Neo-Pagan Groups in Central-Eastern Europe

Abstract
Over recent years, a new phenomenon called polytheistic Reconstructionism emerged among the neo-Pagan milieu. Groups belonging to this stream of neo-Paganism claim that they inherit a long tradition reaching back to the ancient times. A fieldwork study on these groups, conducted in several countries of Central-Eastern Europe indicates their intense networking and ability to create transnational structures.

Keywords: religion, nationalism, neo-Paganism, Reconstructionism, ethnicity, Paganism, New religious movements

Introduction
The subproject prepared by the Faculty of the Humanities at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (formerly known as Warsaw Agricultural University) was concentrated on groups representing the so-called polytheistic reconstructionism, which is a brand of neo-Paganism inspired by folklore and ethnicity. The principal investigator was Dr. Piotr Wiench, an assistant professor at WULS.

According to the definition by Timothy Jay Alexander, “Polytheistic Reconstructionism, sometimes simply referred to as Reconstructionism, is the practice of rebuilding an ancient cultural pre-Christian religion based on the best available archaeological evidence and, where evidence is lacking, making inferences from scholarly comparisons to similar cultures and religions, both ancient and modern” (Alexander, 2007, p. 16). The groups chosen for the fieldwork were selected according to their conformity to the above stated features.

The main objective of the fieldwork was to interview the key activists/leaders of the selected groups in several countries of Central-Eastern and Southern Europe (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary and Serbia) to obtain a comparative perspective of the contemporary reconstructionist movements in Central-Eastern Europe.
Methods

The research was done using the qualitative approach solely. The main research tools were 17 semi-structured interviews with key activists/leaders of the target groups. The interviews were based on a questionnaire which contained five basic sections (characteristic of the group, ideas, activity, tradition, Paganism and the social mainstream).

The emphasis in the interviews was on the ideas of the group, on the concept of tradition and on the problem of the re-construction and construction of tradition. Sources of legitimacy for the group were especially important to its members who were usually engaged in seeking sources in antiquity for the tradition they represent.

Results

As the members of the movements state themselves, they have gathered to express their solidarity for the ethnic, indigenous, native and/or traditional religions of Europe and the other regions of the world (WCER, 1998).

The research also revealed the process of integration and unification of the neo-Pagan religious movements which are driven by the need to unite, because they perceive themselves as an oppressed minority. In some cases, there is clear evidence of this discrimination, including some forms of legal discrimination on religious grounds. Yet another topic of this research involves the sources of inspiration for these movements. It disclosed very distant locations and traditions involving cases such as the Hungarian neo-Shamans.

The main research findings can be summarised as follows:

- The target group patterns of behaviour and activity occurring with striking regularity within groups which have nothing in common and which never even had an opportunity to meet.
- Most of the groups claim that they are heirs of ancient traditions.
- They usually stress the role of nature as the source of divinity.
- They claim that they focus on the reconstruction of extinct or eradicated traditions.
- Although some groups display certain latent forms of radicalism, the majority is not politically engaged.
- None of the groups has developed a strategy for recruitment of new members and no conversion-oriented activities are present in their activities.
- They tend to represent a conservative set of values.
Discussion and conclusions

The most interesting part of the research findings is the insight into an ongoing process of globalisation within the New religious movements which leads to an integration of the reconstructionist movements. This process has passed through two distinctive stages. First the World Congress of Ethnic Religions, which represents mostly the European groups, was created. Later the close cooperation of WCER with Hindu groups began.

Both the Reconstructionists and Hinduists define themselves as original, ethnic, native religions. This permits close collaboration and, with the help of the Indian diaspora, the development of an extended network of participating groups worldwide.

References


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Neopagonių grupės Vidurio ir Rytų Europoje

Santrauka

Pagrindinės tyrimo temos apėmė grupių charakteristikas, idejas, veiklas, tradicijas, pagonybės ir socialinio meinstrymo santykius.

Pastebima, jog pastaraisiais metais neopagonių aplinkoje atsirado naujas reiškinys, vadinamas politeistiniu rekonstrukcionizmu. Šiai neopagoniškai srovei priklausančios grupės teigia, kad jos pavelki ilgalaikės tradicijas, siekiančias gilią senovę. Šių grupių tyrimai Vidurio ir Rytų Europos šalyse rodo intensyvų jų bendravimą ir gebėjimą kurti tarptautines struktūras. Tyrimas atskleidžia naujų religinių judėjimų globalizacijos procesą, susijusį su rekonstrukcionistinių judėjimų integracija. Šių tyrimų rezultatai rodo intensyvų jų bendravimą su hindų grupėmis.

Raktažodžiai: religija, nacionalizmas, neopagonybė, rekonstrukcionizmas, pagonybė, naujieji religiniai judėjimai.