before visiting the reconstructed early medieval encampment, visitors need to walk between stalls with contemporary products—folk jewelry, souvenirs, toys, food. Although the event’s organizers select the vendors and try to invite folk artists or craftspeople, the products offered there have nothing in common with the Middle Ages. Visitor information points set up by the festival’s organizers and their partner institutions (the Podgórze Cultural Center and Kraków Archaeological Museum) distribute leaflets with the event’s program and a brief history of Rękawka. Beyond the stalls begins the re-enactment of the early medieval past. Its organization changes a bit each year, depending on the leading theme of the event.

Since the 2018 theme was the Slavic Netherworld, upon entering the festival grounds visitors passed through the “gate to Nawia”—a place inhabited by gods and demons, where human souls were said to dwell after death. Visitors could choose to ignore the gate, but those who decided to walk through it entered the re-enactors’ vision of a Slavic sacred ritual. The supreme god Weles, accompanied by the goddesses of winter (Marzanna) and spring (Dziewanna), welcomed the “new souls” into Nawia and threatened them that they would stay in the realm forever, serving them, unless they made an offering. The new souls were guarded by demonic creatures known from nineteenth-century Slavic bestiaries—*Żmij*, *Bies*, and *Południca*—who prevented newcomers from leaving the Netherworld too quickly. Although all interactions between the re-enactors and the visitors were playful, some of the latter felt a bit upset with the re-enactors’ behavior and escaped “Nawia”; others played along, asking Weles for mercy. Those who managed to leave the Netherworld safely could go further and visit a re-created Pagan temple.

The structure was erected at the outskirts of the re-enactors’ encampment. It featured a light wooden frame and walls made of red fabric, which



**Figure 6.2.** Weles with goddesses Marzanna and Dziewanna in Nawia—Slavic Netherworld, Rękawka, Kraków, 2018. © Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska.

sheltered a wooden figure of Światowid, a four-faced deity. The figure was a replica of a historical artifact found during archaeological excavations and displayed in the Kraków Archaeological Museum. Since the identification of the god represented on the statue is still a matter of a heated dispute, re-enactors used the example of the figure to explain to visitors the complexities of research pertaining to Pagan religion. Re-enactors of various denominations of Rodzimowiercy, Roman Catholics, and also nonbelievers took shifts in front of the temple to inform the audience about Pagan religion. Some spectators snuck curious peeks inside the reconstructed Pagan temple, asking questions about the figure, the rites that were observed in such temples, and Slavic gods. Some visitors passed by indifferently, heading directly toward the early medieval encampment re-created at the bottom of the hill, where for a single day re-enactors could try to live as their ancestors had in the past. They set up tents and placed simple furniture (wooden tables and stools) in front of them; later they lit fires to cook food and cleaned weapons and sets of armor, preparing for the afternoon battle. All of them, including small children, wore historical attire sewn by hand and made of handwoven fabrics, in line with the fashions and technologies known in the early Middle Ages. Some items of clothing, tools, and ornaments made in that manner could be bought in Rękawka, available both to the audience members and

to re-enactors. Craftspeople displayed their work, mostly fabrics, pottery, jewelry, and leather accessories such as belts, pouches, and armor elements. Since handicraft products are not cheap, only a small group of visitors decided to buy historical souvenirs; re-enactors, in turn, saw the fair as an opportunity to add new items to their historical equipment and thus shopped eagerly. Visitors moved between tents, stopping to touch handwoven fabric or to try some flatbread baked over an open fire, as some re-enactors were selling food made on the premises. Spectators could hold a sword or a shield in their hands and take photographs with re-enactors. Some of them asked questions about the artifacts they saw or about life in the past; others were too timid and just looked on from a distance. For the entire day, visitors were moving along the bottom of the hill, visiting certain sections many times and just passing through others. The time they spent at the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka varied, from thirty minutes to several hours.

Like every year, the 2018 Rękawka fair started at noon with the kindling of a sacred fire at the top of the Krakus Mound. First, a procession of men and women in historical attire climbed the mound, carrying food offerings—some to be placed at the top of the hill, some to be rolled down from it. This time the fire was lit by a Jagiellonian University scholar, since the Pagan priest who usually performed the rite could not attend due to health issues. After the offerings for ancestors were complete, the event officially began. Short performances were enacted in front of the audience throughout the day. Three of them were related to the main theme of that Rękawka fair and represented legends connected to Slavic beliefs. The first performance told the story of the goddesses of winter and spring. One year Marzanna (winter) did not want to leave the human realm. Since people were starving because of the long winter, they needed to place offerings for her to persuade her to go back to Nawia and allow her sister Dziewanna (spring) to come. They were forced to make offerings from their very last supplies, risking death by starvation to make Marzanna go away. Eventually they succeeded, and spring finally arrived, bringing hope for a brighter future. The second play was presented in front of the reconstructed temple. It told the story of a female temple servant, called Siuda Baba, who ended her service performed in isolation and solitude and needed a young apprentice to replace her. After capturing a young girl and condemning her to a sad and lonely existence in the temple, Siuda Baba came back to her community expecting to live happily among people, only to be murdered as a person belonging to the nonhuman world. The third play presented the story of a cruel princess from the Lasota Hill, who managed to maintain her youthful appearance by killing men who courted her and absorbing their vital energy. One of them finally outsmarted the princess and saved his life, leaving her to perish.

Each of these stories was taken from folk legends told or read to children; members of the Krak Host rewrote and edited them to draw more emphasis to their relation to the actual Slavic religion, presenting them as possible elements in its canon. This, however, does not mean that the performances were enacted in a serious, solemn way, as a kind of religious drama. On the contrary, the rather gruesome tales of murder, sacrifice, and humankind's dependence on the whim of the gods were presented with a dose of situational humor, in a manner suitable for children (who were among the audience). As Rękawka is an event organized for families, the representation of the more cruel beliefs and the difficult living conditions of early medieval people is not possible; the only form that re-enactors can assume is the ludic one.

Other performances are shown to the audience during the Rękawka fair on a recurring (yearly) basis, although with a varying level of spectacularism. The first one is a warriors' race around the mound. Historical sources pertaining to Rękawka celebrations inform that it involved various games and competitions; the present-day races were conceived by the re-enactor organizers as a way to present how such games may have looked like (see Baraniecka-Olszewska 2016). The competition held in 2018 was a rather modest one, as only a dozen warriors decided to enter. Moreover, none of them was particularly determined to win, and the whole race appeared a bit slow. Another annually organized event involves a divination to foretell Kraków's fortunes for the coming year. In 2018 it was performed next to the re-created temple. A "priest" (one of the re-enactors) hid behind a huge loaf, asking three times whether he could be seen from behind the bread. The answer was no, which augured a prosperous year for the whole city. Interestingly, the prophecy was received by the vice-mayor of Kraków.

The most popular event among the audience members is the re-enacted battle staged next to the mound. Several dozen re-enactor warriors take part in it every year. Since no actual historical sources describe battles fought in the vicinity of Kraków in the tenth century, re-enactors invent them and perform before the audience, providing a short introduction, which justifies the historical probability of such an event. In 2018 the battle was entitled "Vistulan warriors against their invaders" and presented how the Vistulan tribe may have defended its territory from enemy raids. The closing event of the 2018 Rękawka fair was an anti-vampire burial, during which a faux corpse wrapped in a black shroud was pierced with a wooden stick through the heart before being buried. The organizers of the celebration explained that such a funeral rite corresponded with the idea of the Slavic Netherworld as a place full of demonic creatures that struck fear in our forebears, prompting them to invent ways to prevent such horrors from interfering with their daily lives. All performances were preceded by brief introductions given by

re-enactors, to provide the audience with a historical and religious context for the presented stories.

Performances often prove a successful means of transmitting knowledge about the history of groups that are silenced or oppressed, granting such history a certain agency to act within the society (Taylor 2006: 193). History performed in re-enactments thus holds a potential for affecting the present (Schneider 2011). This performative potential is used by re-enactors who bring the past back into play in order to influence contemporary social reality and help them construct Pagan religious heritage. Performed history not only strengthens the bond that contemporary Pagans or cultural Pagans build with the past, but also enables a transformation of the Christian-biased vision of Kraków's history as the city of John Paul II (Niedźwiedź 2017, 2019).

Materializing the Pagan past in the form of performance gave re-enactors an opportunity to confront their audience with the vision of Kraków's history they propose. The form of the event assumed by the organizers of the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka promote this idea effectively, as the event gains more popularity with every passing year. Furthermore, it has already overshadowed the Roman Catholic part of the festival and became an emblem of Rękawka for its visitors. The festivities held next to the Saint Benedict church are visited by fewer people, and the visitors tend to spend less time at the site. As one of Podgórze district's inhabitants in her mid-twenties told me, she has been coming to Rękawka for as long as she remembers. She has always visited the fair around the church, since this is what Rękawka was when she was little. However, she really looks forward to the event on the Krakus Mound, because something interesting is always going on and she meets more friends there. In this respect, the event's organizers have succeeded in finding a niche for introducing Pagan heritage to the public sphere in a ludic fashion and were granted a place there, acknowledged, and recognized by the municipal and district authorities.

## **By Way of Conclusion: In Order to Win, You Have to Make Sacrifices**

Performing the Pagan past in a playful way, reinvigorating folk legends in order to show their roots in the actual pre-Christian religion, and referring to the Pagan past as the actual history of Kraków are what re-enactors are allowed to present in the public sphere. The entire event is partially financed by the district authorities; it is given official city patronage and the permission to be organized within urban space. However, to keep all these resources, the organizers of the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka cannot

fill this local heritage project of enacting the Pagan past with contemporary Pagan religion. Managing this situation prompts re-enactors to self-culturalize the religious aspects of Rękawka. The price re-enactors need to pay in order to stay in the game is the outcome of certain secularization practices involving non-Christian religions. These practices are imposed by the dominant role of Roman Catholicism within the national heritage project.

As contemporary anthropological research on the subject has demonstrated, secularization is neither comprehensive nor homogenous, and there are many variants deriving from specific cultural and historical backgrounds (Asad 2003; Cannell 2010). Moreover, it is important to look at secularism as just one of many possible attitudes toward religions. As Lambek writes, “Although secularism (by definition) recognizes and perhaps produces transcendent religion, something we might call immanent religion continues unremarked and unbidden, or is seen as vaguely threatening insofar as it cannot be pinned down and governed” (2013: 25). When we focus on the “pinning down and governing” religion as enacted by the Roman Catholic regime of truth, the secularization practices appear a political tactic: an attempt to govern non-Catholic religion and deprive it of its worship dimension in the public sphere. Understood in this manner, secularization is easily recognized in top-down, state-governed practices limiting the access contemporary Pagan religions in Poland have to the public sphere. Thus, the culturalization of *Rodzimowierstwo* is a result of secularization tactics.

Although the notions of culture and religion are inseparable, focusing on the process of culturalization enables us to grasp what happens with religion when in political or legal discourses it is presented as culture (Joppke 2018) and not as—to use Michael Lambek’s (2013: 25) term—an “immanent religion.” The organizers of the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka would like to operate within the “immanent” frame, gain recognition for both historical and contemporary Paganism as an actual religion, and consequently use this credit to build a Pagan religious heritage. However, it is the strategy of culturalization of *Rodzimowierstwo* that allows them to stay in the game, since the trump cards they hold in their hands are too weak to secure them the ultimate victory. Although the performativity card allows the ludic past to materialize on stage through attractive historical re-enactments and stories full of legendary creatures, gods, and goddesses, the event is perceived in terms of leisure, a pastime not to be taken entirely seriously. The locality trump card allows the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka to be inscribed into Kraków’s heritage-scape, but situates the event among the city’s other traditions, entangled in an unbreakable connection with the Roman Catholic Rękawka.

Significantly, many participants of both Rękawka celebrations do not perceive the Roman Catholic and the Pagan events as incommensurable.

Visitors go from one hill to another, commenting that after having a look inside the Saint Benedict church, they go to see the medieval encampment. Standing on one hill, some say to their family members and friends, “Now let’s see another part of Rękawka.” When I asked passersby both on the Krakus Mound and on the Lasota Hill a question that many found a bit annoying—“Where is the actual Rękawka?”—people were pointing to one hill and then the other, saying, “You see here and there,” or “Here, where you’re standing and on the other hill.” When I asked, “And what is worth seeing at Rękawka?” the answers were also very similar: “An old church and the re-enactors’ performances on the mound.” And when, standing on the Lasota Hill, I finally decided to ask if what I was witnessing was a single Rękawka fair or two separate events, one older lady got a bit irritated by too many repetitive questions: “Child, please. This is the old part, there is the new part. But you see that all people are going both ways, to see both parts. This is how Rękawka is now, see?”

Aside from the organizers of the Traditional Celebration of Rękawka, most visitors do not distinguish between the two Rękawka fairs, but participate in one event. Among the dozens of visitors with whom I spoke, there was only one person who was not planning to see the part on the Krakus Mound. She came to the fair around the church with her husband and said that the new part of Rękawka is not what she was used to and that she did not like the crowds there. But even though she was reluctant to see what was happening on the Krakus Mound, she was still referring to the events there as the “other part” of Rękawka. Spectators do not experience any incommensurability between the events because they do not recognize both of them as religious. When I asked what happens in the Saint Benedict church, even tourists who were not from Kraków answered that there was a holy mass. And when I asked if there were any rituals performed at the Krakus Mound, usually my interlocutors replied that the event involved some plays and shows presenting medieval times. I inquired of several people about the kindling of fire at the top of the Krakus Mound, asking if they knew that this rite was usually performed by a Pagan priest. A few of my interlocutors were very surprised, but notwithstanding the information I shared, they were describing this ritual as “just Rękawka tradition.” Only the Roman Catholic event is seen as religious in nature; therefore the potential competition between the religious regimes of truth remains unnoticed.

The elements of pre-Christian religions performed and presented during the celebration remain pre-Christian in the chronological sense; in the eyes of the spectators, they are not related to contemporary Paganism and its heritage. The continuity between past and present religion—which constitutes the present-day core identity claim for Rodzimowiercy—remains unrecognized by the audience. Spectators perceive Rękawka as a theatrical recon-

struction of a legendary folk realm. As a creed without any fixed theology or ritual canon, featuring many local variations and individual forms of cult, *Rodzimowierstwo* is rarely taken seriously or recognized as a religion (Simpson 2017: 69–70). Therefore, it is granted only the status of local folklore within the national heritage regime. In Poland, the heritage regime allows the Roman Catholic past to become a national value. As far as this religion is concerned, the processes of heritagization and culturalization do not entail secularization. There is room for Roman Catholicism as an “immanent religion” within the national heritage regime. Other religions operate within this heritage regime according to the structure deriving from the hierarchical pluralism of religions in Poland (see Pasięka 2015). In the case of Rękawka, a smartly played game of truth grants Pagan heritage entrance to the public sphere, but neither the actions re-enactors undertake nor the rituals they perform are perceived as an actual religion by the spectators of the event. The audience is more likely to interpret them as mere re-enactment of past rituals, deprived of the “lived” religious content. Rękawka organizers have succeeded in introducing Pagan heritage to the public sphere, but they have not been equally successful in representing it as religious heritage. This is, however, a sacrifice the event’s organizers needed to make in order to stay in the game.

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## NOTES

1. My research on Rękawka was conducted for the HERILIGION: The Heritagization of Religion and Sacralization of Heritage in Contemporary Europe project in 2018, funded by Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) grant # 5087-00505A. It was a part of a broader study on Kraków’s heritage, and my task was to investigate how contemporary Pagan religious heritage is constructed in the circumstances of overwhelming dominance of Roman Catholic and Jewish identities of the city—also researched within the HERILIGION project. I was accompanied in my efforts by Dr. Alicja Soćko-Mucha, who kindly shared her fieldwork data with me, for which I am deeply grateful.

2. Indulgence is a ritual in the Roman Catholic Church. Participation in it, in accordance with the rules established by the Church, might contribute to the reduction of the time a soul would spend in purgatory after death.
3. In the chapter I decided to use terms “Pagan” and “Paganism” both for the historical and contemporary religion, emphasizing, however, when I refer to modern times only. The notion of Neo-Paganism is severely criticized by believers, as it ignores the connection to past religion that is crucial for contemporary followers. Although they also reject the term “Paganism” that was introduced by Christians fighting with local beliefs, I have decided to use it—just as other scholars investigating contemporary Pagan religions—rather than referencing only the names of specific native religions, which would narrow the analysis too much.
4. Michael Lambek, “Facing Religion, from Anthropology,” *Anthropology of This Century* 4 (2012), <http://aotcpress.com/articles/facing-religion-anthropology/> (accessed 31 August 2021).
5. The Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) Party formed a government in Poland in the autumn of 2015; however, its presence on the political stage has been felt for much longer. Thus, the particular historical policy supported by the party and incorporated into its political program has already started to become visible in the public sphere in the first decade of the twentieth-first century (Traba 2010).
6. On the current historical policy in Poland, see Korzeniewski 2008; Łuczewski 2017; Traba 2010; and Wolff-Powęska 2007.
7. A branch of the Museum of Kraków.

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