

Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder (eds.)

Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society. Ethnographies of Catholic Hegemony and the New Pluralism in Lithuania

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This review revolves around two highlights. Firstly, it notes that *Religious Diversity in Post Soviet Society* joins previous texts in confirming insights about the peculiarities of religious occurrences in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Secondly, since the volume frames its findings within a Gramscian meta-theory, it provokes a set of questions about the adequacy of this approach to study contemporary societies.

Emphasizing the contribution to the existing scholarship on CEE religious peculiarities, it is worth mentioning the book's examples of links between religion and nationalist sentiments (e.g., the role of Catholic church in triggering anti-minor religions campaigns), which inscribes Lithuania into a broader regional context and confirms earlier observations (see Máté-Tóth and Rughiniş 2011; Goldberger et al. 2010; Doktor 2002) that new religious movements (NRMs) in CEE were stigmatized not only with the medicalized social control imagery, but were also depicted as a menace posed towards the nation itself, which in fact has not appeared in the anti-cult ideology in the Western world. *Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society*, however, does not limit itself to the problems of post-communist normative conflicts when reconfirmation of collective moral boundaries has been often deployed in "the Schmittian circumstances." It is instructive how Lankauskas maps the rival talk between Catholics and Evangelicals, which in the early 1990s became antagonistic, shaped and analyzed respondents were mainly concerned with the reinforcement of their confessional identities. The tide of competitive articulations had, however, considerably diminished by the end of the 1990s when antagonism "assumed a more accommodating tone" (p. 111) and the relationship of rivals had "given way to more dialogic exchanges" (p. 111). This piece expands the growing scholarship related to the problems of agonistic transformations (cf. Mouffe 2005) of the hostile attitudes among religious actors in CEE to the position of legitimate opponents (e.g., the evolution of hostile societal reactions towards ISKCON in Poland as analyzed by Marinović Jerolimov and Marinović [2010], or Richardson's [1997] paper demonstrating the successful strategy of Hungarian Hare Krishnas in "re-making" their stereotypical profile).

We also need to pay closer attention to another major exploratory question of the volume that assumes that Lithuanian Catholicism should be described within a perspective of the concept of bricolage. It is particularly Ališauskienė's chapter that covers this problem by putting emphasis on the role of personal reconsiderations of the Catholic tradition that led to reworking of the orthodox beliefs through the use of New Age imagery. This strategy brings another example of the individualistic attitude that leads to the reinterpretation of religious practices in terms of the self, but on the other hand Ališauskienė's ethnographic study provides valuable insights that challenge the universalist assumptions of Heelas and Woodhead's (2005) famous approach on alternative religions. Ališauskienė, similarly to Hall's (2007) recent argument, has shown that the concept of new spiritualities as articulated by Western scholars is not fully relevant to describe the new spiritual phenomenon that may be traced in CEE. The adherents of holistic milieus in CEE reflect global trends, but at the same time these processes are connected to local cultural backgrounds, in the case of Lithuania or Poland characterized

by strong Catholic and folk patterns. Ališauskienė's piece, among other studies, insists that a Western approach should be applied with caution while exploring New Age occurrences in CEE.

While the mentioned chapters do not make any unfounded generalizations about the whole population of Lithuanian Catholics and carefully limit their scope to the analyzed groups, Schröder's chapter on Catholicism in the urban context is more problematic. Given the non-representative sample, the author too often offers uncorroborated sweeping statements (e.g., "for the majority of urban Lithuanians this habitus [religious] is characterized by a lack of deep commitment to any religion" [p. 83], "many urban Lithuanians" [p. 87]); the assertion about having conversations with people who Schröder is acquainted with (p. 87) can hardly be qualified as a solid methodology, and this approach certainly does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the Lithuanian urban Catholicism as such. While the author states "Catholicism is not considered to be an important element in the everyday lives of urban middle-class individuals" without any substantial evidence to support this claim, we can easily imagine the opposite findings if Schröder had been acquainted not with secular "academics or professionals" but with the Lithuanian members of Opus Dei or Neocatechumenal Way, who are also urban-based Catholics. Thus, when Schröder writes about "the inability of statistics and quantitative methodology in general to convey an adequate understanding of the ongoing process of religious identification and construction of faith in Lithuania" (pp. 206-207), it sounds slightly ironic. Although we cannot rule out *a priori* the possibility that urban Lithuanian Catholics lack commitment to religion—in fact, this conclusion sounds quite likely—it would nevertheless sound more convincing if the inquiry could have properly tested this hypothesis.

The last issue that needs a comment concerns the major interpretory framework used in the book. By employing Gramscian categories (e.g., hegemony), the authors rightly argue that the power relations underpin religion, and social objectivity itself is politically negotiated. What is baffling, however, is the lack of any acknowledgment that Gramscian heritage has been profoundly reworked, particularly by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and by other Essex School scholars. This fact is of crucial importance since it has been demonstrated how classical Gramscian scholarship is considerably flawed due to its essentialist orientation, which poses serious analytical problems while exploring contemporary social formations (Marchart 2007). An application of the linguistic assumptions (e.g., De Saussure 1955, Hjelmslev 1975, Derrida 1978) to the Gramscian premises led to the abolition of the transcendental center of social (embodied by class and economic relations), which acted as a rational instance governing the course of social change. While we address this turn in Gramscian studies, we have to look differently at certain insights presented in Ališauskienė and Schröder's volume. For example, within this revised perspective hegemony cannot be merely limited to the leadership of political elites or privileged groups; instead, hegemonic interventions according to Laclau and Mouffe (1985) constitute the possibility of emancipatory power available for various social formations. In other words, the hegemonic ideology provides the surface of meaning also for the peripheral social subjects that may function in the interrelation with other hegemonic and counter-hegemonic formations. Also, the proposed separation of power in the volume (e.g., an agentive mode equated with ideology and a nonagentive mode with hegemony) provokes doubts, particularly when we follow a Wittgensteinian concept of language games that comprise both linguistic exchanges and actions in which they are embedded, thus—as Laclau (2005, 13) argues—proper analytical distinction should not separate ideology from hegemonic performances carried out by actors. Another problematic issue refers to the notion of common sense that usually is understood as a subordinated way of perceiving reality, and hegemonic consciousness, which manifests itself as a potential that is capable of mastering social relations. This division can hardly be maintained on the post-Gramscian premises of subjectivity; the latter is not assumed as a rational ego but is equated with the order of signifier expressing a radical inability to function as a stable representative of the significance (see Stavrakakis 1999, 16).

This inability triggers a necessary utopian ideological component in the cognition of social objectivity, but is not elaborated in terms of false consciousness that lingers in the conventional Gramscian legacy (Laclau 1990, 92).

Although this review takes the side of critics who point out that the classical Gramscian model is considerably removed from the crucial amendments of post-Gramscian scholarship, what may hinder its analytical efficiency is that it is nevertheless clear that Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo Schröder deserve congratulations for a tastefully produced volume that holds much content of interest for scholars dealing with religion in CEE.

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