Changing Constructions of the Pagan in the Irish National Print Media 1900–2013

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH NOTE

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ABSTRACT

This research note examines how the terms 'pagan' and 'paganism' have variously been used in Irish national print media. It does this to investigate how Irish identity was constructed as the Republic of Ireland changed to a secularising society where the hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church substantially weakened. It finds that the trope of 'pagan' has been used to represent moral threats or political threats (such as the growth of Nazism or secularism) or acknowledge the influence of paganism (defined as ancient religious elements) on Irish culture. Research on Irish Pagans and related eco-spiritualities is a nascent field of study and this research note aims to contribute to its development. Limitations of the present study are outlined and avenues for future research are discussed.

Introduction

This research note examines how pagans and paganism were reported and discussed in the three largest daily broadsheet newspapers published in the Republic of Ireland since the beginning of the twentieth century. Ronald Hutton's study of modern paganism in southern Britain identifies four prevailing discourses (or 'languages') that have been used to discuss 'the pagan'. Hutton outlines these four discourses of pagans and paganism as: a barbaric pre-Christian age; a progressive classical civilization; a foundational, unifying 'world' religion; a mechanism for secular humanists to reconnect to the natural world. He explores how each of these has entered popular consciousness in British modernity through being *proposed* by scholars and *explored* and *developed* by writers and artists. This research note demonstrates that, although there are some similarities in the way in which 'pagan' has been discussed in representative samples of the Irish mainstream media, the lens of Roman Catholicism has had a substantial impact on the way pagans have been reported in the Irish print media. Additionally, the impact of Catholicism on reporting is not shared by the established religion in the English context.

Articles from *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Independent*, and *The Irish Press* were selected for analysis. These daily periodicals, according to Christopher Morash, were the 'big 3' broadsheet newspapers over the time frame of this research. The third, *The Irish Press*, had

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a much smaller run of just over 65 years and ceased publication on the cusp of the seminal *Celtic Tiger* years in 1995. For reasons of completeness, however, it has been included in this analysis. *The Irish Times* had a more restricted circulation compared to the other two nationals, but "its influence nonetheless remains disproportionately strong" (Morash 149) and it has for a long time been regarded as the Irish broadsheet newspaper of record. *The Irish Press* was considered the official organ of the Fianna Fáil (centrist conservative republican party) and *The Irish Independent* was considered "broadly nationalistic" (Morash 148).

The form of analysis applied to the articles sourced is drawn from Pasi Ahonen's (34–47) review of how the closure of a successful forestry concern in Finland was reported in local newspapers. Ahonen describes trope analysis thus:

> Trope is a term common in literary criticism where the concept is used to refer to a repeated theme or motif. Tropes are closely linked to genres. In a given genre, tropes appear as familiar key characters, settings, events or plot lines. In this study, my aim is to identify the tropes that appear in the public discourse on the shutdown decision and its consequences in the print media. The public discourse should not be treated as one story. Rather, it is a collection of news stories, reports, carefully considered opinions, 'gut reactions' and other texts that together form a contradictory, conflicting and contested public discourse on the mill shutdown and its various effects, justifications and interpretations. (36)

Articles which included references to pagans, paganism or any aspect of 'the pagan' in their titles were obtained from electronic resources. The Proquest Historical Newspapers™ database archives articles from *The Irish Times* from its foundation in 1859 until 2012 and it is possible to search articles by titles through the product's advanced search option. The full text of articles published in *The Irish Times* in 2013 was available from the Proquest News and Newspapers™ database which is also searchable by article title. The full text of articles in *The Irish Independent* and *The Irish Press* were searchable in the Irish Newspaper Archive™ online database.

When conducting searches in The Proquest Historical Newspapers™ database, the term 'pagan*' was employed to return articles with 'paganism' or 'pagans' in their titles. Throughout this research note, these terms will be referred to as *the pagan trope*. This pagan trope is treated variously throughout the dataset in a way that was not clearly differentiated for readers of these articles at the time. For example, during the years between the ending of World War I and the beginning of World War II, several warnings (usually from members of the Church hierarchy) were made in relation to 'the New Paganism'. However, this new paganism was often identified by specific events or practices that a particular bishop found objectionable (which could range from the introduction of new dance steps to the rise of Hitler in Germany or the rise of Mussolini in Italy). During this time frame, to decry something as 'pagan' was to warn against it so that it could be excluded from the daily reality of life as lived in Ireland at that time. Separate pagan tropes may not have existed in the minds of editors and journalists and it would not serve this study if such a distinction were suggested.

Sources which made passing references to words associated with 'pagan' but did not attempt to discuss the concept in detail were removed (as in reviews of plays titled "A Pagan Place"). It was not possible to conduct a search that was specific to titles in the Irish Newspaper Archive™ database, so all items with these terms included in the text of the article were returned. These articles were then reviewed and those which did not include the terms or variations of the terms 'pagan' and 'paganism' were removed from the analysis. In total, 419 viable articles were identified which variously used the pagan trope in their

Table 1. Articles containing Pagan trope in titles by decade.

Decade	Irish Independent		Irish Press (1932–1988)		Irish Times		Total Number
	Frequency	Mean	Frequency	Mean	Frequency	Mean	
1900–1909	4	0.4	N/A		10	1	14
1910–1919	4	0.4			5	0.5	9
1920–1929	28	2.8			13	1.3	41
1930–1939	102	10.2	47	5.9	40	4	189
1940–1949	11	1.1	5	0.5	7	0.7	23
1950–1959	12	1.2	10	1	5	0.5	27
1960–1969	5	0.5	9	1.1	4	0.4	18
1970–1979	3	3	7	0.7	12	1.2	22
1980–1989	2	2	2	0.2	8	0.8	12
1990–1999	13	1.3	0	0	11	1.1	24
2000–2009	9	0.9	N/A		14	1.4	23
2010–2013	8	0.8			9	.9	17
Total	201		80		138		419
Overall average of articles published per year	1.8		1.2		1.2		1.4

titles: 201 (48%) appearing in *The Irish Independent*, 138 (33%) in *The Irish Times*, and 80 (19%) in *The Irish Press*. A breakdown of the number of articles which appeared in each source over each decade of the analysis is provided in Table 1.

As will be outlined below, all the articles were analysed to see if they represented pagans or paganism as a threat. Each article was then placed into one of four central categories of analysis, which emerged from the dataset to determine how they were viewed. The category of *political* variously discussed right-wing, left-wing, extremist or secular ideologies as pagan. The category of *moral* discussed pagans in one of three ways. The first denounced practices such as drinking, gambling, 'unfeminine behaviour', attendance at sporting events or foreign films, and uncouth behaviour as pagan. The second discussed pagans as potential future converts to Catholicism. The third moral categorisation of pagan saw it as something non-Christian or non-Catholic. This latter sub-category may have been informed by a wider understanding of paganism in negative terms (what one does not believe in, rather than what one does believe in); for example, the primary definition of pagan given in the 1990 edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* is "a person not subscribing to any of the main religions of the world, esp. formerly regarded by Christians as unenlightened or heathen" (Allen 855). The category of *temporal* discussed pagan survivals and classical civilizations, usually in a non-judgmental way. Finally, the *spiritual* category discussed how people who identified as pagan practised their faith.

Identity, Religion, and 'Irishness'

National identity in the Republic of Ireland remains largely bound to the Roman Catholic Church (Inglis, *Moral,* "Catholic"; Fuller). In recent years, however, the influence of the Catholic Church on social and political life has waned as a result of a range of factors, including rapid economic growth (McWilliams) and the development of an increasingly ethnically diverse population (Share, Corcoran and Conway; Maguire and Murphy). The most significant influence on the reduction of Church hegemony stemmed from a range of internal scandals, particularly the extent of sexual and physical abuse of children by priests

or within Catholic institutions and the ensuing 'cover-up' perpetuated by certain members of the Irish hierarchy (Lynch 54–86). The publication of reports of official government investigations into the extent of, and poor response to, child abuse within the Church that appeared in the late 2000s (such as the Ryan and Murphy Reports in 2009, see Government and Ryan; Commission of Investigation) led Pope Benedict XVI to write a pastoral letter to Catholics in Ireland the following year, in which he claimed that clergy who had abused children had "forfeited the esteem of the people of Ireland" (Benedict XVI 8).

In his sociology of Irish Catholicism, *Moral Monopoly*, Tom Inglis sets out in detail how the religious *habitus* of Irish Roman Catholics emerged from the intertwining of Irish identity with Roman Catholicism. Inglis also points to the fact that, in Ireland, "many traditional pagan practices have been successfully incorporated in formal Church rituals" (25), such as the Wake, faith-healing, visiting holy wells, pilgrimages, outdoor vigils, and usage of rosary beads. This does not mean that all pagan practices were syncretised with all of Irish Roman Catholicism's 'magical practices'. The primacy afforded to the virtue of chastity, for example, was set against pagan morals which were portrayed as being overtly sexual.

The usage of the term 'pagan' is particularly interesting in the Irish context, having been variously used to refer to 'un-Irish' activities by religious and political interests, despite other groups claiming that paganism is Ireland's 'indigenous' religion. This research note examines the engagement of mainstream Irish print media with the trope of 'pagan' and how the media can focus on a powerful social imaginary and use it to construct their own contrasting version of an accepted form of 'Irishness'. Similar research has been conducted in the past on portrayals of Muslim and Irish social imaginaries as a means by which the British media defend their own constructions of British identity (Nickels, Thomas and Hickman). In short, the research note examines how the Irish media's reference to one particular trope has been used to address changing notions of Irish identity which has long been a fluid process (O'Boyle).

Neil O'Boyle writes that, due to the presence of competing communities and conflicting identity narratives, "Irishness within Ireland remains contested and uncertain" (353). Jim MacLaughlin discusses how such fluid understandings of Irish identity represented a threat to the emerging hegemony of nineteenth-century bourgeois nationalists and their project of developing an economy which prioritised the values of property owners above those of other groups, such as the rural poor and Travellers. The development of the Irish state required the construction of an idealised form of Irish identity:

> Irish nationalism, simply considered as a struggle for the control of territory has always striven to control population and to produce an Irish 'people' as a political community. The Irish nation was a historical system of exclusions and dominations, a place where the patriarchal values of the rural bourgeoisie occupied pride of place. (MacLaughlin 138)

If a social imaginary is "that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor 23), 'exclusions' perform a powerful role in determining the legitimacy of an imagined national community. Studying representations of such excluded groups and changes in the *manner* in which they are represented and discussed assists understandings of how Irish identity is imagined during periods of broader social change.

The proportion of people normally resident in Ireland who identify as Roman Catholic dropped from a high of 94.9% in 1961 to 84.2% in the census of 2011, but the actual congregation of Catholics in Ireland "at 3.86 million strong was the highest since records

began" (Central Statistics Office 6) in 1881. Sociologists of religion in Ireland have often pointed out that the *way* in which Irish Roman Catholics *do* and *experience* their faith may have changed profoundly in recent years (Inglis, "Catholic"; Fuller)**,** but it still remains the dominant religious grouping and 'the' Church in the Republic.

Pagans, Neo-pagans, Druids, Wiccans, and adherents of other eco-spiritual traditions do not receive a mention in the 2011 census; it can only be assumed that they are somehow represented in the 1,940 pantheists or 14,118 affiliates of 'other religions' (Central Statistics Office 48). This might be due to the variety of self-identifications of those who are affiliated to the hugely diverse range of Pagan religions in contemporary Ireland. Even if individuals self-identify as Pagan, this will be counted in the 'Other Religions' category. Jenny Butler attests that it is more common to refer to 'Paganisms' to reflect the huge degree of fluidity that exists among people who practise non-dogmatic pantheistic eco-spiritualities ("Irish"). The reasons why people choose to identify as a particular religion in an official Government form are influenced by many factors and it is acknowledged that obtaining a clear picture of the number of Pagans in Ireland is difficult. As the "ultimate authority for Pagans is not a scripture, a prophet, a priest or any social institution, but personal spiritual experience" (Aldridge 193), the highly reflexive, subjective nature of Pagan spirituality often makes it a 'hard to reach' area of academic inquiry. Butler ("Irish") remarks that this has led to much misinterpretation of Paganisms in Ireland, which is due to the hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church and a resistance among some pagans to engage with 'mainstream' institutions, including the media. Some Irish Pagans have claimed that the drift caused between media which believe themselves to be charged with providing simplistic explanations and a religious tradition which is sometimes reticent about engaging with the mainstream media is liable to lead to misunderstandings and stereotyping at best and to stigmatisation and seclusion at worst (Smith). In other words, when Pagans are misrepresented by the mainstream media, they very understandably become reluctant to agree to further interviews and this may create a cycle where a lack of general awareness about Pagan beliefs and practices continues.

General Findings

Two things are immediately noticeable from Table 1. Firstly, *The Irish Independent* published substantially more articles with the 'pagan trope' in the title than the other two newspapers. Secondly, and more importantly, almost 55% of the items were published in the two decades between 1920 and 1939. Given that the second largest amount of articles was published during the decades 1990–1999 and 2000–2009 (especially when it is considered that *The Irish Press* ceased publication in 1995 and the articles that had a variation of the term 'pagan' in their titles were drawn from a smaller pool of resources), the question arises whether the discussions of the pagan trope had a different focus and emphasis in articles produced in the twenty-first-century Irish mainstream media than those returned for the 1930s.

The texts of all the articles were uploaded to MaxQDA software (a software application which is used to analyse qualitative data such as text) and coded according to the vocabulary with which the pagan trope was discussed in each article. Henri Nickels, Lynn Thomas and Mary Jane Hickman's analysis of how Irish and Muslim communities in the UK were represented in the British press over a 33-year period found that these communities were portrayed as posing different forms of 'threat' to Britain, although the nature of this threat

Table 2. Threat/non-threat category articles by decade.

Decade	Non–threat	Threat	Total
1900–1909	7	7	14
1910–1919	2	7	9
1920–1929	13	28	41
1930–1939	40	149	189
1940–1949	5	18	23
1950–1959	6	21	27
1960–1969	12	6	18
1970–1979	14	8	22
1980–1989	6	6	12
1990–1999	9	15	24
2000–2009	16	7	23
2010–2013	13	4	17

varied. Similarly to this study on the British press, the data collected for the present study were arranged into two categories. Articles which spoke of pagans or paganism in a negative or ominous way were assigned to the 'Threat' category and those which did not were assigned to the 'Non-Threat' category. Thus 66% of the articles (n=276) were assigned to the 'Threat' category and 34% (n=143) to the 'Non-Threat category'. As Table 2 shows, there is no clear division between representing the pagan trope across the time frame of the entire dataset; pagans and paganism are represented as both threat and non-threat in all the decades from the beginning of the twentieth century until the near present. However, it is also noticeable that the pagan trope was seen as substantially more 'threatening' in the earlier half of the dataset and non-threatening in the latter portion: 76% of the articles collected in the years between 1900 and 1959 were placed in the 'Threat' category; 60% of those collected in the years between 1960 and 2013 were categorised as being in the 'Non-Threat' category.

Following the application of this categorisation as a primary index to the items sourced, four central categories for organising the data analysis were developed: *Political* (which examined how the trope was applied to various regimes and ideologies); *Moral* (which referred to the various forms of ethics and ethical behaviour which was labelled as pagan or associated with pagans); *Temporal* (which referred to various ways in which historical understandings of the pagan trope were reported); *Spiritual* (which referred to items which professed to explore various representations of pagan spirituality).

The Pagan as Threat

As mentioned above, almost two thirds of the articles (276 items) associated the pagan trope with some form of threat. Of these, the majority (n=151, 55%) referred to '*moral threats*'. Almost half of the items in this category described non-Christian (and particularly non-Catholic) values as evidence of the spread of paganism throughout the world (for example, "Menace of Paganism: The Catholic Alone Will Survive", *Irish Independent*, 15 October 1930) as shown in the perceived moral laxity among young people (especially women). In 43 articles, debauchery or what was considered immoral behaviour (such as public drunkenness, female involvement in sports, new fashions in clothing, the usage of coarse language at polo matches) was associated with the pagan trope. In 14 articles, the growing 'materialism' of young people was described as evidence of the growth of pagan ideals and 10 articles linked criminality or violent behaviour with paganism. Most of the

connections were made in speeches or sermons given by senior figures in the Church or by Catholic intellectuals. In 27 articles, there was explicit reference to England. Indeed, several of these articles used the phrase 'Pagan England', which appeared to have been in common usage during the first half of the twentieth century. Concerns about the impact of cultural imperialism on the values of young Catholic people (particularly the influence of Hollywood films and English newspapers) were referred to in 12 articles. The pagan/moral threat connection was most prevalent in articles published in the 1930s, but 4 instances were recorded in the 2000s.

The second largest grouping of articles which represented the pagan trope as a threat was under the heading 'political' (106 articles). Most of them were published in the 1930s and referred primarily to the growth of Nazism in Germany and to Italian fascism. Although some articles made specific reference to the project of creating a pagan religious order that would serve as a Nazi faith system, most vilified the Nazi regime as pagan on the grounds of its persecution of the Jews and its opposition to the Roman Catholic Church. In Ireland, the largest number of articles which used the pagan trope to represent a political threat referred to measures which attempted to secularise the state through the legalisation of divorce or contraception or through the introduction of measures which would lessen the influence of the Church in the life of the people of the State. In 16 of the articles, pagan was associated with a left-wing political threat and referred chiefly to anti-religious policies in the former USSR.

The Pagan as Non-Threat

Just over one third of the articles (143 items) used terms which represented pagans and paganism as non-threatening: 62% (89) were categorised as *temporal*, 25% (36) as *spiritual*, and 12% (14) as *moral*. The *temporal* articles discussed pagans in relation to the periods of classical history or archaeology (both in Ireland and in Greco-Roman civilization) and in relation to Irish folklore. A noticeable element of a sizeable amount of these articles related Ireland's pagan past to contemporary cultural practices (such as Christmas and Halloween). Only 14 articles attempted to explore the experiences or beliefs of people who identified as Pagans or neo-pagans and all but 2 of these were published after 2000. However, in-depth analysis of the diversity of pagan beliefs in the sample of articles is noticeably scarce. Only 9 of the articles discussed the pagan in terms of artistic expressivism, where interviews with writers and musicians communicate a desire romantically to express the 'spirit' of nature.

Finally, besides the temporal perspective on paganism as a 'pre-Christian faith', there is also the *moral* perspective on the same sub-category. This includes items which were generally published in the first half of the twentieth century; they referred to the missionary work of the Irish Roman Catholic Church and its aim to convert pagans. Most of these articles discussed 'pagans' in Africa and Asia in terms which are expressly benevolent, given their status as potential future Catholics.

Discussion

The period 1900–2013 was chosen as the time frame for the analysis as it encapsulates most contemporary attempts to define modern Irish identity and as it highlights the key political, social, and economic turns which this process involved. This period also covers most of era when the hegemonic influence of the Church on Irish society rapidly declined.

Instead of Ireland undergoing an economic or political revolution in the nineteenth century, Inglis (*Moral*) writes that Ireland underwent a 'devotional revolution' at that time, which resulted in Roman Catholicism being cemented with Irish identity. Inglis summarises the four main reasons why this happened: Roman Catholicism provided a sense of ontological security at a time when language and cultural identity were rapidly lost; the gradual disappearance of poorer classes who had been oriented to 'magical practices' rather than organised religious institutions; the Roman Catholic Church provided a 'respectable' mechanism for Irish society to participate in the modern civilizing process that had taken place throughout Europe (Elias); the sublimation of class grievances by the British Government. Just as the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution triggered fundamental changes in the way life was lived in most of Europe during the 'long nineteenth century', Inglis states that the 'long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism' emerged from a Devotional Revolution which had an impact on how people lived their lives and saw their place in society. This process began to come to an end in the mid-1980s. Inglis points out that this does not mean that religion in Ireland is dying, but rather that Irish Roman Catholics are increasingly less likely to see the institutional Church as the arbitrator of morality:

> As Bourdieu would suggest, while the acquisition of religious capital in the religious field is still based on people being spiritual and ethical, Irish Catholics are increasingly devising their own paths to spirituality and morality. (Inglis, *Moral* 205)

The following recent example may be indicative of this. The International Eucharistic Congress was held in Dublin in June 2012. In the week preceding this event, *The Irish Times* ran a series of articles titled "My Faith" in which individuals reflected on their relationship with Roman Catholicism. In one of these reflections, a lapsed Catholic commented on her time in a convent school:

> And I didn't like all the paganism: worshipping statues, using holy oil, making sacrifices. If you want to be a pagan, be a pagan, but don't borrow or steal their practices. (Boland)

This comment might point to a lack of awareness of modern Paganism and eco-spiritualities and/or nature religions, but it also equates 'all the paganism' with un-reflexive religious practices. The greatest shift in the use of the pagan trope in the articles surveyed is the move away from focusing on foreign political extremism, internal processes of secularisation, and debauchery towards seeing paganism as a legitimate religious system in its own right. This 'turn' is synchronous with the ending of the 'long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism' discussed by Inglis.

To illustrate, the earliest statement by a self-confessed pagan in the dataset was from the German nationalist General Eric Ludendorff who was quoted in an article in *The Irish Press* on 9 April 1935: he claimed to be proudly anti-Christian on the grounds that Christianity was anti-nationalistic and supportive of what he imagined was a Jewish conspiracy (Anon). By contrast, on 24 August 2013, *The Irish Independent* published interviews with three followers of Paganism (Smith). All three discussed coming to Pagan beliefs though a process of personal spiritual exploration that is respectful of all religious traditions and perspectives. The fact that this latter form of article, although smaller in number, has become more prevalent since the 1990s may be indicative of the ending of the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism. The Pagans interviewed borrowed their spiritual practices from a number of religious traditions and conducted personal spiritual quests on their own terms. These are clearly important facets of what Paul Heelas describes as New Age approaches to spirituality.

The 'long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism' may have begun with the 'Devotional Revolution', but this research tentatively suggests that it may have ended with what Heelas et al. refer to as the 'Spiritual Revolution', where the individual subjectively undertakes a search for personal fulfilment, rather than acquiescing to the rules of an external authority or institution.

The pagan trope in the Irish print media, as shown in this sample of articles taken from the three most influential mainstream broadsheet newspapers in Ireland over the time period covered, has been deployed for various purposes. It has been used to refer to the perceived failings of Irish Catholic Society and to characterise the external enemies to the project of constructing a Catholic Irish *habitus* through projecting the pagan on to 'good foreigners' (African and Asian non-Christian 'pagans' waiting, in the Christian view, to be converted) and 'bad foreigners' (German Nazis, Russian communists, Italian fascists, British secularists). This analysis also demonstrates that, in the diverse uses of the pagan trope, the pagan is not always seen as a threat and many articles discuss its role as something which is part of Ireland's past as well as part of contemporary culture.

The largest *lacuna* in this body of articles on pagans is, however, the voice of Pagans themselves, which is significant, given that, as Butler writes,

> The neo-pagan movement has been greatly misconstrued, largely due to its low public profile… Due to the lack of public awareness of what neo-paganism actually is, often the only source that has an impact on public consciousness is media accounts, which are frequently biased or consist of snippets that don't go into much explanatory depth. Media presentations of Paganism lead to subsequent popular understandings (often misunderstandings) of it within the general population. ("Irish" 113–14)

By the mid-1990s, Heelas had noted "many signs that another [pagan] revival is underway" (88) and almost ten years later Cole Moreton reported it becoming part of mainstream culture in the UK. However, as mentioned earlier, due to the lack of census data, it is difficult to ascertain how many people in Ireland affiliate with a religious system related to Paganism.

While some academic research on contemporary Irish Paganism has been conducted (Butler, "Ethnographic"), misconceptions continue, given that media misrepresentations of Irish Pagans and their beliefs persist. In June 2013, the Association for Catholic Priests in Ireland stated that the decline in the number of Irish people who practise as Roman Catholics has led to a belief among bishops and priests that people are "turning pagan" (McGarry). This research note has demonstrated an imbalance in the reportage in relation to an increasingly visible religious community in Ireland. However, this research is limited in its scope (in that it has identified relevant articles by title only) and in its range (in focusing solely on the three biggest national broadsheet newspapers in Ireland). A more comprehensive search would extend the scope to include other news sources (including tabloid and local newspapers as well as electronic news sites) and to search for other nature-based spiritual traditions as well as Paganism and neo-Paganism. The academic field of Pagan studies in Ireland is in a nascent phase; perhaps it goes without saying that further empirical research is required not only on what is written and said about 'pagans', but also on what Pagans as a religious grouping actually do and believe. It is hoped that this research contributes to this growing field. It is particularly important that new contributions are made to the sociology of religion in Ireland, as Irish society undergoes a transformation from Roman Catholic dominance to a post-Catholic milieu.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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