

## **INTRODUCTION: DIFFERENTIATION OF RITUAL YEAR(S) THROUGH TIME AND SPACE**

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The idea of this issue of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* originated in a panel that we presented at the 11th congress of the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore (SIEF) held in Tartu, Estonia, in July 2013. During the panel meeting we focused on the differentiation of the ritual year and its various elements. After nearly ten years of research and conferences,<sup>1</sup> we identified the ritual year as a general frame within which calendrical rituals, festivals, and other cultural performances take place and can easily be studied and interpreted. The idea of the ritual year has proved to be productive as it enables collaborative and interdisciplinary research with no historical or geographical limits. Not only folklorists and ethnologists, but also archaeologists, linguists, sociologists and political scientists can contribute something to the study of the ritual year because the idea of connecting nature and culture seems to be present in all societies throughout all eras of history.

### **RITUALS IN A GLOBAL WORLD**

Out of general interest in calendars and rituals, we developed a special interest in the ways that, and reasons why, some elements of the traditional ritual years were picked up by individuals or political bodies and selected in order to construct or revive identity, to address the preferences of new audiences in a globalised world, to create or improve the image of a locality, etc. We have become especially interested in the ways that traditional rituals can be adapted and transformed in new social and cultural settings, new historical contexts, or in relation with migrations or other geographical changes.

In a globalised world, with a high rate of migration and crucial political changes in Eastern European countries, we can see that some of the traditional rituals have survived and even developed into huge national festivities, while

other customs fade away and finally disappear.<sup>2</sup> In this context, we suggest that globalisation paradoxically leads both to the differentiation and to the fragmentation of traditional rituals.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the notion of differentiation can be grasped through the circulation as well as the mobility, adaptation and (re)construction of traditional rituals and festivals through time and space.

By means of case studies and more theoretical reflections, the contributions to this issue of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* enable us to compare the ritual systems across various countries, so as to uncover the reasons for selectivity and differentiation (migrations, ideology, religiosity, national values, local cultural tourist attractions, etc.). Special attention is paid to the ritual year in the former socialist countries, and the cases of other European countries provide valuable material for a comparative analysis. The contributors to this issue also aim to highlight how material about the traditional knowledge and performance habits is collected, studied and circulated nowadays, and how it leads to reinterpretations of the rituals.<sup>4</sup>

## **CIRCULATIONS, DIFFERENTIATIONS, SELECTIONS**

Three different sets of questions are connected with our topic. Firstly, why do rituals circulate? This question has several answers. Political, ideological (including religious), and economic reasons immediately come to mind when we think about minorities who have to leave their countries to continue performing their rituals, but the circulation of rituals also depends on the taste for novelties, fantasy, and the initiatives of religious leaders or communities. In some cases the political opponents of a regime decide to create their own ritual year with new symbols, emblems and dates, using and adapting rituals that they borrow from other societies or cultural settings. In other cases, old rituals are re-enacted to bring back the memories of a legendary past.

Secondly, how do rituals differentiate in time and space? This question makes us reflect on the rhythms of the differentiation processes. Different rituals can change at a quicker or slower pace according to the context and the dynamics of the cultural systems to which they belong. In some cases the differentiation of the rituals is not even perceptible and people speak about unchanged traditions, but in other cases sudden shifts can occur and totally change the local ritual landscape in a few years' time. The differentiation of rituals is then useful to understand the social changes and evolutions in general.

Thirdly, which elements are selected when rituals circulate? This question is concerned with the adaptability of the different cultural parts of which rituals

are composed. In the differentiation process, ritual emblems can be re-used with different meanings and new symbols can appear. It is interesting to compare the elements that travel easily from one context to another and the ones that are left behind and progressively forgotten. Selectivity has its own reasons which can be grasped through empirical investigation and reveal both the more and the less powerful charge of the different elements of the rituals.

The question of the differentiation of rituals in time and space eventually appears as a very complex one because it mixes the idea of the global evolution of rituals and the notions of circulation and diffusion. Focusing on the differentiation of the ritual year is also a means to simultaneously study the rituals and their significations. The calendar is a complex meaningful system, and the different sorts of rituals need to be connected with their respective meanings. Looking at the ritual years in the plural, as suggested in the title, opens for investigation new invented rituals and different local celebrations of religious festivals, but also those of national holidays. By means of the notion of differentiation, we then aim to pay attention to the ways that dissimilar rituals still share the same problems when they are confronted with a new context.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF CASE STUDIES**

The contributions to this issue of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* provide only a few elements to answer the general questions raised by the differentiation process in which the different rituals worldwide are caught. However, they show the importance of case studies and their usefulness in addressing more general or theoretical problems.

All the cases investigated by the authors are based on various ethnological data and present different views on the circulation, differentiation, and selectivity of the ritual year(s), yet the general reasons for modifications are common and vary only in details.

This volume contains six articles that geographically cover Eastern Europe (Russia), including the south-east (Croatia) and north-east (Lithuania); there are also cases from Central (Slovenia, Austria) and Western Europe (Scotland). The majority of them focus on the national ritual years that circulate also abroad, in new cultural contexts, and reveal differences between the diasporas and the motherland.

Laurent Sébastien Fournier (France) in his article “Circulation and Differentiation of Scottish Games and Sports” investigates a unique case of selectivity in the status and spread of traditional folk sports. The two major types of the

Scottish traditional games – the folk-football and the Highland games – exemplify a paradoxical differentiation regarding the mobility of sport festivals. The former remains popular mainly in Scotland, whereas the latter has migrated within the British Commonwealth and almost around the world and is taken as a master sample of Scottishness, in terms of tartans, bagpipes and other national stereotypes. The differentiations between sports in Scotland and abroad, as Fournier argues, show that “the Scottish identity is disconnected from any spatial references in the new context of a global circulation of ritual patterns”. Interestingly enough, the exported version of the Highland sports contributes to their development in the home country.

Two of the articles trace the changes in the festive systems of a nation during the last century and up to the present day. An interesting case of the differentiation of the ritual year is given by Ingrid Slavec Gradišnik (Slovenia) in her article “A Festive Bricolage: The Holiday Calendar in Slovenia over the Last Century”. During the 19th and 20th centuries this country underwent at least four changes of political regimes and was part of different countries until it gained independence in 1991. Each political formation brought along new languages, new co-members, new values, various attitudes towards the Church and, correspondingly, new holidays to be celebrated. Being an *independent* state or a *dependant* one, i.e., a part of a bigger country (like Slovenia in the two Yugoslavias – the royal one and the federative republic), and being a *majority* or a *minority* greatly influences the character and the content of the ritual year. As this and some other cases presented in this volume show, the intention to keep the national identity and to oppose the Other is demonstrated through the selection and circulation of certain “own” festivals. Thus the commemorative day of the Slovene poet France Prešeren (February 8) has preserved its value through all the regimes and in the present-day state has obtained the status of the Slovenian Culture Day. At the same time official holidays of the ritual year are often perceived as foreign and thought of as “their” holidays. In socialist Slovenia, this is the case with the Serbian and Croatian Saint Vitus’ Day, and Tito’s birthday on May 25 celebrated as the Youth Day.

The modern Slovenian ritual calendar, as well as festive systems in other post-socialist countries, is seen by ethnologists as a “bricolage”, a mixture, consisting of a combination of old, authentic, and new traditions, including many borrowed and adopted holidays.

Two political rituals in the Slovene diaspora in Austria are described by Jurij Fikfak (Slovenia) in his article “Political Rituals and Discourses: The Case of Carinthia”. The author investigates the celebration of a very special event, which marks the historical plebiscite of 1920 for Carinthia to stay “free

and undivided” in Austria, and deals with the concepts of national mentality. Both ethnically and regionally, this festival has a strong state image, yet is unconnected to other calendrical festivals, which are very popular among Slovenes and Austrians. Still the official celebrations (processions, presentations, concerts, etc.) with the participation of statesmen play an important role in political life; the attendance of statesmen at the festival influences elections and has an impact also on other issues. The second, newer, commemorative ritual Fikfak investigates is a recent acquisition introduced in 2008 – an anti-fascist procession, remembering the martyrs of the concentration camps, mainly from the Slovenian community. The mass media discourse investigated in detail by Fikfak proves to be extremely important for the differentiation and circulation of the festivals, be they political or not.

A few more interesting and important details are added to the topic of the volume through the case analysed by Juraj Belaj, Marijana Belaj, Petra Kelemen, and Filomena Sirovica (Croatia) in their co-authored article “Politicising St. Martin and Constructing Heritage: A Case Study of a Small Town in Croatia”. This article deals with an example of how a religious festival, the commemoration of Saint Martin (November 11), after having been ousted from the public festive life of former Yugoslavia for a period of 45 years, eventually turns into a major significant ritual complex. This process of “martinisation” started in the 1990s, in the small town Dugo Selo, not far from the capital Zagreb, where in 1993 this day was declared a municipal holiday, and St. Martin was declared the patron saint of the town. The selection of this day is associated with many factors, for instance, commerce, winemaking, and tourism.<sup>5</sup> The process of constructing the festival as an old Slovenian one is supported by the new archeological finds in Dugo Selo, which date back to the epoch of the Templars and are interpreted as proof of St. Martin as one of the pro-European symbols in this exact location.

The reconstruction, invention and circulation of a selected holiday in present-day Russia is investigated by Nina Vlaskina (Russia) in her article “The Age-Old Cossack Feast of the Protecting Veil: A Contemporary Interpretation of a Traditional Calendar Date”. The author describes the construction process of the ritual year by Don Cossacks, who have historically been engaged in military activity and hunting. Usually a date from the religious or historical calendar is selected and being “privatised” by an ethnic, professional, or religious group, which puts in an enormous amount of work to prove that this is a traditional holiday, associated with this particular group from time immemorial. After perestroika, when the process of the Cossaks’ revival started and they re-inforced their identity, they declared the Christian Orthodox feast of the Protecting

Veil of the Mother of God as “the main Cossack national holiday”. The reason for selecting this holiday as their own is associated with the meaning of the feast – the idea of protection and commemoration.

The Lithuanian metamorphosis of the well-known European holiday of Shrovetide (Užgavėnės) is investigated by Žylvytis Šaknys (Lithuania) in his article “Užgavėnės: A Rural and Urban, Religious, Socialist, and Lithuanian Festival of Shrovetide”. The original agrarian and seasonal meaning of the festival as a “farewell to winter”, with ritual food, masking, guising, and merry-making has been selectively modified with urbanisation, change of ideology and globalisation. In the beginning, under the Soviet occupation, the socialist government marginalised this feast similarly to other religious and folk celebrations. Later on the general meaning was transformed and the festival took the form of fighting against evil, as most of the Soviet holidays had to be flavoured with antagonism. In the 1990s the Shrovetide festival turned into one of the major seasonal celebrations, and as such has been attracting and absorbing many festive components and developing new semantics, with new images, masks, and new games created. As this case makes evident, the return to a pre-Soviet state does not entail a return to authentic ethnographic celebrations. Many Soviet Lithuanian innovations in Shrovetide celebrations have been preserved, and are now combined with new adopted globalised forms of entertaining. Celebrating Shrovetide abroad in the Lithuanian diasporas is strictly connected with Lithuanianness.

In summarising these six cases, it should be mentioned that the selection and circulation are often carried out by the governmental elites and are not felt as “our own” by the population. Folk celebrations, on the other hand, are not welcomed by the state, but they are preserved and survive until the regime changes. The 1990s formally destroyed the socialist camp and brought along drastic changes in the ritual years, usually supported by state decrees giving up the existing festive system. This happened in Slovenia, Russia, and also in other countries. The festivals suppressed during socialism turned into major ones and were chosen to express national identity, both in the homeland and abroad.

With regard to selectivity and circulation, the contemporary ritual years are subject to various modifications. Among these we would like to stress the quantitative growth of the festivals due to people’s intention to celebrate more often and follow the examples of mass culture, the development of the commercial and touristic activity, and the openness of the borders. All these processes facilitate the cultural and festive interchange between neighbouring countries and the migration of festivals, as well as enhance Western and

Eastern influences and globalisation. If we take into account the selection and preservation of the national, local, or regional holidays as essential fragments of heritage, we find unrestricted possibilities for constructing the modern ritual year and the rhythm of celebrating.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See the webpage of the Ritual Year Working Group on the SIEF website: <http://www.siefhome.org/wg/ry/index.shtml>. Reports on the Ritual Year Working Group conferences have been published in English in journal *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* (EJF). For the reports on the 6th, 7th and 8th international conferences see: Sedakova 2010; Sedakova & Sidneva 2012; Sedakova 2013. The report on the 10th conference is published in the current issue.
- <sup>2</sup> Concerning the analysis of the increase or decrease of rituals in contemporary Europe, a fine introduction can be found in Jeremy Boissevain's book *Revitalizing European Rituals* (1992).
- <sup>3</sup> As concerns the relation between globalisation and fragmentation, see, for instance, how Saskia Sassen connects globalisation with the local places in which the global dimension is discussed and built up (Sassen 2007).
- <sup>4</sup> In this respect, our aim is to combine the study of rituals and the study of performances. For a general overview, see Bell 1992 for rituals and Schechner 2003 for performances.
- <sup>5</sup> St. Martin's Day is celebrated in other countries of the region. On November 11, 2012, during the 7th International Conference of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group in Slovenia, the ritual *martinuvane*, the tasting of the new wine, was performed in a local restaurant, showing a fine example of the adaptation of a traditional ritual to an international scholarly audience.

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