

LITHUANIAN PAGANISM: A 'NATIVE' CRITIQUE

Jurgita Saltanavičiūtė

ABSTRACT

In this article I will use my experience with Native American cultures and religions to offer an alternative perspective on Lithuanian paganism. I will compare the definitions, methodology, and politics in the studies of indigenous Baltic and Native American religions, or spirituality and belief systems. In order to understand the situation of Lithuanian paganism, I employ two perspectives: a viewpoint of a "native" Lithuanian combined with the anthropology of "Native" North America. I also argued for the need of interdisciplinary perspectives on a cultural phenomenon. Collaboration of cultural anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, social scientists, historians, and archaeologists would provide the richness of sources, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives on Lithuanian paganism. I also emphasized the need for more fieldwork, especially qualitative, in order to include the indigenous views, stories and contexts. It is also paramount that the scholars of Baltic Studies as a new anthropological school remain open to their research outcome and experiment with various methodologies and perspectives, learn from other ethnographic examples and apply that experience to the unique local Baltic situation.

KEY WORDS: socio-cultural anthropology, Lithuanian paganism, Native American Indians, spirituality, belief systems, cultural phenomenon, Baltic cultures.

ANOTACIJA

Kalbėdama apie lietuvių pagonybę, šiame straipsnyje remiuosi dviem „vietiniais“ požiūriais: lietuvių, pabandžiusios suprasti lietuvių amžiais praktikuotą religiją, požiūrį derinsiu su Šiaurės Amerikos indėnų kultūros ir dvasingumo praktikos supratimu antropologijoje. Lietuvių pagonybę pabandžiau suprasti per Amerikos indėnų studijų ir patirties prizmę. Pagonybės tyrinėjimuose siūlau pereiti nuo išnykimo prie išlikimo, nuo pertrūkio į tęstinumą, nuo statiškumo prie kultūros reiškinių dinamikos suvokimo. Taip pat straipsnyje iškeliau šaltinių, kuriais remiasi pagonybės studijos, problemą. Produktyvus kultūros antropologų, etnomuzikologų, istorikų ir archeologų bendradarbiavimas padėtų atrasti naujų šaltinių, metodologijos ir teorijų pritaikymo būdų. Būtina panaudoti lauko tyrimus, ypač kokybinius, kad galima būtų suprasti pačių žmonių požiūrius ir jų kultūrinių reiškinių suvokimą, taip pat ir tokio suvokimo kontekstą. Labai svarbu, kad Baltų studijų mokykla vykdytų mokslinius tyrimus be išankstinių nusistatymų, eksperimentuotų su įvairiomis teorijomis ir metodologijomis, mokytųsi iš kitų etnografinių pavyzdžių ir pritaikytų kitų tautų patirtį unikalios baltiškos situacijos interpretavimui.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: sociokultūrinė antropologija, lietuvių pagonybė, Šiaurės Amerikos indėnai, dvasingumas, senųjų tikėjimų sistema, kultūrinių reiškinių suvokimas, baltiškoji kultūra.

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In this article I will use my experience with Native American cultures and religions to offer an alternative perspective on Lithuanian paganism. I will compare the definitions, methodology, and politics in the studies of indigenous Baltic and Native American religions, or spirituality and belief systems. In order to understand the situation of Lithuanian paganism, I employ two perspectives: a viewpoint of a "native" Lithuanian combined with the anthropology of "Native" North America.

My first argument employs the current trend in Native American anthropology that studies transformation and change (Nurge 1970; Fowler 1982; Foster 1981). Anthropology views cultures as constantly changing and adapting to new conditions as a result of which some elements of culture are lost and others survive. In the last hundred years, the focus of the anthropology of Native North America has switched from the disappearance of Native American cultures and salvage an-

thropology to their survival and acknowledgement that they have experienced forced assimilation and cultural repressions. By comparing the experiences of the Lakota people of Northern Plains and Lithuanian people, I will consider Lithuanian paganism from the perspective of continuity, change, and revival rather than disappearance and interruption.

My second argument deals with the sources and methods that are available or are used for the studies of oral cultures. My experience with studying Lakota songs suggests that the song texts are cultural documents that provide the insider's perspective of the culture at the time. I will propose viewing paganism as an oral culture in whose revival songs as a native source and as a native perspective are playing a major role.

In Lithuania, Christianity became the official religion in 1387. Christianity was accepted by Lithuanian nobility due to political reasons. The pre-Christian religious institutions, such as priests or temples, were destroyed, yet the common people were reluctant to abandon the old beliefs and practices (Beresnevičius 2004:24-25). Since then, Christianity has influenced and shaped the public thought and ideology in Lithuania. However, it is documented that villagers maintained pagan beliefs and practices as late as the eighteenth century (Beresnevičius 2004:34). There is no field research that would document the disappearance of pagan traditions in the Lithuanian villages in the twentieth century or today (Trinkūnas; Trinkūnienė 2005).

Contemporary revitalization efforts of Lithuanian paganism are directed at rebuilding paganism as an institutional religion. For example, the institution of the *krivis* or the high priest of Lithuania was revived in 2002 (Saltanavičiūtė 2002). The leaders of the revitalization movement have voiced the need to gain access to the old places of worship such as the ruins of the Perkūnas Temple under the present day Vilnius Cathedral (Iliuzija-Tikrovė 2005). Revitalization of paganism also includes performance of ceremonies and restoration of old ritual songs (e.g. the wedding ceremony or Perkūnas' chants).

Native American languages and cultures have experienced a wave of revitalization since the 1960's civil rights movements. In the 1990's federal programs were created to provide funding and resources for Native American language programs. Music, dances, and religious ceremonies, e.g. Lakota *wačipis* (powwows, or social dance fests) and Sun Dance ceremonies, continue to be learned and practiced. Native Americans have regained access to their culturally significant sites on federal lands where ceremonies have been traditionally conducted (Saltanavičiūtė 2000).

The terms and definitions that are used to refer to this religious revitalization phenomenon echo the current political situation in Lithuania and in Indian Country. For example, the Lakota beliefs and cultural practices that existed before the arrival of Christian missionaries and their versions that survive today are described as traditional or referred to as traditional culture and the ways of the Lakota people. Thus the continuation of the Lakota culture and religion is recognized by Lakota people who also view their culture as being oppressed and dominated by Euro-Americans. The culture survived in the face of forced assimilation, land transmutation, military defeat, and stigmatization of Lakota language and culture through the boarding school system (Brave Heart 2003). However, as the culture changes its elements change or they may be lost. For example, the Womanhood Ceremony is not widely performed among the Rosebud Lakota today anymore¹. Yet culture change

¹ There have been attempts to revive this ceremony; however, it is not as common today as the sweat lodge or the Sun Dance. The recent revival is described in Philomene Lakota, *Becoming A Woman*, *Well Nations Magazine*, Vol. 5, No. 5, September-October 2005. <http://www.wellnations.com>. Accessed October 15, 2005.

does not stop the whole complex of religious practices nor does it demean the ceremonies. For example, the people may pray in the English language, or use plastic tableware at the dinner that follows a ceremony. However, the ceremonies are periodically performed, songs learned, and beliefs kept.

In Lithuania the indigenous religion is referred to as paganism, although the word is used more in a descriptive sense rather than derogatory, as it would be perceived in the Lakota context. Traditional religion in Lithuania or rather, a traditional religious community is defined by law. Today, surprisingly, this status belongs to the Roman Catholicism, the Russian Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, Karaism and six other religious communities none of which, however, is indigenous to Lithuanian land (*Lietuvos Respublikos Religinių Bendruomenių ir Bendrijų Įstatymas*, Chapter 5).

It is not uncommon to observe the attitudes of fear and disdain towards the pre-Christian ways among both Lithuanian and Lakota people. The missionaries were quite successful in the ideological transformation of the people's pre-Christian lifeways into evil and in enforcing these beliefs through the institutional control mechanisms such as inquisition or boarding school education. Today there are Lakota individuals and institutions such as Sinte Gleska University of the Rosebud Lakota who are working to reverse the 100-year-old colonial discourse and to return the pride in Lakota identity and culture.

Christianity in Lithuania claims over 600 years of existence and it has been absorbed into Lithuanian culture in very sophisticated ways. Christianity has become part of the Lithuanian tradition and Lithuanians have accepted the discourse of the Catholic Church as one of their own. Indigenization of Christianity served to preserve Lithuanian culture rather than eradicate it (for example, the summer solstice celebration was turned into St. John's day on June 24th). Thus while for the traditional Lakota people Christianity is a foreign ideology which associates with the conquest, loss of land, and racial and cultural superiority, in Lithuania Christianity does not involve the racial conflict and the crusade experiences are distant history. Rather, Catholicism today represents stability in the value system, economy, and the state while paganism with its deep cultural roots may pose a serious challenge to the Church's position of authority and stability.

These two perspectives can be illustrated by the example of sacred sites. Since 1978, Native Americans have regained access to the culturally significant ceremonial sites such as the Devils Tower (Bear Lodge) in north-eastern Wyoming and the Bighorn Medicine Wheel in north central Wyoming (Saltanavičiūtė 2000). Now these places close down for the tourists in order to allow the Native people to conduct their ceremonies undisturbed. Thus the sites are subject to multiple uses and their management is defined by law. The laws include the tribes as consulting parties in a government-to-government relationship.

When in the spring of 2005 the elders of the pagan communities in Lithuania voiced their need to access the remains of the Perkūnas Temple under the Vilnius Cathedral, such claims were met with scepticism and disbelief (Iliuzija-Tikrovė 2005). The remains of the building are considered to be the relics of the past and the people who used them are thought to be extinct. Although the authorities agree on the preservation of the remains, the needs of the pagan community are not accommodated.

This example reveals the key points in the critiques of Lithuanian paganism. The critics today seem to claim unanimously that the ancient Lithuanian religious tradition has disappeared. Archaeologist Rimantienė (1995:154) points out that the ancient Lithuanian religious tradition has been pushed out by Christianity, and that it is redundant to modern life. Tradition is perceived as static

and organized into rigid categories where the loss of one element (e.g. the institution of the *krivis*) is seen as the end of the tradition rather than a change in the form of its expression (Beresnevičius 2004:27). American religious studies scholar Strmiska (2005(b):39) views the 20th century Lithuanian paganism as a new religious movement, sometimes referred to as neo-paganism, developed by spiritually inclined folklorists.

However, western cultural theories acknowledge the fact that the elements of culture are closely connected and the loss or change of one element generates a series of changes in the culture. For example, at the end of the eighteenth century in north-eastern United States the six Iroquois nations were put on the reservations. Plow agriculture was introduced as well as the new gender roles making the male the head of the family. In the early 1800's Seneca prophet Handsome Lake developed a code of teachings which blended the Christian philosophy with the traditional Iroquois rituals (Kehoe 1981: 263-265). This religion replaced the old Iroquois religious practices and helped the people adapt to the new way of life on the reservation. Today it is known as the traditional religion of the Iroquois, the way of the Longhouse.

The revivals of the ceremonies in Native American communities re-establish the status of traditional religions. Native American ceremonies such as the Sun Dance among the Plains tribes either ceased at the end of the 19th century or went underground and were still conducted secretly (Hirschfelder and Molin 1992: 284). Their revival and practice today raise the voices of respect and appreciation in the communities. Despite some fairly recent revivals after a century of cessation, the "neo"-terms were never considered, and "pagan" is not used either because it implies the juxtaposition with Christianity and the positions of superiority and inferiority in the colonial discourse.

Lithuanian paganism of today is not viewed as a natural continuation of the pre-Christian religious tradition which is reshaped and remodelled as a result of the political, social, and material change throughout centuries, but rather as a newly emergent religious movement or an organization created by the 20th century activists. The critics rarely attempt to study the social and political conditions beyond the twentieth-century Soviet occupation. However, Lithuanian culture and the state of religion were impacted not only by the 50 years of Soviet oppression, but also by such major stresses and crises as two centuries of crusades that ended in the Battle of Žalgiris in 1410, were hit by plagues and other epidemic diseases that swept through the Baltic region, endured serfdom and multiple wars and rebellions against the foreign powers. Consideration of these historical themes from the native villager's perspective might open the opportunities for the studies of Lithuanian adaptation strategies to the historical complexities and also the strategies to protect their identities and culture including religion.

According to the critics, this Lithuanian paganism is "new", as it was revived after passing to extinction. "Neo-paganism" is the term coined to refer to the revitalization efforts of paganism in Lithuania. The first book in the English-speaking academic world, however, includes Lithuanian paganism under the banner of "modern paganism" (Saltanavičiūtė 2004:18; Strmiska 2005).

Such interpretations of Lithuanian paganism bring it closer to the New Age movements, which synthesize elements from various religious traditions, but do not have a solid single cultural background. This also creates the image of foreignness that puts Lithuanian paganism in the same category with the numerous religious movements and churches that swarmed to north-eastern Europe from the west after the break-up of the Soviet Union to recruit new followers. Thus the religion that is indigenous to this land and practiced by the people who are the creators and actors of Lithuanian history is dismissed as the romantic creation of folklorists in the post-Soviet world.

However, there are no fieldwork results which would confirm the complete extinction of Lithuanian pagan traditions. Quite contrary, fragmented field reports confirm that there are elders who still practice the old prayers, maintain plant knowledge and pagan philosophy (Trinkūnas; Trinkūnienė 2005). The observations of everyday life and human interactions show that these old traditions permeate almost every aspect of our life (e.g. Rasos šventė, or St. John's day) as "folk culture".

The existing evidence suggests the need for the study and analysis of social and political relations in the villages after the introduction of Christianity in order to reveal the changes that paganism went through to adapt to the new conditions. For example, the *krivis* was not just a religious figure, but he also had social and political functions in the communities. Beresnevičius mentions (2004:29) that there were village elders who were "not professional priests", yet they continued to supply leadership in religious activities. I expect that the analysis of social relations in Lithuanian communities at different historical times may suggest insights into how the pre-Christian tradition was changing its form in order to survive in the changing world. Such a study may also contribute an opinion whether the ordainment of the *krivis* in 2002 was a new creation of an extinct institution, or whether it was just an official return of a name to the institution that has never been eradicated from Lithuanian communities.

It is disappointing that the studies of Lithuanian paganism are limited to written sources, while qualitative fieldwork aimed at the study of people's behaviour and social and cultural practices has never been done. The written sources produced by outsiders and fragments of material culture do not reveal the holistic view of a cultural phenomenon such as Lithuanian paganism. They actually exclude the voice of the people who created and lived that history. It also seems that the ethnographers are still in the salvaging stages of collecting songs and other folklore, but their analyses are limited to the perspective of one scholarly discipline such as literature.

As anthropologists we have to deal with the fact that oral cultures did not leave us any written documents of their cultures. At one time, Lithuanian and Lakota cultures were oral. People relied on stories and songs to preserve cultural information and transmit it to younger generations. The first Lakota writing systems were designed by missionaries (Riggs 1852, Buechel 1939), and the first Lithuanian books were also published as a result of Christian initiative (Mažvydas 1547; Daukša 1999). The historical chronicles and ethnographic sources about Lithuania and its people before the nineteenth century were written either by outsiders such as crusade descriptions or by Lithuanian missionaries (Dundulienė 1991:10-15). The most famous works on the Lakota culture are actually the interpretations of this culture by outside anthropologists (Hassrick 1964; Powers 1977; Powers 1986). Collection of Lakota texts is another vivid trend in the Lakota anthropology (Buechel and Manhart 1978; Deloria 1932; DeMallie 1999; Walker 1980; Walker 1982) and also in the Lithuanian folkloristics (Balys 1948, Basanavičius 1903, Juška 1954, Vėlius 2002).

The songs and folklore collections can serve as a document of culture, only of a different form. Constantine and Porter (2003: 125-140) suggest that songs preserve and reference the community's collective memory. Johnston (1976:26-28) emphasizes the central role of music and songs in the construction of native identity due to the cultural context that is embedded in them. Powers (1992) shows that the translation of a Lakota song containing vocables depends on the context to which the vocables refer. I suggest viewing the oral tradition or folklore collections as a cultural text whose interpretations would offer unique insights into the cultures and people that created them. While the oral tradition is not always helpful searching for historical accuracies, it is definitely rich

in cultural information. Therefore, it must be consulted for cultural studies in order to include the voice and the philosophy of the people of historical periods.

In my work with Lakota songs I try to combine the methods of linguistic and cultural anthropology and ethnomusicology in order to present and analyze the sources created by an oral culture. The current project, “Preservation of the Lakota Language: Translation of Songs and Speeches”, consults Lakota songs and speeches as a cultural document which recorded the events, worldviews, and values as they as they were practiced and I foresee the success of using such a document in the field to collect further information about the old ways.

The practitioners of Lithuanian paganism, just like the Lakota people leading the revitalization of the Lakota language and culture, focus on songs. The ritual folk group Kūlgrinda restores and performs the old folk songs (Kūlgrinda 2005; Kūlgrinda 2003; Kūlgrinda 2002). Traditional Lithuanian heritage also found its way into the youth culture and music. The performers of Baltic metal music developed a new and unique genre of metal called war or folk metal which grounds itself in the history and cultural heritage of Latvia and Lithuania (Obtest 2001, Skyforger 1998). The Žalvarinis CD (2002) which featured Kūlgrinda singers and was a blending of rock and folk music was among the best selling CDs in Lithuania. The annual festival Mėnuo Juodaragis which focuses on folk culture and music and their modern expressions attracts more and more visitors every year. These performances and events help young people rediscover their pride in their Lithuanian identity.

In conclusion, in my discussion of Lithuanian paganism I attempted to employ the perspectives that are used to study and understand Native American cultures. I suggested shifting the focus in the studies of Lithuanian paganism from disappearance to survival, from interruption to continuity, and from static to dynamic. I believe that the studies of Lithuanian paganism and Baltic Studies in broader sense would benefit from viewing the people as the active agents of change rather than the passive victims of historical circumstances. The people were affected by certain historical circumstances and they made conscious decisions how to adapt to them. Thus culture and tradition are not static, but they constantly change and recreate themselves.

I also argued for the need of interdisciplinary perspectives on a cultural phenomenon. Collaboration of cultural anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, social scientists, historians, and archaeologists would provide the richness of sources, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives on Lithuanian paganism. I also emphasized the need for more fieldwork, especially qualitative, in order to include the indigenous views, stories and contexts. It is also paramount that the scholars of Baltic Studies as a new anthropological school remain open to their research outcome and experiment with various methodologies and perspectives, learn from other ethnographic examples and apply that experience to the unique local Baltic situation.

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LIETUVIŠKOJI PAGONYBĖ: „VIETINĖ“ KRITIKA

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Santrauka

Kalbėdama apie lietuvių pagonybę, šiame straipsnyje remiuosi dviem „vietiniais“ požiūriais: lietuvių, pabandžiusios suprasti lietuvių amžiais praktikuotą religiją, požiūrį derinsiu su Šiaurės Amerikos indėnų kultūros ir dvasingumo praktikos supratimu antropologijoje.

XIX a. pabaigoje – XX a. pradžioje Šiaurės Amerikos antropologijoje vyravo kultūrų gelbėjimo kryptis. Į indėnus buvo žiūrima kaip į nykstančias kultūras, todėl antropologija bandė surinkti apie juos kiek įmanoma daugiau duomenų, tiek materialiosios kultūros, tiek folkloro, kalbos pavyzdžių ir t. t. XX amžiaus antroje pusėje antropologai pradėjo pripažinti faktą, kad indėnai ir jų kultūros išliko, tačiau keitėsi laikui bėgant. Tuomet buvo pradėta domėtis kultūrų kaita ir jų prisitaikymu prie naujų sąlygų (Nurge 1970; Fowler 1982; Foster 1981). Šią tęstinumo, kaitos, ir atgimimo tendenciją ir panaudosiu šiame straipsnyje Lietuvos pagonybės situacijai nagrinėti.

Kita vertus, pagoniškoji Lietuvos kultūra, kaip ir indėnų kultūros prieš atvykstant misionieriams, nebuvo užrašyta, taigi ji buvo žodinė. Iš kokių šaltinių ir kokiais būdais mes sužinome apie tokias kultūras? Pasiūlysiu pažvelgti į pagonybę kaip į nerašytinę kultūrą, kurios atgimime dainos yra ypač svarbios kaip vienintelis vidinis, pagoniškas, pačių žmonių sukurtas šaltinis, nepersisunkęs svetimu požiūriu ir įtaka.

Krikščionybė tapo oficialia Lietuvos religija 1387 m., valdančiajam sluoksniui ją priėmus iš grynai politinių paskatų. Lietuviškosios religinės institucijos, pvz., kriviai ar šventovės, buvo sunaikinti, nors paprasti žmonės krikščionybės nesuprato ir nenorėjo staiga atsakyti amžiais praktikuoto tikėjimo (Beresnevičius 2004: 24–25). Nors krikščionybė ir atliko didelį darbą formuodama Lietuvos ideologinę mintį, istoriniai dokumentai patvirtina, kad pagoniškosios tradicijos Lietuvos kaime buvo išlikusios XVIII amžiuje (Beresnevičius 2004: 34). Šiandien nėra jokių lauko tyrimais paremtų studijų, kurios patvirtintų, kad pagonybė yra galutinai išnykusi. Priešingai, naujausi stebėjimai rodo, kad senosios tradicijos yra gerai išsilaikiusios (Trinkūnas; Trinkūnienė 2005).

Šiandieninėje Lietuvoje bandoma atgaivinti pagonybę kaip institucinę religiją. Krivio institucija buvo atgaivinta 2002 m. (Saltanavičiūtė 2002). Kaip ir indėnų gentys praėjusio amžiaus 8-ajame dešimtmetyje, pagonys kovoja dėl teisės naudoti šventas vietas, pvz., Perkūno šventyklos griuvėsius Vilniaus Arkikatedros požemyje (Iliuzija-Tikrovė 2005).

Terminologija, kuria apibūdinamas religijos atgimimas, atspindi etninių kultūrų padėtį Lietuvoje ir Šiaurės Amerikoje. Baltų tikėjimas šiandien vadinamas pagonybe, nors šis terminas Europos kontekste turi daugiau aprašomąjį negu negatyvų atspalvį kaip būtų Šiaurės Amerikoje. Analogiški indėnų tikėjimai yra vadinami tradicinėmis religijomis. Lietuvoje tradicinė religinė bendruomenė yra apibrėžiama įstatymo. Būna tik stebėtis, kad šis statusas suteiktas dešimčiai religinių bendruomenių, kurių šaknys, deja, yra toli nuo Lietuvos, pvz., katalikų, rusų ortodoksų bažnyčiai, sunitų pakraipos islamui, karaimų tikėjimui ir t. t., o lietuvių amžiais praktikuota pagonybė tokio statuso neturi (Lietuvos Respublikos religinių bendruomenių ir bendrijų įstatymas, 5 dalis).

Pagonybės kritikoje galima išskirti keletą pagrindinių teiginių. Į pagonybę žiūrima kaip su tam tikru laikmečiu ir jo materialine kultūra susijusią religiją ir teigiama, kad ji išnyko arba yra atgyve-

na, kurios praktikavimas nesuvokiamas šiuolaikiniame gyvenime (Rimantienė 1995: 154). Tradicija suvokiama statiškai, kur vieno elemento praradimas arba jo susiskaidymas yra traktuojamas kaip visumos išnykimas (Beresnevičius 2004: 27). Iš to išplaukia dar viena pozicija, apibūdinanti pagonybę kaip naują (neo-)religinių judėjimą, kurį sukūrė ir plėtoja dvasingumo ieškantys folkloro tyrinėtojai (Strmiska 2005(b): 39).

Šiuolaikinėse kultūros teorijose kultūra yra glaudžiai susijusių elementų visuma, kurioje vieno elemento praradimas ar jo pakitimas sukuria visą seriją pokyčių apskritai. Pavyzdžiui, šiandien irokėzų genčių tradicine religija vadinamas Longhauso kelias buvo iš esmės susintetintas ankstyvajame XIX amžiuje iš prieškrikščioniškų garbinimo formų ir krikščionybės bei modernaus gyvenimo ideologijų įtakų. Religija ir dvasingumo formos yra nuolat perkuriamos, nes jų tikslas visada buvo padėti žmogui prisitaikyti prie gyvenimo ir kultūros pokyčių.

Lietuvių pagonybės studijos daugiausia remiasi iš svetimo požiūrio taško rašytais šaltiniais. Tokie šaltiniai dažniausiai pateikia tam tikro laikotarpio kultūros fragmentus, tačiau juose nesigirdi svarbiausio balso – balso pačių žmonių, kurie kūrė ir išgyveno tą istoriją. Antropologai, studijuojantys žodines kultūras, turi susitaikyti su tuo, kad šios kultūros nepaliko išsamių aprašymų. Tačiau ar tie aprašymai neegzistuoja kitokia, mums ne taip įprasta forma? Lakotų gentyje istorija buvo užrašoma žiemos pasakojimuose, kur kiekvienais metais svarbiausias įvykis bendruomenės gyvenime buvo pažymimas piktografiškai. Dainos ir viešai sakomos kalbos yra kitas žmonių paliktas istorinis ir kultūrinis šaltinis. Jose atsispindi svarbiausi to meto įvykiai, pasaulėžiūra, socialinė ir politinė struktūra bei jų pokyčiai, vertybės bei jų kaita ir t. t. Mano darbas su lakotų dainomis parodė, kad folkloras, ir ypač dainos, yra svarbus istorinis ir kultūrinis dokumentas, nes būtent tekstuose atsispindi tai, kuo žmonės tuo metu gyveno. Be to, dainos perteikia požiūrį į tam tikrą kultūrą iš vidaus, t. y. leidžia į ją pažvelgti joje gyvenusių ir ją kūrusių žmonių akimis.

Šiame straipsnyje lietuvių pagonybę pabandžiau suprasti per Amerikos indėnų studijų ir patirties prizmę. Pagonybės tyrinėjimuose siūlau pereiti nuo išnykimo prie išlikimo, nuo pertrūkio į tęstinumą, nuo statiškumo prie kultūros reiškinių dinamikos suvokimo. Manau, kad ne vien tik pagonybės, bet ir baltų studijos apskritai turės naudos, jei į žmogų bus pradėta žiūrėti kaip į aktyvų kultūros kaitos dalyvį-veikėją, o ne kaip į pasyvią istorinių situacijų auką. Istorinės aplinkybės visada turėjo įtakos žmonių gyvenimui, tačiau žmonės darė sąmoningus sprendimus, kaip prisitaikyti prie tų besikeičiančių aplinkybių. Taigi kultūra ir tradicija nėra statiški reiškiniai; jos nuolat keičiasi ir yra perkuriamos.

Taip pat straipsnyje iškeliau šaltinių, kuriais remiasi pagonybės studijos, problemą. Produktyvus įvairių disciplinų mokslininkų bendradarbiavimas, pvz., kultūros antropologų, etnomuzikologų, istorikų ir archeologų, padėtų atrasti naujų šaltinių, metodologijos ir teorijų pritaikymo būdų. Būtina panaudoti lauko tyrimus, ypač kokybinius, kad galima būtų suprasti pačių žmonių požiūrius ir jų kultūrinių reiškinių suvokimą, taip pat ir tokio suvokimo kontekstą. Labai svarbu, kad Baltų studijų mokykla vykdytų mokslinius tyrimus be išankstinių nusistatymų, eksperimentuotų su įvairiomis teorijomis ir metodologijomis, mokytųsi iš kitų etnografinių pavyzdžių ir pritaikytų kitų tautų patirtį unikaliai baltiškai situacijai interpretuoti.

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