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Guest editors Irina Sedakova, Nina Vlaskina
& Laurent S. Fournier

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Editorial address:
Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore
Vanemuise 42–235
51003 Tartu
Estonia
phone: +372 737 7740
fax: +372 737 7706
e-mail: folklore@folklore.ee
home page: http://www.folklore.ee/folklore

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RITUAL RULES IN CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES: BREAK, ADAPT OR MAINTAIN? AN INTRODUCTION

Laurent S. Fournier
Professor of Anthropology
Université Côte d'Azur, France
laurent.fournier@univ-amu.fr

Irina Sedakova
Sc.D., Head of the Department of Typology and Comparative Linguistics
Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
ised@mail.ru

This issue gathers some of the works presented by the members of the Ritual Year Working Group during the 15th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) in Helsinki in June 2021. As the general theme of this congress was "Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression", most of the articles stick to this question and try to understand the relationship between rituals and (the breaking of) social rules. The authors address the major problem from several perspectives: the regulations for performing traditional rituals and the reasons for violating them; ritual behaviour on certain dates when the social norms, the hierarchies, and the gender roles are turned upside down; modification of the ritual year recommendations according to the new environment in emigration; etc. Transgression is seen as breaking the traditional foundations and also as a transition from real performance to virtual participation. And, as in June 2021 the entire world was subjected to the rules of COVID-19, some articles in particular attempt to address the pandemic's impact on ritual sociability worldwide.

Speaking of methodology and academic approaches to the challenges, the authors recognise that the twenty-first century is definitely the time of an easier crossover from one discipline to another. Though this is an issue of a folklore-oriented academic journal, the neighbouring scholarly spheres, such as sociology,

ethnography, cultural studies, folk religion, textology, semiotics, and linguistics, are heavily dwelt on. New digital science disciplines and methods are combined with the traditional ones and added to one another.

Questioning the relations between rituals, rules, and transgressive behaviours is anything but a new topic in the field of the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, there were some classical debates already at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century regarding the general reasons why humans feel it necessary to perform rituals. According to some scholars, rituals would have a logical origin. Edward Tylor (1871), for instance, suggested that the first rituals were due to the questioning of prehistoric men when facing corpses for the first time. The incomprehension in front of a dead body would be at the origin of a need to ritualise in order to rationalise the situation vis-à-vis the sudden absence of response from the loved one. But from another perspective, rituals would also be connected with the need to cure fears and anxieties. Emile Durkheim (1912) accordingly suggested that rituals derive from irrational beliefs and therefore have to be understood as elementary forms of religion. Last but not least, Victor Turner (1969) came out of this debate by asserting that what was most important about rituals was not their cultural meanings but the very way in which they were carried out as local experiences and performative acts.

For this issue, most relevant is the comprehension of a ritual presented by Jens Kreinath. He wrote:

> *By intentionally following* prescribed rules of conduct [emphasis added], *ritual is used to indicate a transformation in the meaning and efficacy of the respective act, behavior, or practice. The concept "ritual" can therefore be defined as the orderly performance of a complex sequence of formulaic acts and utterances that are set apart from other forms of everyday activity through framing and formalization...* (Kreinath 2018: 1)

Interestingly, the recent pandemic has led to the reuse of this accepted theoretical framework and also to its renewal through the lens of participant observation. Indeed, nobody has really been exempted from the COVID-19 crisis, which raises the question of self-reflexivity in our studies. When rituals suddenly stop or need to adapt worldwide, it becomes difficult to remain objective about the situation, and researchers are urged to comment on it, eventually using their own subjective experiences.[1] In this respect, the accepted rules of social sciences, humanistic epistemology, and the usual ethical codes have largely been twisted since the beginning of the pandemic, as everybody was in need of focusing on the

present. As a result, this issue presents very different sorts of texts, although they are all precisely centred on the problem of going beyond the rules.

The first sort of texts try to keep a cool head and carry on with the objectivist tradition. This choice was defended within our group by those who felt that the best thing to do in times of crisis was to continue to do what we were able to do the best, namely, research. In a way, this is already a transgressive attitude insofar as strong social expectations are weighed on the researchers, asking them, at all costs, to think about the situation and about the crisis first. Within the framework of this effort to concentrate on the continuation of our work on the ritual year, several options stand out. In some cases, the authors have proposed more descriptive approaches, centred on the long history of certain rituals (Nina Vlaskina), on the holiday bans and the punishment for violating them (Irina Sedakova), on the transgressive social functions of other rituals (Anamaria Iuga and Georgiana Vlahbei), or on linguistic approaches to cultural diffusion phenomena (Gleb Pilipenko and Maria Yasinskaya). In other cases, the approach is more committed from a political point of view and proposes strategies for improving traditional rituals based on the observation of their inadequacy with the values of modernity (Lidia Montesinos Llinares, Margaret Bullen, and Begoña Pecharromán Ferrer).

Another sort of text reports, on the contrary, the need to think about the crisis and the sudden collapse of the rules. This type of text strives to understand what the pandemic has done to rituals, for example, through the study of the transformations undergone by annual rituals or by the rituals of the individual life cycle. It is from this perspective that the sometimes surprising transformations and adaptations of Easter rituals in Russia (Daria Radchenko), wedding rituals in Hungary (Judit Balatonyi), and pilgrimages in Romania (Irina Stahl) have been studied in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, as a symptom of the need to change the rules in order to give oneself the means to think about a situation that is in many respects new, the logic of the authors' text dissolves, at the end of our issue, into a multivocal report of a roundtable on rituals during the pandemic. Thus, the rule of formally presenting separate research fields is replaced by the need for a collective dialogue and an exchange of experiences. However, this dialogue is all the more constructive in that it makes it possible to compare individual points of view and to propose a debate of ideas, beyond the simple presentation of data.

In the first article of this issue, **Irina Sedakova** (Russia) concentrates on a very direct understanding of the Congress's and the Ritual Year Working Group panel's topic and analyses the violation of the holiday bans and recommendations as they are depicted in Bulgarian ethnographic prescriptions and

their folkloric poetic versions. In the traditional culture, any holiday is seen as a blessed and, meanwhile, a dangerous day, which is supported by the terms for the feasts (*sacred day* vs. *damned*, *malevolent day*). Thus, misbehaviour, for example, working on a sacred day, is punished with natural disasters, losses of crops and cattle, illnesses, and death. Sedakova gives examples of the remains of the bans on working and doing certain activities on holidays and shows how the bans are covered by the Bulgarian mass media.

The next article, by **Anamaria Iuga** and **Georgiana Vlahbei** (Romania), concentrates on the Mute, a central masked character in the *Căluş* Whitsunday ritual in Romania, which is now protected by the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. The *Căluş* ritual is a complex healing and prophylactic ritual, intertwining the connected dimensions of transgression and laughter. It is both a living tradition and an artistic performance, within which the costume and mask simultaneously hide and reveal sexual taboos. The authors show that the reception of the Mute's transgressive behaviour by different audiences and over time reveals how society views, constructs, and controls deviant behaviours and the evolution they undergo within these boundaries. In this respect, ritual makes transgression temporarily acceptable.

Nina Vlaskina (Russia) presents her fieldwork on the Nekrasov Cossacks in their processes of emigration and re-emigration. Focusing mainly on fishing and agricultural rituals, she shows how economy is deeply intertwined with culture, nature, and ideology, and how the Cossack rituals have followed a multigenerational historical adaptation. Vlaskina thus reminds us that any ritual is built over a long period of time. Rituals are therefore complex constructions, and as such, they are fragile and need to be studied and protected.

In their article, **Gleb Pilipenko** and **Maria Yasinskaya** (Russia) focus on Easter traditions among Slovenes in the Natisone Valley in the Province of Udine, Italy. Through field research, they study both Easter customs and the linguistic materials, which demonstrate the results of the contacts between the two languages and two cultures. The zones of contacts display innovations and contaminations, but they also demonstrate that some archaic customs are stable, and the rituals in the region of Udine confirm that. The authors show the importance of interculturality in general and of Slavic-Romance interactions in particular, reminding us about the importance of cultural contacts in building up traditional rituals.

While the first group of articles draws attention to the importance of commitment by researchers in their field of research, the recent event of the pandemic has even reinforced the need for such commitment. In her article, **Daria Radchenko** (Russia) focuses on Easter festivities during the lockdown in Russia,

investigating how believers constructed and reflected the space of the Easter service in their homes, using three key strategies: synchronisation, spacing, and appellation to experience. She questions the so-called "distributed church service" and tries to find out if on-screen rituals enable participation. Reflecting on private space and the materiality of rituals, she eventually shows how the mediated Easter service during the pandemic produced a complex system of communication and co-action between the actors of the religious ritual.

Irina Stahl (Romania) documents and scrutinises the changes in the religious processions and pilgrimages dedicated to St Paraskeva, St Demetrius, and St Nektarios in urban settings under the COVID-19 restrictions. She investigates the new norms imposed by public authorities, the solutions found by the Church representatives, and the faithful's reaction to the new situation. Pilgrimages urge physical performance by the priesthood and participation by the parishioners, so the processions cannot take place entirely in the virtual form. The article depicts in detail how the Church representatives and the faithful finally adapted to the rules.

For her part, **Judit Balatonyi** (Hungary) studies weddings in quarantine in Hungary. She notes that there were fewer weddings in general during the pandemic, but not in Hungary, where a 3% increase was observed in the number of weddings. Using netnography as well as questionnaires, she discusses macro-contextual factors that influence individual decision-making, replanning, and reinterpretation processes, and follows up by examining how these processes unfolded. She argues that people usually turn to micro-weddings when restrictions increase and asks about the reasons why they choose to maintain or postpone their weddings. While restrictive government measures to curb the pandemic (e.g., curfews and interdictions on public gatherings, the banning of events, or limitations on the number of attendees) were often used as an explanation for the cancellation of weddings, Balatonyi also draws attention to stronger reasons for getting married, especially emphasising the power of love as well as pre-pandemic social policies of the government. People, she suggests, rather thought tactically, either trying to postpone their wedding to be able to hold large wedding receptions, or downscaling their wedding, or postponing it, or holding the official wedding and postponing the wedding reception.

Then, **Lidia Montesinos Llinares**, **Margaret Bullen**, and **Begoña Pecharromán** (Spain) use the lens of feminist anthropology to study the role of women in traditional "androcentric" rituals in Spain. Studying the *fiesta* from a gender perspective, they find out that where previously women assumed invisible domestic tasks, such as sewing costumes, cooking, and taking care of children, they now begin to take the lead as participants in the festive rituals.

In order to answer the demand and vindication of women to participate in living history or in carnivals, the promotion of more equalitarian festivities might follow different consensus strategies, such as dialogue and mediation strategies, creative strategies, strategies that seek parity, equity, or equality, strategies for intervention in the communication of festivals, strategies for eradicating violence against women, and institutional strategies aiming at a better inclusion of women in the rituals. The authors eventually advocate for the need for progressive changes and propose that researchers should encourage intervention in the field in order to promote gender equality.

Thus, the strategic reactions observed in the case of traditional prohibitions (as in the case of Spanish women prevented from participating in traditional rituals) were also observed in response to the new prohibitions that appeared in the context of the pandemic. The roundtable concluding the work of two previous panels organised by the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group (transcript by **Irina Stahl** and **Nina Vlaskina**) makes it clear by questioning the different impacts the recent COVID-19 pandemic had on the ritual year. Indeed, such impacts were manifold, including emotions, (re)negotiations of space, and the adaptation of research strategies. Moreover, the sudden absence of collective rituals during the lockdown made us realise how important they are and how they are actually rhythm-making. A feeling of alienation resulted from the lack of communication with other people, of togetherness. There was also an alienation from the senses, from feelings, and from being involved in the ritual as a person and as a physical body. With the suppression of rituals, plenty of cultural meanings and performances were also suppressed. The discussions show that new rules appeared during the pandemic, along with violations of the same rules. Alongside the transformations of the rituals themselves, the ways in which they were viewed, the modes of engagement of researchers, and the strategies of adaptation were transformed.

Alexander Novik, **Irina Sedakova**, and **Anastasia Kharlamova** provide a general view on and a detailed account of some panels of the 15th SIEF congress "Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression". The authors conclude that "the main topic of rules, norms, chaos, and anomalies has inspired the researchers to look for new approaches and review the traditional ones in their analysis of sociological, political, and scientific facts as well as the ethnological and folkloristic data". This statement sums up the ideas of all the articles in this thematic issue.

This collection of essays eventually gives an idea of the various issues at work in the context of global crises, which can be not only health-related but also economic, political, and cultural. While the COVID-19 pandemic seems to

have faded away, 2022 has brought new challenges and tragic events that have influenced the run of the ritual year and established new topics and rituals to be studied and discussed. Because rituals always constitute a bridge between nature and culture, they are fragile in times of crisis, but at the same time they are very valuable indicators for judging the consequences of crises on human societies.

NOTE

[1] The pandemic inspired the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group to start a Seasonal Webinar in 2020, which proved to be a great platform for uniting the scholars and supporting their traditional studies of the rituals. The virtual meetings also stimulated the members of the group to document and investigate the new forms and contexts of the feasts and celebrations during the COVID-19 restrictions. About the account of the webinars see Sedakova & Stahl 2022.

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Laurent S. Fournier is Professor of Anthropology at the Université Côte d'Azur, France. He has worked on rituals and festivals in Europe and on traditional sports and games. He is President of the Eurethno Network (Council of Europe),

the co-chair of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group, and a former executive member of the SIEF.

laurent.fournier@univ-amu.fr

Irina Sedakova (PhD, Sc.D.) is Head of the Department of Typology and Comparative Linguistics, Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia. Currently she is the co-chair of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group. Her fields of interest are Slavic and Balkan studies, ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, folklore, childbirth and calendric customs.

ised@mail.ru

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CALENDRIC FEAST BANS AND THE PUNISHMENT FOR VIOLATING THEM IN THE BULGARIAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Irina Sedakova
Sc.D., Head of the Department of Typology and Comparative Linguistics
Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
ised@mail.ru

Abstract: The paper offers an interdisciplinary ethnolinguistic and semiotic analysis of the Bulgarian calendric prohibitions and the consequences of violating them. Special attention is paid to linguistic data – the chrononyms which characterize these days as ambivalent, both blessed and malevolent, days which must be observed as work-free and free from other types of activity. Folk etymology of some terms for holidays reveals how language constructs the calendric order and offers an insight into the ritual restrictions of some feasts. The list of bans in an ethnographic context is scrutinized according to which holidays are "dangerous", who is the subject of the bans, and what punishment will follow for breaking the rules. Holidays for which non-observance is most seriously punished are Christian calendric feasts which often have many pre-Christian elements and occasionally reflect the cult of animals. Many restrictions affect women only, especially those who are pregnant and mothers, as they concern female biological and social functions. Folklore parallels to the theme of the article are investigated and a poetic means of depicting the punishment for the sins is shown. A reverse development of the motif of 'sin and punishment' is represented in the songs about Saint Nedelia, who does not punish the sinners but suffers herself because people work on 'her days', Sundays. Some of the bans and recommendations relevant for calendric rituals are still evident in Bulgarian society, confirming the continuation of certain features of the archaic worldview. The paper is based on field research data collected by the author during the last three decades and on published and archival materials.
Keywords: Bulgarian folklore, cult of saints, ethnolinguistics, prescriptions, punishment, ritual year, semiotics, sins

INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper alludes to the general heading of the 15th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) (19–24 June 2021), "Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression", and addresses an

array of complex linguistic, ethnographic, and folklore facts analysed in the ethnolinguistic prospective, with special attention to the semiotic approach.[1]

Traditional folk culture is strictly regulated, and the bans and recommendations are one of the means to transform the chaos into cosmos and to culturally adapt the nature. The very calendar and the ritual year, the division of time into meaningful fragments and marking the holidays are seen as culture opposed to nature, as mythological conceptualization of time, and following the rules guarantees the society's safety and prosperity (Braginskaia 1980: 502).

Vladimir Toporov notes, "In the archaic mythopoetic and religious tradition, [a holiday is] a temporal period that has a special connection with the sacred sphere, suggesting the maximum involvement of all the participants, and is marked as a kind of an institutionalized (even if it is improvisational) action" (Toporov 1980: 329). The holidays are strictly delimited as concerns time and space (locations), performers (male/female, married/unmarried men and women, old/young people, children), types of activity and speech, usage of special objects and garments, etc. On holidays, special rules of behaviour are prescribed for the people, and especially for women (pregnant, mothers, young wives), children, and old people, as they are the most vulnerable group of any community. These recommendations reflect the idea of the importance of the cosmic world order; they also fit into the ethics and moral directives of the traditional way of life in a community.

The lists of the calendric bans on various types of work and activity, with depictions of what consequences would follow if the rules are broken, are a common phenomenon in all ethnographic and folkloric field data and in the research studies discussing feast days. The consequences of breaking the festive rules constitute the general subject of some Bulgarian narratives and folk ballads, with corresponding poetic means and didactic alignment. The proverb "They say that on the Day of the Annunciation (25 March) even a bird does not make a nest"[2] supports the idea of the importance of being idle on great holidays. Legends narrate that the way the holidays should be celebrated has been set by the saints. For example, St Sabbas[3] demanded his day (12 January) to be celebrated as 'an empty day', a day without routine work:

> *Once, St Barbara* [4 December] *and St Sabbas had a talk, and St Barbara said that she would like people to venerate her by baking bread and working as usual. But her sister*[4] *St Sabbas answered that she did not want bread nor fish, but she wanted the people to respect and venerate her and they were not supposed to work. That's why women's work is not carried out, so the children do not get ill.* (Popov 1994: 84)

In this article, I will firstly examine the most "dangerous" holidays, the rules for their celebration, and the typical punishment for breaking the bans. This is the case when people sin and then suffer or provoke the sufferings of their family and the whole village. I will also scrutinise an unusual consequence – when people sin, but it is Saint Nedelia who is punished and who is suffering. In this section, the specifics of folklore texts with ethnographic motifs – the links between ethnographic knowledge and its representation in folklore genres – are of great relevance. The paper is based on the archival and printed materials and on the field data I have collected during the last three decades in Bulgaria.

CALENDRIC HOLIDAYS AND BANS IN LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Folk terminology

The rules of celebrating and the restrictions of everyday activity on a holiday relate to the semantics of the corresponding terms for a feast. In the Bulgarian language, a holiday is denoted by the common Slavic word *празник* (*praznik*), which literally means 'an empty day', 'a day when people do not work'. This term underlines the uniqueness of a holiday when time stops; thus, a feast is opposed to ordinary, non-holiday days – weekdays (Toporov 1980: 329). Other Bulgarian words for a holiday reflect the idea of a sacred blessed day *благ ден* (*blag den*) similar to other Slavic terms: Ukrainian *свято* (*svito*), Byelorussian *свята* (*svita*), Czech *svátek*, Polish *święto* (Vendina 2015: 221).

The epithets that characterize feasts reveal the ambivalent essence of these days. They are exposed as a blessed and, in the meantime, evil time period. A frequent Bulgarian epithet for a feast day is *личен ден* (*lichen den*) 'outstanding', and it is positively marked as 'great' and 'beautiful'. Other epithets are *лош, опасен ден* (*losh, opasen den* 'a bad, dangerous day') and *тежък празник* (*tezhuk praznik*), or synonymous *хаталия* (*hatalia*) 'a heavy, dangerous day' (from Turkish *hatalı* 'an error, a misfortune'). The epithet directly alludes to a potential punishment, e.g., it contains the idea of the perilous results of breaking the regulations. Other folk terms for a holiday are Slavic *лют ден* (*liut den*) 'fierce day', *проклет ден* (*proklet den*) 'cursed, damned day', which also qualify a feast as a dangerous and malevolent day.[5]

The terms denoting ritual and everyday rural rules, bans, restrictions, and recommendations (Bulgarian *правило*, *рекомендация*, *регуляция* (*pravilo*, *rekomendatsiia*, *reguliatsiia*)) should also be commented on. They are bookish, literary, and belong to the vocabulary of scholars, not to the lexicon of the

bearers of the folk tradition. The scholarly metalanguage reflects the artificial system of terminology, while the authentic language of restrictions and recommendations uses different words and expressions. The vernacular vocabulary for patriarchal order is very metaphoric, and its semantics fits into the traditional ethical and moral binary oppositions of good – bad, safe – dangerous, sinful – righteous, etc.

The bans are often expressed by the modal verb *should not*, by impersonal verbal constructions *it is forbidden to*…, by nouns signifying a sin or a mistake,[6] by adverbs meaning 'it is bad', 'it is not good', or just by a statement 'on that day people do not…'.[7] In the Bulgarian ethnographic publications, there are lists of bans and restrictions which constitute a short folklore genre, a certain model of behaviour, and they are published in special sections, occasionally called *нефела* (*nefela*, literally 'bad', in this context 'not recommended'). This word gives an excellent example of a typically Balkan linguistic case when one borrowed word (*нефела* comes from Greek ἀνωφελής 'useless' (BER 2012: 629)) obtains a Slavic particle of negation *ne-* and then goes through many formal and semantic modifications to become a key denotation of the prohibitions. The polysemic *нефела* and its versions (*неела*, *нихела* (*neela*, *nikhela*), etc.) fall into the lexicon of negative, frightening, and dangerous, and are reasoned. The Bulgarian and common Balkan term *нефела* 'not good' is used in its full semantic diversity to verbalize the regulation of ritual and non-ritual activity. One can also suggest Romance roots in this lexical net; compare *valeo* 'to be healthy' and *invalid* 'disabled' (see Sedakova 2007: 86–91). Even more, some scholars see a Turkish trace in these words: *nafile* 'in vain' (BER 2012: 565, 629). Thus, the word *нефела* and similarly sounding words exemplify the processes of language interinfluence, typical for the Balkan Slavs and the Bulgarians due to the contacts and the Balkan neighbourhood. Interestingly enough, this is a parallel to the cultural multilayer and inhomogeneous folk tradition of Bulgaria with the Thracian substrate, cross-Balkan influences, and a combination of pre-Christian and Christian views.

Folk etymology and rules of behaviour

Folk etymology is a relevant process in the folk perception of the saints' names and the terms of the feasts, which influences the choice of rules and the corresponding punishment for sins (Tolstoi & Tolstaia 1988). I will analyse those which are related to the theme of the article.

St Panteleimon (27 July) is known as the patron of diseases, but his name is taken as an allusion to the root **put* 'a road', and he is known as *Пантелей*

Пътник (*Pantelei putnik* 'Panteleimon the Traveller'). Other allusions take into account the ending of the name *-лея* (*leia*) 'to pour', and the very day of his commemoration is celebrated "against gales, storms and floods". According to Khristo Vakarelski, many stories narrate events from the lives of the relatives whose houses, cattle, or fields have been flooded or taken away by water because the people did not venerate St Panteleimon. On this day, children cry in the streets *"Пантелея-лея, Пантелея-лея!"* (*Panteleia-leia, Panteleia-leia* 'Panteleimon, pour, pour!') (Vakarelski 1943: 91).

Folk etymology links the Bulgarian name *Прокоп* (*Prokop* 'St Procopius', 8 July) with the verb *прокопсвам* (*prokopsvam* 'to prosper'), and people are not allowed to work, so as to avoid misfortune in the family and losing good luck (G. Mikhailova 1999: 317). The similar sounds of the Bulgarian terms for *Ирминден* (*Irminden* 'St Jeremiah's Day', 1 May) and for the illness of the women in labour *ирминясвам* (*irminiasvam*) prevent the pregnant women from working on this day so as to avoid getting ill after the delivery. St Simeon's Day (1 September) is associated with the verb *сименьосвам* (*simeniosvam* 'to mark') and thus it is believed that working on his day is dangerous for the unborn babies – they will be 'marked', born with pigment spots on the body or with a defect.

St Ignatius (20 December) is thought to be the master of fire, due to folk etymology, because the regional pronunciation of the name of the saint is analogous to the Bulgarian word 'fire': *Игинят – огинят* (*Iginiat – oginiat*). There is a belief that the person who does not venerate the saint will suffer from fire (Primovski 1963: 238). Similar folk etymological associations with the fire can be found in St Paul's name: the Bulgarian dialectal *Палювден*[8] (*Paliuvden* 'St Paul's Day', 30 June) is associated with the verb *паля* (*palia*) 'to burn'.

Folk etymology reveals that language reflects archaic beliefs and, meanwhile, it creates new models for structuring nature.

SINS AND PUNISHMENT IN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

As mentioned above, under the title *нефела* one can find lists of bans and recommendations for proper behaviour to avoid misfortune. Not all of them, though, cover the ritual year restrictions. We can find more rules in the ethnographic accounts of calendric holidays and the ways they should be celebrated: "St Elijah's Day [July 20] is an evil day. If it is not venerated, a disaster will follow" (Popov 2002: 369); "2 February is the Day of St Blaise, Bishop of Sebaste, the cattle day. Those who work, their fingers will ache" (Genchev & Georgieva 1993:

245); "On 26 November [the Day of St Stylian of Paphlagonia], mothers do not work, so their children do not get ill" (Popov 1994: 84), etc.

Occasionally, there are no prescriptions for staying idle. There is just the date of the holiday and an epithet: St Panteleimon's Day is "a heavy holiday" (Popov 1994: 113). This means that there is a certain sample of behaviour, and that people should be very careful, otherwise misfortune will follow. Misbehaviour is sinful and therefore perilous: "On St Tryphon's Day [1 February] it is forbidden to touch sharp objects – needles and knives – because it is a sin, and St Tryphon will punish you with cuts and wounds" (Primovski 1963: 239). The fact that the villagers are afraid of being punished is expressed openly: "On St Barbara women do not touch sharp objects, needles, scissors, knives, because they are afraid that St Barbara would bring them disasters" (Primovski 1963: 245).

A conditional clause is another means of expressing the ban, which sounds like a real menace: "If on Todor's Saturday[9] women cook, the lambs would be born with defects" (Genchev & Georgieva 1993: 246). This logic is often transformed into explanations and longer stories of the cases when there is mischief: "The lambs have been born with defects because you have cooked on Todor's Saturday" (see more on these logical transformations in Sedakova 2007: 93–94).

The rules defining righteous behavioural models are not written down. In the communities, they are transmitted orally – usually within the family by older relatives, in the church by the priesthood, or by fellow villagers. Dimitar Marinov, a Bulgarian ethnographer of the nineteenth century, gives precious information on that:

> *On Sundays and great holidays, the priest does not allow people to go to the field and to work (this is not good for the village). Nor do villagers let people work. If somebody goes and starts working, the villagers stop him. If the person is too bull-headed, the villagers can break his plough or cart … During the Great Lent, the priest does not perform marriage ceremonies, and people do not allow weddings to be performed because it is not good for the village and for the cattle. On the eve of Sundays and great holidays, the priest does not perform marriage ceremonies, and people do not allow weddings to be performed, because it is not good for the young (newlyweds).* (Marinov 1907: 102)

Other ethnographic sources underline that "the heavy holidays" are known for strict bans on any kind of work, and those who wish to work are spoken against and even beaten.

In April, May, and June, there are many feasts which are celebrated to prevent hail. On St Mark's Day (25 April) and the Great Thursdays (a series of

Thursdays starting from the Holy Week till Ascension), people are not allowed to work. There are many disputes, quarrels, and even fights, if someone decides to work, especially if the village has suffered from hail before.

The number of "dangerous" holidays which do not allow people to work is amazingly huge.[10] They include all the great feasts of the Christian ritual year, smaller church holidays, commemorations of saints, and pre-Christian celebrations. The lists of such "dangerous" feasts and the cults of the punishing saints vary from region to region. Apart from the saints, the evil spirits have their own days of veneration. In certain festive periods, for example from Christmas till Epiphany, the demons *караконджалы* (*karakondzali*) prescribe certain restrictions in behaviour. If somebody breaks the rules, they will die or get ill (Sedakova 2021: 55–75).

The descriptions of bans and the consequences of breaking the rules range from very general ones to very detailed advice.

"People do not work on St Nicholas' Day" (G. Mikhailova 1986: 246).

"On the day of the beheading of St John the Baptist (29 August), people do not start any work. Especially they try not to touch sharp objects – the wound would never heal up" (Zakhariev 1935: 227).

On St Charalambos' Day (10 February), no work should be done at home so as to prevent the epidemic of plague.

On St Catherine's Day (24 November), women do not work so as to avoid fires and fever, and do not "make houses black [wearing black clothes for mourning]". They do not touch sharp objects – to secure their hands from wounds (Popov 1994: 83–84).

Often, there are real stories with real protagonists (mother, father, neighbour, etc.) exemplifying the efficacy of the bans if they are broken. These didactic texts also vary in their form and length. They can consist of just one sentence, as an illustration. The statement "There is a ban on baking bread on St Blaise's Day [*Власовден*]. The person who does not follow the rule will develop a disease in the mouth like having hair [*влакна*]" is exemplified by a real case: "My mother baked bread on this day and until she ate it, she got some hairs on her tongue and she could not eat. She said, 'Venerate this day'" (Popov 2002: 338). On St Charalambos' Day, Bulgarians said, do not sew, do not start new work. One woman whitewashed the walls. They had a gun at home. She decided to move it. And then the gun shot. People commented: "Kurta [the name of the lady] worked, and she was shot in the hand" (Popov 2002: 337–338).

For many holidays, the bans relate to all the grown-ups who work, but there are many feasts with restrictions exclusively for women or women of reproductive age. It is connected with the female biological and social functions to bear

and give birth to a child, then to bring the children up, to take care of their husbands, and to look after the household.

We can speak of a women's ritual year which includes the cycle of Virgin Mary's feasts and the holidays of the female saints. Many days in this calendar are venerated by pregnant women, as there is a saying, "If somebody does not venerate a holiday, the Lord will mark the child" (RKS: 353). From St Ignatius' Day till Christmas, there is a period of strict regulations for pregnant women, since it is believed that the Virgin started to feel delivery pains. This belief is supported by the all-Bulgarian Nativity song "Замъчи се Божа майка от Игнат до Коледа" (Mother of God Felt the Labour Pains from St Ignatius' Day till Nativity). The Virgin Mary's great holidays: Annunciation, Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (2 February), Assumption (15 August), and Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple (21 November) are supplemented by the days of women saints: Assumption of St Ann (25 July), St Catherine, etc. There are other feasts chosen for various reasons which are venerated by women, e.g., St Tryphon's Day and St Simeon's Day when women of reproductive age, and especially the pregnant ones, do not work, so as to give birth easily and to avoid having a handicapped baby (G. Mikhailova 1986: 273; Popov 1994: 87). Many narratives depict the real events when a pregnant woman cut something on St Simeon's Day, and the baby she gave birth to had a harelip, or fingers were missing (see more examples in Sedakova 2007: 79–82). Some bans for women are focused on preventing the tragic deaths of children – mostly in fires. On St Barbara, apart from general bans on housework, there are special restrictions regarding bathing the children – otherwise they will die in the fire (G. Mikhailova 1986: 245).

Women also venerate the Day of St Anastasia (Bulgarian *Наташа* (*Natasha*), *Черна* (*Chiorna*, 'black'), 22 December, one of the folk personifications of death), and leave their work aside. According to a belief, if you do not follow the bans, St Anastasia will make the house of the working woman black, i.e., the household will be in mourning.

Of special women's attention are the so-called Wolves' Days (occasionally Martin's Days, Bulgarian *Мартиньок* (*Martiniok*)), which are timed to Christian feasts, but in their essence are based on the archaic cult of the animals and the real fright of them (Gura 1997: 122–159). There are several periods in the ritual year, different in their area of distribution, when women are not allowed to touch anything that can be associated with making clothes for men. Wolves' Days are usually spread in the calendar between several saint days and festive periods, but mostly the dangerous days are those of St Tryphon, St Demetrius (26 October), St Menas (11 November), and St Philip (14 November) (Kabakova 1995). The strict bans on women's work, especially knitting and sewing, and even

touching scissors, needles, etc., are reinforced and illustrated by many shorter or longer stories. They usually narrate that a man was followed by wolves, and he was miraculously rescued when he remembered that the clothes (or gloves, or hat) had been made on Wolves' Day, and threw them to the wolves. These stories circulate in the villages and support the strong faith in the inevitability of punishment. I will quote the texts which exemplify the ways and means by which traditional views are transmitted.

> *One woman knitted a pair of gloves for her son on St Menas' Day. He went to the forest to get some firewood, and wolves reached him. He climbed a tree and threw down the gloves. The wolves ate them up and ran away.* (G. Mikhailova 1999: 294–295)

> *People began to forget about venerating the Wolves' Days and did not celebrate them anymore. One woman put a patch on her husband's clothes. When he went to the woods, a wolf approached the man and bit the patch off. It makes it clear that it is forbidden to work on wolves' holidays.* (Radulov 1890: 166)

These stories convey direct messages: if you violate the rules, you will be punished. They lack folkloric poetic details but depict a really frightening situation and a miraculous escape, so as to keep the ritual order and to avoid misfortunes.

Restrictions on women's work on holidays are associated with snakes – another mythic and meanwhile real danger in the Balkans. Rituals to drive away snakes are a constituent part of the Bulgarian calendric feasts, and restrictions on women's work are part of them. Starting on St Jeremiah's Day, women do not work at home and in the field and do not touch sharp objects for the entire week to symbolically protect themselves from snakes and worms (Popov 1994: 107). The days of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (9 March), Annunciation (25 March), and St George (6 May) are also the holidays with prescribed bans against snakes. The ethnographic data turns into poetic folklore ballads, where the chthonic nature of snakes becomes evident, as is shown below.

The final ethnographic episode I will shed light on is dedicated to the so-called Hot Days (15–17 July, Bulgarian *Горешляци*, *Горешници*, *Горещи дни* (*Goreshliatsi*, *Goreshnitsi*, *Goreshti dni*)) and ritual prevention from fire. Though one of these days is St Marina the Martyr's commemoration (17 July), a Christian feast, this period being in the middle of summer is known for many restrictions and recommendations "against fire". People do not cook and bake, do not use fire, they have to avoid working in the fields. In some regions, there is a total ban on any kind of work (Genchev & Georgieva 1993: 256; G. Mikhailova 1986:

276). Other days dedicated to fire are St John (24 June), St Paul, SS Cosmas and Damian (1 July), SS Quiricus and Julietta (15 July), and St Maccabees (1 August), all in the middle of summer and thus tightly associated with natural heat and fire. It is worth mentioning that the real stories illustrating the results of the violated bans depict Turkish landlords.

> *The Day of SS Quiricus and Julietta was venerated very strictly, so that even Turkish landlords were watched by their workers and were forced to follow the rules. A well-known folk anecdote says that one mean landlord did not let his workers to have a rest in summer. He made them work day and night so as to harvest as much as possible. He would say, "Holiday-Moliday, but it is a necessity." On the Day of SS Quiricus and Julietta, the workers told the landlord about the dangerous holiday, but he started to swear at them. In the morning, when they were returning from the fields with carts full of sheaves, a storm came. They hid themselves under the carts, and suddenly a bolt of lightning struck one of the carts. Next year, the landlord started to ask when the feast was one week before the date so as not to work on that day.* (Vakarelski 1943: 87–88)

The figures of Turks as protagonists do not appear here accidentally. They belong to alien faith with a different ritual calendar and norms of behaviour. Besides, they take higher social positions as conquerors of Bulgaria and rich landlords. Still, they are punished for making people work on a feast day. This indication doubles the force of the inevitability of punishment, which is indispensable for all sinners, for all who break the rules.

SINS AND PUNISHMENT IN FOLK BALLADS

The motif of punishing people in folk ballads

In the Aarne-Thompson Index (Aarne & Stith 1961 [1910]), the motifs of breaking the rules to work fall into the section AA*750-779, "God repays and punishes", cf. AA *795, "Lord does not forgive the woman who washes on a holiday".[11] These motifs are often documented in Bulgarian folklore ballads. Some of them are love songs sung at girls' village gatherings. Among the punished people, there are mostly young girls and boys who are chastised for their work on holidays and for not listening to their mothers. These songs have didactic motifs, but they transmit the traditional worldview in another way, a poetical and cliched one, which is well remembered.

The content of the ballads includes almost the whole ritual year. They mention the bans on the Great Week before Easter, Easter itself, St George's Day, St Jeremiah's Day, SS Peter and Paul's Day, Rusalia Days (the week after Pentecost), St Marina's and St Procopius' days, and Sundays.

A ballad titled "A Girl Gets Ill Because She Has Worked on a Holiday"[12] narrates a girl who was sewing on Great Saturday before Easter and now, being terminally ill, she laments for her relatives (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 416). The ballad does not mention who punished the girl and how it happened. This motif is given as common knowledge and a logical development of events. This section of the song is an introduction to the more important part of this love ballad – the dialogue between the girl and her sister-in-law, where the girl explains why, when she dies, she will grieve for everybody but not for her beloved one.

Another song titled "A Bride Gets Ill Because She Worked on a Holiday" gives a detailed picture of how the girl got ill: she started to work on a holiday and her head started to ache. She got a fever, lay down and could not get up. Again, this is the introduction to the main part of the song, which in the form of a dialogue shows the love of the girl who arranges her groom to find another bride.

Apart from terminal illness, blindness and muteness are the divine punishments for working on a holiday. A girl named Grozdomena, who has been stitching embroidery on Great Friday, gets blind and numb, and she asks her mother to invite her friends to undo the stitching. When they finish, she can see and talk again (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 416). Another ending of a version of this song is that the priests are invited, and their nine-day prayers return to the girl the ability to see and to talk (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 416).

For poetical reasons, in some ballads the style is even more expressive – thus the victims are doubled and they are brothers. When all the villagers of Huzhali celebrate a holiday (without defining the day, just mentioning that Bulgarians *църква църкуват tsurkva tsurkuvat* 'were celebrating a religious feast'), two brothers, Pahun' and Mitio, go to a ravine to dig out stones. They find a huge stone, which they think can serve as the foundation for a well, but the stone starts to move and kills them. Before they die, one of them says, "The villagers celebrate the church feast, while we, dear brother, dig out the stones" (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 425–426).

A young man who shears sheep on St Elijah's Day finds a tragic death – he stumbles and falls down on something sharp, which stabs his heart. Before he dies, he cries: "Those sons who do not listen to their mothers should be damned three times if the mother says, 'Do not shear sheep on Elijah's Day', but the son does not listen to her" (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 424–425). This final direct didactic message follows two goals – to call for obedience in the family (to listen to the elders) and to keep the ritual order.

Another tragic development of a punishment introduces a song narrating how two clouds decide to chastise the man who collects tribute money on St Elijah's Day – they decide to kill his twin sons to make him understand that it is forbidden to work on a holiday.

A longer song, "Punished by the Lord for Working on St George's Day", narrates a story which can also be found as a tale. Here, the landlord makes his servants work on the holiday in spite of the fact that they admonish him (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 422–423). The Lord punishes the sinner by setting his bulls on fire.

These songs do not always specify who actually castigates the sinner, but occasionally the actor is mentioned – it is the Lord or a definite saint. There are no songs of how wolves attack a person who wears clothes made or patched on the Wolves' Days, in spite of the fact that there are so many prosaic texts illustrating the corresponding rule. There are, however, many ballads depicting snakes as the punishers of girls who work on holidays (see above about the bans to work on certain holidays so as to escape snake bites). Below is an example of such a song portraying the punishment of a girl working on St Jeremiah's Day, known for strict restrictions "against snakes" (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 418–419).

Тъкала Рада на голям праздник,	Rada wove on a great holiday
на голям праздник, на Иримия...	On a great holiday, on Jeremiah holiday…
Майка й обед готвела,	Her mother was cooking lunch to her,
Да дойде Рада да яде,	So Rada could come and eat it.
да дойде Рада, няма я...	But Rada did not come…
Майка й отишла да я види.	Rada's mother went to see her.
Кросната станали змейове,	Weaving loom has turned into snakes.
На Рада очите изпили,	They have drunk out Rada's eyes,
щото тъкала на Иримия,	Because she wove on Jeremiah's Day,
На Иримия, на проклетия.	On Jeremiah's Day, on this damned day.
	(G. Mikhailova 1999: 310)

There are other ballads which refer to other holidays. A girl does not listen to her mother, who tries to prevent her from working on St Marina's Day, and a snake bites her. A mother does not let her daughter to go to the field and to harvest on St Peter's Day, but the daughter still goes and works. A snake bites her in between the eyes and eyebrows (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 423–424). These songs end with a direct speech in which the danger and inevitability of punishment are stated (ibid.: 423).

The snakes serve as mediators of the Lord's will. They connect the chthonic world of the dead with the world of the living. Sight and eyes have mythical connotations, and the association of the snakes with sight (eyes, blindness) is a frequent motif in folklore and in rituals (Tolstoi 1995a: 501).

All the songs depict the tragic events with poetic means, which are not typical of practical prosaic bans and prescriptions. I will show the poetization of the plot below when describing the sufferings of St Nedelia.

The motif of St Nedelia's sufferings

In Bulgarian tradition, St Kyriaki the Great Martyr of Nicomedia is known as Saint Nedelia ('Sunday'), which in the Bulgarian language literally means 'not-doing'. The semantics of this name correlates with the firm bans on working on Sundays, as they are documented in the ethnography of Bulgarian rural communities. These rules are supported occasionally by folk stories,[13] but more often by folk ballads.

St Nedelia takes her place in the same line as the other personified days of the week – Wednesday and Friday (Veselovskiy 1876; Tolstoi & Radenkovich 2001: 375–376, 423–425, 508–509; Belova 2004; Popov 2008; Amosova 2016; Vinogradova 2017; K. Mikhailova 1999) – the saints who punish women working on these particular days. The ballads of St Nedelia present another consequence of breaking the rules – the girls and women work and sin, but it is St Nedelia who suffers.[14] Such motifs are frequent in South Slavic ballads, and they are included in the indexes of the folklore plots (Ikonomov 1893: 127; Boiadzhieva 1982: 153–154).[15]

These songs are published in the folklore collections in the sections "sacred ("religious", "mythological") songs" with the note that they are performed during the girls' gatherings and harvesting. The length of the songs differs from several brief lines to very long ones, with detailed depictions of St Nedelia's woes. Here is one example of St Nedelia's sufferings with explanations of the reasons for them:

Яз не съм млада дивойка,	I am not a young girl,
яз съм най свита Ниделя,	But I am the very Saint Nedelia,
ют пусти вашти българи	Your damned Bulgarians,
в ниделя ягни колиха,	They work on Sundays,
затуй ми очи кървави;	And my eyes are bloody;
в ниделя ляб печаха,	They bake bread on Sunday,
затуй ми ръце тистяни;	And my hands are covered with dough;
дето на пътя митяха,	They have swept the footpaths,
затуй ми крака прашуви.	And my feet are dusty.
	(Kaufman 1982: № 1251)

The ballads usually narrate a hero, a robber, who sees a monastery in the forest, and in one of the rooms he finds a girl lying in a coffin. The place where St Nedelia is discovered – in most of the versions it is the coffin in a monastery or in a church – is very meaningful. Thus, the saint is correlated with the

cosmogonic functions and with transformation of chaos into cosmos, since she acts as the establisher of the rules and norms of peoples' behaviour.

The wounds of St Nedelia, her dirty clothes are explained by the fact that women work on Sundays. One version of a ballad, after picturing the sufferings of St Nedelia, directly conveys that she was sent by the Lord to control whether people follow the bans and do not work on Sundays.

Мене ме й Господ проводил	The Lord has sent me
да дойда да ва нагледам	To look after you
работите ли в неделя,	Whether you work on Sunday,
копайте ли си папурите,	Whether you dig out corn,
жените ли си житата,	Whether you harvest wheat,
метете ли си дворове.	Whether you sweep your front yards.
	(Bogdanova et al. 1993: 414)

The portrait of the dirty, wounded saint serves the aims of the poetics and structural composition – the sufferings are depicted three times, and they contain rich ethnographic details. The analysis of all the ballads with this plot allows us to make a list of bans which includes the following: to sweep the front garden, to sew, to prepare the dowry, to sew on buttons, to bake bread, to comb hair, to throw the hair into the fire, to slaughter, to wash and to pour out the water after washing. The most frequent restriction is to sweep the yard, because due to this activity, St Nedelia would have "dusted clothes", "dusted face", "dusted eyes", or "dusted feet". The second most frequent ban in the list is that of sewing and stitching, because otherwise St Nedelia's "eyebrows and fingers are stabbed", "the hands are pitched", "the eyebrows are sown", "her body is in blood". Another important ban is making dough and baking bread, as otherwise St Nedelia's hands and nails are covered with the dough. Occasionally the prohibition against slaughtering animals is mentioned (the blood is poured over the saint, her eyes are bloody), the bans to wash the clothes and pour out the water (St Nedelia's clothes are wet), to brush hair (St Nedelia's hair is uncombed), and to throw the hair into the fire (St Nedelia takes the hair out and burns her hands).

In the ballads, the physical sufferings of St Nedelia appear in triads with depictions of the face – the eyes – the eyebrows affected; face – eyes – hands; face – clothes – the whole body; eyes – nails – fingers; eyes – hands – feet; eyes – hair – hands. The most vulnerable are her eyes, and this undoubtedly confirms her role as the mediator (Tolstoi 1995a). The most important opposition related to the saint is the definitions of clean and unclean, because Nedelia originally is pure, as she is a saint. Due to the sinners, she loses her purity, and the con-

sequences of breaking the rules are depicted in compliance with the poetic and didactic orders. In the choice of the ethnographic recommendations for Sunday to be depicted in the songs, the idea of the visualization of sinful behaviour dominates. The poetic version differs considerably from the prosaic concise recommendations. This list of the violated bans is much longer, while the "sinful" activity is much more detailed and picturesque. St Nedelia suffers as a result of "girls sewing", not just any girls, but betrothed girls; the dough is beaten not just by any mothers, but by mothers with many children. Further on, the girls are not just sewing, but they are sewing on buttons or the dowry. Besides, the very actions are covered with smaller details, for example, brooming the front yard.

There are other means typical of folklore poetics: permanent epithets (white Bulgarian girls, white breads, white hands, black lambs, bright lambs, young girls, young women, young guys, old women, small girls, large breads, flat front yards, heavy silver, black blood, yellow candle); repetitions, numeral symbolics, tautology, synonyms; hyperbole. The ballads use the typical addressing forms to the young guy, depicting him as a hero, as a heroic man, repetition of the name and traditional folklore particles: *Стуене лудъ гидийо; Стоене, холам, Стоене* 'Stuene, brave guy; Stoene, hey, Stoene' and to the young girl: *Девойко, млада хубава* 'Young and beautiful girl', etc.

Short folklore genres organically enter the ballads, such as curses, where the Lord is supposed to be the punisher:

Да даде Госпуд да даде,	Let God make so
ръцети да ти изсъхнат,	That your hands wither away,
мисата да ти укапът.	That your flesh falls away.
	(Dabeva 1934: 17)

To sum up, the song plots have not drastically changed in terms of their content and the ideas of the logical conclusions, but they are artistically elaborated with expressive details, typical of the folklore traditions. While the prosaic casual bans and restrictions are just a summary of the major idea expressed in a short form, like good – bad, recommended – forbidden, the poetic texts give a comprehensive cluster of illustrations.

CONCLUSIONS

The bans and recommendations to avoid working at home and in the field, as well as other types of activity on holidays are very stable in Bulgaria. Contemporary field research reveals that many calendric rituals fade away, but the

bans on working on a holiday are still observed. In the village of Pavel, Veliko Turnovo region, many of the Christmas customs are forgotten, but the rule for women not to wash their husbands' clothes to avoid the attacks of the wolves (Kolev 2007: 93) is still topical. Nowadays, in the villages, people remember the rule not to build houses on the Hot Days to prevent fires. When a fire happens, there is an explanation that there was work on the roof of the house on the holidays.[16] On 9 May 2022, St Nicholas' Day, the Facebook page of the village of Ovchartsi, Kustendil region, Bulgaria,[17] posted a folk song about a girl getting ill because she worked on a holiday, and commented: "On the day of Summer St Nicholas[18] one should not work, so as not to make the Saint angry and avoid His punishment with natural disasters and calamities." The contemporary ethnographers observe the growing restrictions on work on St Stylian's Day. The cult of this saint, the children's protector, used to be regionally restricted (Popov 1994: 84), but now it is developing into a strong all-Bulgarian (and even transnational) worship (Karamikhova 2020: 20).

Reminiscences of the beliefs regarding breaking the rules and the corresponding misfortunes are found in Bulgarian mass media, while the interpretations are occasionally wrong. The tragedy that took place off the Black Sea shore on 2 August, when a 17-year-old young man was drowned, is commented as "On Elijah's Day the sea took its sacrifice" in regard to the widely known ban to swim on St Elijah's Day (Bedrosian 2020). There are many other similar reports of the drowned people on St Elijah's Day, written with the same allusion to the ban to swim in the sea.

Thus, the behavioural rules and the traditional worldview are still observed in the Bulgarian society. These remains are supported by the language, folklore texts, and memories of the elderly. It is not important who is supposed to be the punisher – God, saints, or the nature – the beliefs in the penance for breaking the rules are still alive. There is a philosophical folk saying, "There is one power", often heard when people are speaking of misfortunes and accidents and trying to explain the reasons for them. Widely spread in Bulgaria, it confirms that people believe in the cosmic order, and if it is broken, "one power" will punish the sinner.

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NOTES

[1] Semiotic approach is a constituent feature of the Moscow School of Ethnolinguistics, established by Nikita Tolstoi (Tolstoi 1995b; Tolstoi & Tolstaia 2013). In 2022, the year of the centennial of the world-famous semiotician, literary critic, and culturologist Yuri Lotman, I would like to stress the value of the semiotic methodology and the input of the works of the Moscow-Tartu semiotic school in particular (Nikolaeva 1997; Nekliudov 1998; Velmezova 2015) in humanitarian studies and, correspondingly, for this article.

[2] There are regional versions of this saying. For example, in Sakar, people say that birds do not nest from St Ignatius' Day (20.12) till Christmas (25.12) (Popov 2002: 329).

[3] The ethnographic information is occasionally contradictory because the regional versions of customs and beliefs vary considerably. Thus, in the Plovdiv region, people believe that they should work on St Sabbas Day, so as to work easily through the year (G. Mikhailova 1986: 145).

[4] St Sabbas the Sanctified, in the folk view, is often seen as a woman, partly because of his name, which has the morphological composition of a feminine anthroponym.

[5] In the Russian idiom of Don Cossacks, a holiday obtains negative epithets as well: *злой* (*zloi*) 'angry', *грозный* (*groznyi*) 'fearsome', *карательный* (*karatel'nyi*) 'vindictive', *наказной* (*nakaznoi*) 'punishing' (Vlaskina & Shestak & Terskova 2012: 160).

[6] In the folk tradition, many kinds of breaking the rules are often seen as a mistake, as the word *грех* (*grekh*) 'a sin, a mistake' denotes them (Tolstaia 2000).

[7] For comparison, see an analysis of the idioms characterising as the bans in the tradition of the Russian Old Believers (Svalova 2019).

[8] St Paul is commemorated with St Peter on 29 June, but in the folk version of the ritual year St Paul is bestowed with his own day, 30 June.

[9] The Day of St Theodore of Amasea (Tiron) is celebrated on the first Saturday of Lent.

[10] For comparison, see the detailed account of the "dangerous" holidays in the Don regional version of the Russian folk tradition (Shestak 2010).

[11] The Russian Index of Fairy Tales (Comparative Index of Subjects) denotes related motifs as 846A*: "The poor man ploughs on the Day of the Forty Martyrs, because he does not have his own plough. The saints send him a plough. The following year, he ploughs again on a holiday to get a good harvest and, as a punishment, falls ill for forty years" (Barag et al. 1979).

[12] The names of the songs are not authentic. They are given by the scholars and publishers according to the plot.

[13] A widely spread story narrates: "People do not work on Sundays since people dreamt of the saint, and she appeared as she was dirty, because women wash themselves on Sundays and pour the dirty water on the saint. That's why she is that dirty and wears ragged clothing."

[14] St Nedelia chastises a young girl who works on this saint's day, a Sunday. Early in the morning on a Sunday, Iana sweeps the yard, feeds the horses, and goes out to the field to work. A girl comes and frightens the horses, and they kill Iana (Bogdanova et al. 1993: 414). Compare similar motifs in other Slavic traditions (Amosova 2014).

[15] About a more detailed analysis of the versions of these ballads see Sedakova 2008.

[16] Information from Georgi Mishev, village of Starosel, Plovdiv region, 2021.

[17] Following the development of internet media and online networks, there is a growth of interest towards folk traditions, rituals, songs, costumes, etc. Such pages follow the ritual year and make posts with the corresponding information of the holiday.

[18] In the Orthodox calendar, Saint Nicholas is commemorated twice: on 6 December, on the day of his death, and on 9 May, on the day of the transfer of the saint's relics from Myra of Lycia to Bari. In Slavic traditions, the first day is often called Winter Nicholas, while the second is Summer or Spring Nicholas.

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Irina Sedakova, PhD, Sc.D., is Head of the Department of Typology and Comparative Linguistics, Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia. Her fields of interest are Slavic and Balkan studies, ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, folklore, childbirth, and calendric customs.

ised@mail.ru

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THE MUTE: RITUAL AND TRANSGRESSIVE MEANINGS OF THE MASKED CHARACTER IN THE ROMANIAN *CĂLUŞ* RITUAL

Anamaria Iuga
Head of Ethnology Studies Department
National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Romania
anaiuga@gmail.com

Georgiana Vlahbei
Independent Researcher, Romania
georgiana.c.vlahbei@gmail.com

Abstract: The article focuses on the importance and meanings of the masked character of the Mute (*Mutul*), part of the *Căluş* ritual performed at the Whitsuntide feast in several regions of Romania and observed in two villages in Argeş County (Stolnici and Bârla). The *Căluşari* (the members of the *Căluş* group) perform specific dances meant, first of all, to cure the ritual illness inflicted by *Iele* (mythological feminine creatures) and also intended to provide for the good health and prosperity of the households where they are being performed. One of the performers is the Mute, archetypally similar to the Jester/Joker, who is impersonated by a man dressed as a woman but endowed with the fertility symbol of a wooden phallus. His presence and actions are all about transgression – he can mock the *Căluşari* or the community members assisting in the ritual, breaking all conventional behaviour rules. He plays, as well, an important part in the short episodes meant to make the audience laugh. We inquire into how his performance and actions can be perceived in relation to the social limits they break. At the same time, the article discusses what happens to the masked character in the staging context of the ritual, since from the beginning of the twentieth century, especially during the communist period, it reached larger audiences during local (and international) festivals. As of 2008, the ritual has been recognised internationally as an identity emblem, part of the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Keywords: Bârla, *Căluşari*, jester, mask, Mute, ritual, Romania, Stolnici, transgression, Whitsuntide

INTRODUCTION

The year-round calendar of customary practices in Romania, especially in the Orthodox calendar, brims with rituals that include masked characters, starting with carnival ceremonials, commonly held in most communities during winter: at Christmas, on New Year's Eve, or Epiphany (see Pop 1999: 42–98), but also in early spring, at the beginning of Lent, in Banat region and in Muntenia, as well as in the catholic German and Hungarian communities (Pop 1999; Neagota 2012). These rituals are accompanied by a diversity of masks and costumes (phytomorphic, zoomorphic, anthropomorphic), which are defined by various transgressions, all together chasing away the evil and the winter, to protect the community. They bring laughter, and by doing this, purify and renew the world (Bahtin 1974 [1965]). Then, there are the spring customs, in which vegetal masks are more present, such as the rituals of *Paparuda.*[1] And finally, there are the summer customs, with several rituals held at Whitsuntide, such as the ceremonial ox in Transylvania (Neagota 2005), but also the *Căluş* ritual in Muntenia and Oltenia, which this article focuses on.[2]

The *Căluş* ritual is a complex healing and prophylactic ritual, providing fertility, which encompasses an entire universe of choreographic, sound, costume, and prop elements, as well as a rich imagery supported by numerous beliefs. It incorporates two types of performers. The first are the "non-masked actors" (Benga 2009: 62), the *Căluşari*, a group of men of uneven number, whose main role is the "ceremonial aggregation" (ibid.: 61) through dance and specific actions and gestures which they perform. The second is the "masked actor" (ibid.: 62), called *Mutul* (the Mute[3]), a carnivalesque character who is not allowed to speak while the ritual dances are performed (hence his name), whose main role is, as that of any carnivalesque character, the "ceremonial dispersion" (ibid.: 61). He has a significant ritual responsibility, ingrained in his appearance and displayed by his gestures.

The Mute is our central focus as we discuss his formal appearance and representation, but also his functions and symbolic meanings within the *Căluş* group. While being a consistent part of the ritual, where he plays an important role, he is somewhat of an outsider as well, in relation to the ritual group. Apart from his ceremonial duties, he aims to provoke laughter: on the one hand, he mocks himself, on the other, he teases, pranks, and mocks the *Căluşari.* At the same time, he is teased by the other performers.

He acts as a sort of binder – his actions connect the *Căluşari* with the host families and the community: as he is teasing the audience, he is actually aggregating the people's participation in the performance. By wearing a mask, the Mute is transformed by it into a vehicle for ritual acts, but, furthermore, he is an animator, a jester, a joker; all in all, he is a transgressor.

Figure 1. *The Mute is teased by a* Căluşar. *Stolnici village 2014. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

RESEARCH CONTEXT

When writing about the *Căluş* custom, ethnologists and anthropologists have always referred to the different layers of its functions and significance – both the ritual and the spectacular ones. There has been much debate on the transition from the ritual to the secular structure and manifestation (Giurchescu 1992) which accompanies the heritage-making process undergone by the ceremonial. As a consequence of this transition, a change in the audience has been observed: from performing for the community to performing in front of outsiders (Ştiucă 2009). In the 1960s, ethnologists discussed the transformation of the custom, focusing on its de-ritualisation (Pop 1998 [1962]); these studies emphasised the importance of artistic performance, praised not only during musical festivals but also in local communities. Researchers argue that *Căluş* has considerably lost its spiritual meanings. "Today, only the dance with all its virtuosity has remained from the *Căluşari*," claims Horia Barbu Oprişan (1969: 143), although the detailed descriptions of the custom he is making suggest otherwise, and stress the importance and meaning of the ritual act for numerous communities at the time of the research (1950s–1960s).

Already at the beginning of the 1980s, Gail Kligman[4] asked the question "What is *Căluş* today?", unfolding three different layers[5] of meanings: "To some it is a vivid memory of a healing and fertility ritual; to others it is a dramatic event through which respect for tradition can be expressed; to others it is still an existing artistic performance" (Kligman 1999 [1981]: 13). We find all three layers verifiable on the field today, although we strongly believe that the ritual is a living tradition, not a memory capsule as G. Kligman suggests, since the members of the communities where *Căluş* is performed strongly believe in its protective, beneficent, and therapeutic power. Healing still occurs nowadays, reported more rarely,[6] but nevertheless, it is always certified to be a reality during the interviews.

Altogether, in the past years, there has been a strengthening of the "outsider" type of audience, especially since 2008, when the *Căluş* ritual was included in the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Representative List. Thus, it is more and more promoted as an emblematic heritage for mankind.[7]

In our text, we focus both on the living tradition of the *Căluş* and on its perception as an artistic performance, emphasising the role that the masked character plays. We support our assertions with our qualitative research conducted in two communities, Bârla and Stolnici[8] (Argeş region), in several years – 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2018. We conducted a series of interviews and direct observation in the villages on stage performing. The two communities are situated approximately 150 kms away from Bucharest and are mentioned in the monograph of the ritual published by Oprişan (1969: 206, 210) as villages where the ritual was active in the 1950s–1960s, thus assuming that there has been, up to now, a continuity in performing the custom. The village of Stolnici was, furthermore, extensively researched by Anca Giurchescu in the 1970s, 1990s, and 2000s (Giurchescu 2009b), which is all the more reason to stress its continuity. During our documentation visits, we witnessed three different actants impersonating the Mute character within the groups, and, apart from the differences in acting due to their distinct personalities coming into play, we were able to observe the similarities that unify this *dramatis personae* with other *Căluş'* Mute characters encountered in other field sites.[9]

RITUAL CONTEXT

When discussing the *Căluş* ritual, the ritual timeframe should be explained first. The custom takes place on Whitsunday and the week that follows. It is "a critical time when the dead spirits return, and the activity of the *Iele*[10] is

at its height" (Giurchescu 1992: 35). Thus, one of the core beliefs in the region where the custom is still active is that there is an important connection between the performers of the ritual and the *Iele* spirits. The relationship between the two instances is of a complex nature, "including similarity, polarity, and ambivalence" (Giurchescu 1992: 34; see also Vuia 1935;[11] Neagota & Benga 2011; Eliade 1973) – the *Căluşari* being the only ones able to heal the illness inflicted by these fairies on those who break working taboos during Whitsuntide week.[12] The healing practice and process is perceived as an ecstatic experience, pervaded by a complex of ritual gestures, including dance and magic (Neagota & Benga 2011).

The performers, the *Căluşari*, are a group of men, usually of an uneven number (7–9–11, although lately the number has not been considered that important), organised in a similar manner to an initiating brotherhood, a proof of its ancient origin (Eliade 1973; Neagota & Benga 2011). The group carries a banner, a "flag", made of a tall wooden stick (usually a light wood, such as hazelnut), adorned at the top with a cloth and garlic (*Allium sativum*) and, in some regions, also wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*). These plants are meant to protect them from the *Iele* spirits. The flag is ritually built when the group of *Căluşari* gather together and take an oath of obedience[13] to the bailiff, the leader of the group called *vătaf*, in order to assert their compliance with the ritual rules and taboos.[14] Although the performers in both researched communities knew about the importance of the flag (Kligman 1999 [1981]: 30–34), in Bârla, as well as in Stolnici, the performers had given up flag-binding and oath-taking years ago, though this does not mean that they, or the community, consider the ritual not to be effective (Giurchescu 2009b). As stated by the interviewed *Căluşari* themselves, the reason for giving up both the flag and the oath is that the rules are too rigid to be abided to these days – performers cannot commit, for instance, to being part of the group for seven years in a row, nor to performing the ritual during the whole canonical timeframe. This limited timeframe is connected to Whitsuntide: Whitsunday and Monday, the two days of the feast, but also some of the days of the next week (Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday – when they "break" the group, as they call the end of the ritual, when their flag, the protective symbol of the *Căluşari*, is unfolded). In some communities, the *Căluşari* unfold the flag on the Tuesday after the Sunday that follows the Whitsuntide feast (Oprişan 1969). Nowadays, due to various socio-economic factors, such as the mandatory presence at work of the employees, the calendar of the ritual has been reduced drastically to two, or sometimes three, days.

Figure 2. *A group of young* Căluşari *from Bârla, dressed in the typical* Caluşar *costume. Bârla 2013. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga. Personal archive.*

The *Căluşari* have special costumes: black hats decorated with beads and colourful ribbons attached to the back; embroidered shirts, worn over the trousers and tied over the thighs with a wide woven belt, where they hang garlic (for protection against the *Iele*); and handkerchiefs that were offered by the young girls, as they believed that they would be healthy if they wore them afterwards, as the leader from Bârla explained in 2014. A pair of woven straps in the shape of an X, made of the same material as the belt, are placed over the shirt. Under the knee, over the trousers, the leggings are decorated with flower patterns and adorned with small bells attached. They wear the traditional *opinca* (leather sandals) to which *pinteni* (spurs) are fastened, which accompany the dance moves with sound. The *Căluşari* always carry with them a decorated wooden stick/staff, used nowadays more for resting purposes during the dances they perform.[15] It is important to note that as the custom was intensely promoted on stage, the costumes suffered transformations: today they have become more unified, although there are still some communities[16] that do not use this type of standardisation or "uniform" for their *Căluşari*.

The ritual develops over the course of several days and it implies for the group to go from one household to another, but also to perform a suite of dances in public places, such as markets, squares, and at times even on the road. The

dances are performed in a circle in both communities, to the music played by the musicians that accompany the *Căluşari* during the days of the ritual. Several ritual elements are placed amidst the dancers, believed to protect the household and the attending people: a bowl of salt, used after that in preparing food; garlic[17] used for cooking but also attached to the waist when people want to carry on jobs that are forbidden in the Whitsuntide ritual time; and a ceramic pot with water, which is meant to be broken at the end of the dramatic play (whose chips are believed to prevent nightmares).

Figure 3. *The ritual elements that the* Căluşari *dance around. Stolnici 2015. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga. Personal archive.*

The dances[18] have a more or less complex structure, with a vivid rhythm, and are performed in a certain order established by the leader of the group, the *vătaf*, the one who decides when to change the sequence of steps, by shouting codified commands. During the dance suite, there is at least one interlude when the Mute comes into play. The performance ends with a round dance, a *hora*, where the hosts and other members of the audience are invited to join in alongside the dancers. That is the moment when babies are given to the *Căluşari* to be carried in their arms (during the *hora)*, as the people have a strong belief that this will provide good health for them. At the *hora*, people

also ask the *Căluşari* to place their hats on their heads, as it is believed that the beneficiary will not suffer from headaches. At the end of the dance suite, performers are rewarded with food, drinks, and money. The salt and garlic danced around are considered beneficial and are kept by the host, although women from the audience outside the recipient household can also ask for a piece and leave a symbolic amount of money.

As to the territory one group can cover, it is important to note they are not received in all the houses in the village. Also, the group may visit neighbouring villages or towns as well, where they have more success in raising the necessary money to pay for the musicians and other services (the rest of the sum received is equally divided among the performers). In this sense, some of the favourite places for the *Căluşari* to perform are the nearby cities where they dance, for instance, in the marketplace, public squares, restaurants, shops, parks, and for whomever requests them to.

Figure 4. *The* Căluşari *from Stolnici performing in front of Piteşti City Hall, 2018. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga. Personal archive.*

FESTIVAL CONTEXT

Described above is a somewhat typical scenario of a village *Căluş* encountered in the two field sites where it is conserved and performed mostly within the traditional cultural transmission inside the group. Nowadays, the *Căluş* is not only a ritual that has an important meaning for the recipient rural communities but has also acquired the emphasis of an important cultural heritage icon. The awareness of its singularity and representativity has become pervasive for the whole Romanian culture, and, since 2008, for the whole humanity, as it was listed on the UNESCO heritage list. Through this recognition and promotion, it has joined the "cultural market of traditions" (Mihăilescu 2008), that is, the heritage-creation process, a process that assumes, as Guy Di Méo (2007) points out, the transformation of a cultural object (that could be material, or spiritual) into its symbolic double.[19]

Căluş dancers have always impressed the audience with their dances and performances, and groups of *Căluşari* have been invited to perform in front of officiality, as historical records from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have shown (Oprişan 1969; Vulcănescu 1970). There are important transformations that occurred in the ritual in Transylvania, due to the influence and efforts of local intellectuals (Giurchescu 2009a), resulting in the *Căluş* being transferred on stage both as a ritual, as it happened in London, at Albert Hall, in 1935,[20] but also as an art performance, pointing out its aesthetic dimension.

Căluş was placed on stage at numerous festivals, especially during the communist period, when "*căluş* became a symbol for Romanian's cultural antiquity, historical continuity, unity and high artistic qualities" (Giurchescu 2008: 17). One of the most important festivals is, still, the Romanian *Căluş* Festival.[21] However, as Anca Giurchescu observes:

> *In the Socialist Era and until 1992 however, the festival was deliberately organised at Pentecost in order to hinder the practice of* căluş *in the villages at its ritually prescribed time. For the cultural activists it was much more important to enforce the new 'tradition' of the* Căluş *Festival than to keep alive the traditional* căluş *in its natural settings*. (Giurchescu 2008: 18)

After the fall of communism in Romania in 1989, the staging of the *Căluş* continued nevertheless: the festivals grew in number, but ever since it has been accepted on the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List, there are very few festivals that occur precisely on Whitsunday; they commonly take place on the second day and other days before and after Whitsuntide.

Outside of the ritual context and time, the *Căluşari* from our field site of Stolnici also participate in different local, regional, or national festivals that take place around the feast of Whitsuntide, to perform the *Căluş* dance among many other groups from the country. The leader of this group, Petre Măsală, is a renowned *vătaf,* who in 2020, upon turning 80, received the title of Living Heritage (*Tezaur uman viu*), bestowed by the Ministry of Culture in Romania,[22] as a reward for his longstanding and prodigious activity as group leader (since 1962). For this reason, he is always invited as an honorary guest to regional folklore festivals or other festivities. The *Căluşari* from Bârla, on the other hand, have not been equally active in festivals during the past years, as their number is decreasing and because there is another group of young *Căluşari* in the village, receiving more attention fromthe local community. The older *Căluşari* from Bârla have also acquired wider recognition due to their central representation in a documentary movie produced by a national TV network in 2014.[23]

THE MUTE'S CHARACTERISTIC TRAITS AND FUNCTIONS

The Mute is the carnivalesque masked character of the *Căluş* ritual,[24] responsible for emphasising the theatrical/dramatical layers of the ritual, which complement the dance and the music performance of the non-masked group. At the same time, he is in charge of a series of ceremonial gestures and actions meant to provide for the prosperity of the recipient family or community. His appearance plays an important role as his true identity is hidden from the audience by his mask and his costume, thus creating a "hetero-individuality" (Vulcănescu 1970: 12). Part of the disguise of the Mute character is the prohibition on speaking while the dances are performed.

The dramatic segment of the ritual has different intensities in the various regions where *Căluş* is performed. In some sites (Dolj, Romanați) there has never been a record of a masked character (Ştiucă 2009; Pop 1998 [1962]), and thus, the theatrical performance is provided by the *Căluşari* themselves. The *vătaf* usually plays the part that the masked character customarily does. In other villages, such as Giurgişa (Dolj region), there is an element of suggestion pertaining to the Mute's specifics – *cioc* (a beak) – a wooden stick covered with rabbit skin, with a hook at the end, handled by the *vătaf* or the leader's help. It is used to scare the audience, especially children, but also to induce a sort of trance state among the *Căluşari* during the healing ritual (Kligman 1999 [1981]).

Before detailing the Mute's role in the two villages where our research was conducted, we sum up a keynote from Narcisa Ştiucă, which explains the part the masked character has in the *Căluş* ritual:

> *The status symbols of the Mute are numerous and important, and well known and respected by the members of the group and the audience. From setting the succession and choosing of the households (according to the prestige of the family, and the foreseen gaining), to setting the rules in relation with the beneficiaries (marking with the sword the magical circle of the dances and punishing the profanes that oversee it, asking for objects to be used in the play, making some licentious gestures that used to bear fecundity stimulation rituals), and then choosing the* respiro *moments destined for the pantomimes (observing the physical condition of the* Căluşari*), the Mute is omnipresent and omnipotent, a real support for the* vătaf*, whose place he is ready to take, sometimes joking, sometimes for serious*. (Ştiucă 2009: 21)

Appearance

The Mute, generically, wears a mask and a costume, usually made from ragged clothes. In Horia Barbu Oprişan's (1969) description, the face mask is attached to a wool cap. He also mentions that the Mute is dressed as an average person, wearing modest or worn-out clothes, though not visually extravagant.

In the two villages, Bârla and Stolnici, the masked performers were dressed as women, either with distinctive garments (skirt, apron) or a dressing gown. They had quite different types of masks in terms of materials and fabrication: in Bârla, the mask was hand-made or hand-painted specifically for the play, suggesting a type of "ugly man".

In 2013, a black hat was added, and in 2014–2015 the mask was attached to a wig, whereas the Stolnici Mute used a gasmask adorned with a goat-like beard, two cloth ears, and tassels attached to his head over a woman's scarf, adding a grotesque-ludicrous element to his worn-out clothes, on top of which small toys, such as dolls, toy-cars, and so on, were pinned in places (in 2015), attesting to the ingenuity and laughable composition of his costume.

There were a few times when the Mute took his mask off, either because it was extremely hot, or to greet people from the audience. Nevertheless, this only happened after the dance-performance was done or in the time between houses, not during the performance *per se*, while attending to his ritual duties. This testifies to the fact that hiding his true identity is not that rigorous anymore, especially since the people in the village are aware of the identities of all the members of the *Căluş* group, and probably know who is the one impersonating the Mute.

Figure 5. *The Mute's costume. Bârla 2013. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga. Personal archive.*

Figure 6. *The Mute's costume. Stolnici 2015. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

Props

During the performance, the Mute can make use of anything he finds in the visited households, transforming it into a prop. Such adjuvants to the improvisation of the Mute can be objects, such as bicycles, blankets, watering cans, old clothes, old water basins, old pots, and even animals – practically everything can become a tool for the Mute.

Figure 7. *Mocking the Mute. Stolnici 2015. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

He may also carry a container (in our examples, a cross-body bag, or a raffia sack) to store his props (e.g., medical equipment) that he can use while improvising. Nevertheless, like the masked characters from other regions, also in the field sites, the Mute had two essential signifiers apart from his distinctive clothing: a wooden sword and a wooden phallus.

The first compulsory prop is a wooden sword painted in red, which has several uses during the ritual.

Figure 8. *Wooden sword placed upon the ritual elements the* Căluşari *dance around. Bârla 2014. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga. Personal archive.*

Figure 9. *The Mute making use of his phallic prop. Bârla 2014. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

Figure 10. *The Mute teasing women before a performance. Stolnici 2015. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

Figure 11. *The Mute teasing old women to touch his wooden prop. Bârla 2014. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

The Mute is considered to be the helper of the *vătaf*,[25] although he sometimes situates himself in opposition to him. With the sword, a symbol of power (Oprişan 1969), he is supposed to admonish the dancers who confuse the steps of the dance, installing a sort of correction or order inside the group and duplicating the *vătaf*'s function. Altogether, we have not witnessed this scolding part in the two villages. One of the first uses of the sword is to visually delimitate the area where the *Căluşari* would perform the dances[26] from the rest of the area. The sword can be equally used as a stick by the Mute and, at times, as an adjuvant in the plays or pranks he performs. Many times, when the humoristic interlude starts, the Mute enters the circle made by the *Căluşari* with his sword elevated above his head, pointing to the sky, or to the other *Căluşari*, or even to members of the gathered public. At one of the performing houses, we witnessed him using the sword to break the ceramic pot (see below) that did not fall to pieces during the play.

His second mark used during the performance is a wooden phallus, a symbol of fertility, attached to the waist by a string,[27] hidden under a skirt. With the phallus, the Mute "fulfils and perfects his acting part" (Oprişan 1969: 188). The licentious actions have an important ritual meaning (see also Ştiucă 2009; Kligman 1999 [1981]): he is using the wooden phallus to tease the *Căluşari* who do not obey him, as well as members of the audience, especially women. The teasing consists of indecent, inappropriate, or eccentric gestures or closeness to women, including making women touch the phallus.

It is important to mention that the phallus is perceived as a fertility and prosperity-inducing object. Thus, women are not abashed to touch it, as it is believed, both in Bârla and in Stolnici, that this will make the corn cob grow big. Actually, as Romulus Vulcănescu explains, "the audience does not consider this phallic prop to be obscene or indecent. It was, for them, the expression of a belief and of a magic-medical practice" (Vulcănescu 1970: 169).

The Mute's part in the ritual

The Mute is meant, first and foremost, to trigger laughter – through pranks on performers and audience alike, including nonsensical gestures. Throughout the performance of the *Căluşari*, the Mute can perform actions such as rolling on the ground and even dragging people from the audience along; checking the blood pressure of the people in the crowd; giving shots to women; harassing or pushing around animals (chickens, dogs, donkeys); even creating a costume of an animal-installation with the help of selected people from the audience; as well as through his more or less complex dramatic plays, which, in Horia Barbu Oprişan's view (1969), act as interludes in between the dance sequences of the group.

Figure 12. *Checking the blood pressure. Bârla 2015. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

Figure 13. *The Mute creates a cow-costume with the help of children from the audience. Stolnici 2015. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

He can be unpredictable, act dumb, have a short temper and a quarrelling attitude. Whenever he is not laughed at, he can attempt to frighten small children or household animals.

The Mute from Stolnici is a great example of a carnivalesque performance, as he managed to hatch numerous and varied, seemingly unconstructed episodes out of each circumstance with extraordinary wit and ingenuity. His demeanour is a good example of popular theatre, being, as is usually the case of other masked characters in *Căluş*, the main actor of these sketches, but also their director and author. In the eyes of the ethnologists who have researched this custom for a longer period of time, such as Narcisa Ştiucă (2009), apparently the theatrical moments tend to have a more important place in the syntax of the ritual. There are some regular themes that the Mute engages with, enriching them with improvisations according to his own imagination.

One of the most frequently played dramatic sketches is the quarrel of the Mute with the *vătaf*. During the sketch, the Mute tries to convince the audience that he is the real leader of the group, and so the *Căluşari* must listen to his orders. Of course, this short play, a duel with the *vătaf*, is meant to bring laughter, as, each time it is played, the *Căluşari* perform the opposite of the commands the Mute asks of them, and, in contrast, obey the leader. We witnessed this sketch several times when following the group of *Căluşari* from Stolnici village and also in some places in Bârla; in some of the households, this intervention was longer, and in others it was shorter, according to the inspiration, mood, or importance given by the *Căluşari* group to the host.

Usually, at the end of the pseudo-dispute sketch, or just without this one, there is the sketch on the Mute evaluating a cow (impersonated by a *Căluşar*), searching for it, and after finding it, milking it. He places the ceramic pot, which the performers danced around, at the feet of the "cow", at the back of it, but, as it is a vicious cow, it moves and with a hit of the wooden stick, the ceramic pot is broken.

If the pot does not break from the first hit, the masked character would break it with the help of his wooden sword. This sketch is performed widely, and it can be longer or shorter, according to the talent of the Mute, the *vătaf,* and the *Căluşari.* This is, actually, the dominant sketch in the two villages.

One particular sketch we witnessed only once in Stolnici but never in Bârla was related to the status of a host – a member of the Stolnici city administration, a strong supporter of the *Căluşari* (as the performers explained). It encompassed a moment dramatising the life, death, and resurrection of a *Căluşar*.[28] This sketch implied the participation of several *Căluşari*, who, on top of their traditional costumes, had put on some old clothes found in that particular house in order to impersonate several characters: a *Căluşar* who had gotten sick, his wife, a priest, or a doctor.

Figure 14. *The moment the ceramic pot broke during a performance of the* Căluşari. *Stolnici 2015. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

Figure 15. *The Mute with the character of the priest impersonated by a* Căluşar. *Stolnici 2015. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga. Personal archive.*

The Mute played as himself, with no change in his character. The props were extremely varied, as the performers used everything that they could get their hands on. At the end of the sketch the ceramic pot was also broken. This short play was but a carnivalesque display of the ritual act that used to be part of the healing ceremony (Neagota & Benga 2011), when, during the dances, one of the performers would be touched by the *vătaf* with the flag (or with the *cioc*), and then he would fall down in trance – an act that accomplished the transfer of the illness (*luatul din căluş*) from the sick one to the *Căluşar*. Altogether, the sketch is, as Bogdan Neagota and Ileana Benga (2011) claim, a reminder to the community of the primary function of the ritual: healing of the *Iele*-induced disease.

The performance of the sketches is followed by more dances: at the sound of the breaking ceramic pot, the *Căluşari* immediately start their dance. Meanwhile, the Mute is performing the ritualistic acts that he has in the ceremonial: he mixes the salt and the garlic that the *Căluşari* dance around, touching them with his wooden phallus.

Figure 16. *"Consecrating" the garlic and the salt with the wooden phallus. Bârla 2014. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

All the ritual elements bear ceremonial (magic?) meanings. The salt is considered to be protective for the animals in the household, and the garlic is used for cooking and worn at the waist if a person engages in an activity[29] that is ritually forbidden in the Whitsuntide's timeframe. Also, the chips from the broken ceramic pot are considered to have an apotropaic purpose, as they are believed to protect people from nightmares if placed under the pillow. Thus, the actions of the Mute, although prevalently carnivalesque, have an important ritual meaning.

When the dances end with a *Hora mare* (a round dance with everybody), the Mute gives away the garlic and the salt to the hostess or even to other women who pay a symbolic amount of money in exchange for it. The Mute also receives payment from the hosts and stores it, to be later divided among all the performers.

Figure 17. *The* Hora mare *(round dance). Bârla 2015. Photograph by Georgiana Vlahbei. Personal archive.*

The Mute and the festival

With all the changes in the audience and the heritage-making process that took place in the past century, changes have also occurred in the ritual itself. On stage, the *Căluşari* often perform the ritual as a theatre play, including moments that are otherwise kept secret from people who are not performers, such as taking the oath and binding the flag. Also, whenever the Mute is present on stage, his actions are censured (Ştiucă 2009), and he never shows off his wooden phallus.

In the case of the two researched villages, the Mute is excluded. He does not even participate in the stage performance, since, as the *vătaf* from Stolnici explained, his actions are licentious and scandalous for a profane public, unaccustomed to this display of gestures. For the same reason, nor do the *Căluşari* from Bârla include the Mute when they rarely appear on stage, as it happened, for instance, during the local festival held in Bârla in August 2013 or in 2015 when they were invited for the screening of a documentary about them in Cluj-Napoca.

What is even more interesting is that the *Căluşari* from Stolnici, when in Piteşti city (Argeş County), excluded the Mute from the street performances in the big city, providing the same motivation – that people from the city would be scandalised by the masked character's actions.

TRANSGRESSIVE IMPLICATIONS OF THE MUTE CHARACTER

The upside-down dialectic of masked characters has long been studied (Caillois 1958; Bahtin 1974 [1965]; Lévi-Strauss 1975; Vulcănescu 1970, etc.) as an intrinsic part of the ritual time-space manifestation. Within *Căluş*, the Mute embodies this paradox within his appearance, his actions, gestures, and attitudes.

His persona is in strict relationship with the larger context of ceremonial performing, as he is a symptom of the imbalance of the world itself. First, in connection with the ritual time *Căluş* is performed – the Whitsuntide and the week to follow – the effect of the ritual is that of marking the transition to the summer. Thus, it can be better understood only in relation to the specific calendar time it is set within the rituals of the life cycle, especially the commemoration of the dead (see also Giurchescu 1992). The week-long *Căluş* ritual takes place after the Saturday of the Souls, a pre-Christian remnant of the worship of ancestors, integrated in the liturgical year within the Eastern Orthodox Church as the commemoration day of the dead. It is believed that leading to Whitsunday, the souls of the dead leave the graves on Maundy Thursday and go around free for

50 days. In the days before the commemoration ritual (locally called *Moşii de vară* (Summer Forefathers), or *Moşii de oale* (Forefathers of Clay)), it is said that the dead wake up from their sleep and search for the offerings made for them, until they are reconciled on the Saturday of the Souls. It is of no coincidence that the ritual of *Căluş* takes place after this time, as, according to beliefs, the spirits of the dead are capricious and make their presence felt in different ways. Another context concerns the mythological creatures, the *Iele*, and the work interdiction connected with the ritual period, which, if broken, would arouse the angry punishing deities' wrath. As previously noted, "the *Căluşari* dances are performed at the time when fairies are most dangerous to people" (Vuia 1935: 100), as "on Whitsunday they are especially powerful" (Pamfile 1910: 18). To be added is also a series of time liminalities surrounding the different stages of *Căluş* – e.g., binding of the flag and taking the oath, as well as the dismantling of the flag on the last day of the ceremonial – all of which happen in-between (at sunrise or at dawn). The context of the performance is thus a moment in need of re-establishing order, the sacred mission of the ritual "cast".

In this context, the Mute plays an important part, even more – liminality is his strong prerogative. The carnivalesque character is a walking metaphor for the undifferentiated matter, which can only manifest inside of this fractured time in need of the *Căluşari* intervention to be repaired. His scandalous, obscene, ostentatious gestures or actions and the general frenzy he spreads have their origin in the same chaos birthed by the transgression of rules that make the *Căluşari* needed in the first place. Viewed from this perspective, the Mute is an expression of the very untameable, capricious, and unpredictable forces whom the *Căluşari* are trying to pacify and, afterward, to restore order.

Costume and mask: Hiding/revealing of sexual taboos

The Mute is the masked character of the *Căluş* group, and, as such, the appearance of the man impersonating it is changed by disguising, which is considered representative of traditional societies, as they perceive this action as a ritual or ceremonial act:

> *[T]he people that got masked, individually, or in a group, were seeking, along with the real or magical protection ... also the spiritual connection, through the masks, with the supposedly spiritual (benign or malignant) forces or fantastic divine figures (demons, demigods, gods, or heroes), which they believed to control, persecute or protect them*. (Vulcănescu 1970: 13)

As a masked character, the Mute is a unifier of opposites. This can be seen, first of all, in his looks: he is dressed as a woman, but has, under the skirt, an oversized wooden phallus. Apparently, this is a contradiction, but, in fact, it is a reiteration of the undifferentiated chaos the Mute embodies: "symbolic inventions give expression to both the male and female aspect or components of Being" (Kligman 1999 [1981]: 185). His gestures give rise to a male/female paradox: the maleness of the actor is concealed under the women's appearance (in the two studied cases), while his sexually provocative gestures mainly target women, revealing the unleashed, primal masculine force. Literature about phallic representations in ritual contexts describes its functions from apotropaic, fertility inducing, attacking, and entertaining aspects. Of course, in this case, we are in the presence of an object endowed with magical properties, inscribed within the formally playful and entertaining atmosphere surrounding the Mute character. Moreover, in the documented groups, the Mute had his phallus painted red, a possible reference to a deflowering act or to impregnation. The Mute, bearing a signifier of potence and virility is expected to bring life/abundance to women, animals, and crops, by using the wooden phallus in his actions.

All in all, the Mute is surrounded by taboos of sexuality:[30] flaunting the exaggerated anatomical representation of his male genitalia, teasing, and making women touch it, implications of defloration[31] and, nonetheless, cross-dressing.

Of the elements of his appearance, the mask-wearing is also an indicator of the Mute's symbolic transgression: while his identity is concealed, he is free to do as he wishes. The mask imposes a distance of its wearer from his rule-breaking behaviour, enabling it and making it acceptable for the community as it is worn under the auspices of the ritual. Nevertheless, behind the mask still stands a member of the community, who is prescribed with a certain character role and attributions expected from him, which he must comply with, proving Roger Caillois' (1958) remark that in ritual context, the mask is a sign of a social institution.

As the extensive literature on the subject suggests, the mask appears in liminal situations and has a mediator role. It is inscribed within the binary logic of hidden/revealed, visible/invisible, apparent/real, but altogether it signals a transformation of its bearer, far from being a simple disguise. Its wearing within the ritual context allows the mundane realm to connect to the supernatural one, bringing forth the invisible into the visible. The Mute (together with his fellow *Căluşari*) acts as a bridge between the worlds in a time of crisis.

The binder

Improvisation plays a key role in the Mute's apparent disorder-seeking, both in relation to objects and people. Making use of anything available from the courtyards or houses visited during the ceremony and taking advantage of people's reactions at any given moment, he displays creativity and craft in his pantomime, conjuring comic buff situations. Actually, the actions of the Mute have been perceived as *buffo* theatre (Oprişan 1969) or *commedia dell'arte* (Giurchescu 2009a). Nevertheless, these are means by which he integrates the entire household – animate or inanimate – making it partake in the ritual act. His chaos-driven behaviour (reminiscent of the instability of the timeframe in the "cosmic plane") draws the community in as active actors and not mere spectators, functioning as a linkage between performers and the audience.

At some moments when his ritual prerogatives allow it, the Mute may assume the role of a spectator from the audience, along with the gathered crowd. This is also noted by Tudor Pamfile (1910: 65): "during the play performance, the Mute does not dance; he simply wonders with his sword, at times inside the *hora*, at times outside, making the space larger and gathering the people round".

In any case, he is the only member of the group to act in both realms – that of the sacred being conjured and "in/of the world", thus creating a continuity between the two domains.

Archetype of the jester/fool

The symbolic traits of the Mute pertain to the wider category of the Jester. Also known as the clown, trickster, comedian, practical joker or the fool, the Jester is the mercurial archetype that is at peace with the paradoxes of the world. The Mute uses humour to illuminate irrationality and also levels the playing field between those with power and those without. He is a fun-loving character who seeks the now, light-heartedness, and carefree living, inviting others to partake in creating a self-depreciating form of satire. Practical jokes are often a part of his repertoire as seen in the description of the comical sketches centred on him.

In mediaeval times, a court jester was there to amuse the members of the court, but he also stood behind the king and offered him discernment on the actions of others who came before the throne. So, while definitely not the centre of power, he played an important role on the sidelines (Otto 2000), much as the Mute does, especially in relationship with the *vătaf* (see below).

One note must be made on the power of laughter as a cohesive mechanism and the idea that laughter aids recovery (thought to be apotropaic): it can be argued that the comic relief surrounding the Mute's suite of actions can also help the community bond by sharing in deep laughter.

The antagonist

The Mute's relationship with power-play adds another layer of his transgression and is revealed in connection with the *vătaf* – the bailiff, the leader of the *Căluşari*.

During the ritual performing of *Căluş*, more visible in the dispute sketch, the Mute sometimes acts as the opposing force to the leader, as an "anti-*vătaf*" (Kligman 1999 [1981]: 27), or the "*vătaf* in the negative" as Gail Kligman (ibid.: 255) calls him, contesting his status by emulating (without success) his posture or commands. Placed within the failed mimicry/overthrowing scenario, he ends up making a fool of himself and being mocked by the other *Căluşari* and/or the audience. While attempting to question or to become the leader, he turns out, in fact, to reinforce the latter's rulership and authority. The power-play becomes more evident since it is recorded (Oprişan 1969; Giurchescu 2008) that the Mute had originally been the ritual leader of the group, and that in the regions where there is no masked character, the *vătaf* also plays the part that the Mute otherwise would.

Being a ceremony meant to restore cosmic order (imbalanced by certain forces drawn by human trespassing), the *Căluş* ritual is not void of socio-political relations. As any ritual, it offers an insight into the group's doctrine, expressed through behaviours. The Mute's episodic anarchy or undermining of the group's hierarchy, though veiled by humour, reveals the means of control exercised by the one in power and their legitimacy.

Consecration and contamination

Though his power is limited, within his ceremonial functions still lies the consecration of the ritual space and elements: with his sword he draws an imaginary line delimiting the dancing place from the outer space. This is seen in his very first gestures he makes as the group enters the yard area: he asks the host to bring garlic and salt, and he places the elements meant to be consecrated (salt, a ceramic pot with water, and garlic), making sure they are at the centre of the dance formation before it begins. He therefore marks both the centre and the surrounding space within an imaginary sphere, where the ritual act can come

to fruition. Even more so, by mixing the elements, sometimes using his phallus, he marks their contamination with the *numinous* essence of the *Căluş* ritual.

The oath of silence

As presented above, the Mute is not supposed to utter a word while the dances are performed in the ritual timeframe of the *Căluş* festivities, otherwise, it is believed, he might go mad (Oprişan 1969). Even from the moment of the flag-binding, he must remain silent, or else he might lose his voice for good (Pamfile 1910). On the other hand, "in rest mode, his mouth won't shut up" (ibid.: 64), as he makes use of his carnivalesque role and mocks the *Căluşari,* the audience, and himself as well.

The annihilation of language is an essential trait of the mystical experience (Kalamaras 1994), as in the presence of higher beings (spirits), words are incapable or even futile in conveying to the exterior world these realms, materially incommunicable: "silence conveys an ineffable experience and accompanies the transformation of one's consciousness when in contact with the divine" (Montiglio 2000: 24). Since the performing of the *Căluş* is related to the communication between the worlds and involves a sacred "cast" of initiated men, the silence is also a way of protecting the knowledge, explaining the foreseen counter-effect for breaking the interdiction: madness as divine punishment.

Nowadays, the breaking of silence is no longer considered a sacrilege, as in many of the households visited, especially with hosts of closer ties, the Mute can easily engage in dialogue, making use of language as another tool to incentivise joy and laughter.

Self-censorship

As traditional recipients of the performing group, the locals and villagers intrinsically comprehend the Mute's role and accept his non-conventional behaviour, especially its sexual connotations and indecency, and take them with light humour. Reverence towards the uninitiated public is offered as an explanation by the two researched groups for why the Mute is excluded from manifestations outside the "village *Căluş*": on stages, festivals, or other showcasing gatherings. What might appear as a self-censoring choice might be driven by the fear of not being properly understood, of misleading the public perception or being poorly judged, which might be a signal of actually observing the ritual norm underneath: the Mute's exclusion from the stage could be interpreted as a technique

to protect some of the old meanings of the ritual, destined, in fact, only for *connoisseurs*. It can also be a sign of the fact that taboos around sexuality and eroticism are still present in the community mentality, but not much understood outside its borders. The power and vigour of the performance and the more spectacular/aesthetic features are brought forth on the stage, suppressing the transgressive features and concealing what might be prejudicial or wrongfully interpreted by the outsiders. Transgression is thus only allowed to manifest within the well-established confines of the village. In another interpretation, the self-censorship is perceived by Giurchescu (2008) as a remnant of the communist period, enabled by ideals of adequacy.

The mild or rougher censorship of the transgressions of the Mute pertain to the field of sexual taboos and must be understood in relation to the evolution of the ritual's receptor audiences, as well as the relationship of the ritual group with these audiences. What is welcomed as a fertility and abundance enabler within the village context is seen by the group itself as gaining questionable morality when decontextualised on stage. Restricting or altogether depriving the ritual of its transgressional features reveals a self-reflexive moral act and brings out the dynamic of the dialectical relation between purity and pollution.

Furthermore, another effect of excluding the Mute from stage is that the binder is removed from the whole ritual experience, making the gap between the actants and the receiving audience even greater.

CONCLUSIONS

Rituals make the transgression temporarily acceptable. Transgression is a ritualised violation of societal norms, as the elements of the ritual are used to question the taboos and limits that dominate societies, in order to coax a reaction out of the audience. All is allowed for the Mute within the original performing settings, as he unveils the rawness of human character and instincts, testifying to what Gibson claims that "[r]itual transgressions are moments of revelation in which the participant penetrates or deconstructs the illusion of metaphysical, moral, social, linguistic and rational norms or frameworks, and experiences directly the creative force of nature alive within each individual" (Gibson 1991: 1). As such, the Mute paradoxically becomes a sort of truth-teller, uninhibited and free under ritual circumstances. He can be seen, furthermore, as a potential exponent and tool of resistance which upturns the taken-for-granted establishment and hierarchies. His performance can be perceived in relation to the limits of the society that he engages with and breaks.

At the same time, other optics are also valid: the Mute's transgressive behaviour ends up affirming the rules inside the ritual cast (it does not provide a way out of the rules of the cast but reconfirms order as he is pushed back in his place). Thus, the transgression attempt becomes a means of ensuring cohesiveness of the group in the end; reinforcing the rules is a form of social solidarity, or, as Bataille puts it, "transgression suspends the taboo without suppressing it" (Bataille 1986 [1957]: 36). Nevertheless, contestation, or critical reflexivity, remains important as he pursues disorder in a highly regulated context: he makes a dangerous play at the boundary of social constructs.

The reception of the Mute's transgressive behaviour by different audiences and over time reveals how society views, constructs, and controls deviant behaviours and the evolution it has within these boundaries. The limit of the Mute's transgression is still set within the ritual group, as a means to control the perceptions or meanings of the ritual (sometimes by prohibiting the transgressor to perform in a certain space altogether). Self-censorship is a sign of auto-criticism in relation to high modernity audiences and a means for the ritual to adapt.

The more recent relaxation of interdictions surrounding the Mute – the ability of taking the mask off, breaking the silence during the ritual timeframe – brings us to the conclusion that transgression nowadays has become more symbolic than factual. The lightening or softening of his proscriptions is a result of the shifts from ritual to spectacular, more specifically, the change in audience, and the evolution of the mentality of receptors (the liberalisation of beliefs, etc.). This loosening testifies to the evolution of perception of the transgression itself: what was transgressive in a certain context vs. what is now perceived as such there and elsewhere (village-stage). The Mute's documented presence and manifestation in the two villages seems to signal towards a normalisation of transgression, moving it from marginal to mainstream, while his absence from the stage reinforces the taboos and moral interdictions that annihilate his whole presence and prerogatives within the ritual. While in the village context, taboo-breaking is needed for the ritual to function, on stage it becomes redundant.

All in all, the Mute, as marginal, exposes the fluidity of boundaries and the ambiguity that lies underneath social norms.

NOTES

[1] The custom of *Paparuda* is encountered in spring and summer feasts (Saint George's Day or Whitsunday) in Transylvania, and is meant to provide rain for the crops, although here it is also connected with initiation rites for young men (see Neagota & Benga 2009). In southern Romania, a similar custom with the same purpose (bringing rain) is followed (although the number of the communities is decreasing) at any time when drought is installed, and it is performed by young girls or children (see Pop 1999).

[2] Customs similar to the *Căluş* ritual are encountered in other European regions. As Anca Giurchescu mentiones, *Căluş* "is closely related to the ritual variants *Kalushari* and *Rusalii* of the Balkans, and shares similar traits with Morris and Sword Dance categories and their various types, as described in Britain, southern Europe (Basque Country, Spain, Portugal, southern France and Italy), as well as in Central Europe" (Giurchescu 1992: 35).

[3] In the English versions of different ethnologic and ethnographic texts, specialists refer to the masked character as "the Mute" (Kligman 1999 [1981]; Eliade 1973; Giurchescu 1992), and only one ethnologist, Romulus Vuia (1935), refers to it as "the dumb man". In our text, we prefer the designation "the Mute".

[4] Gail Kligman's research on the *Căluş* ritual was conducted at the end of the 1970s, and her book (see Kligman 1999 [1981]) was first published in 1981 by the University of Chicago Press.

[5] Ileana Benga and Bogdan Neagota also stress that *Căluş* is a "polyphonic custom" which has several layers of interpretation: it is a historical phenomenon, a sociological process, a cultural fact, a choreatic fact, it has a psychological ground, and it is also used as an ideological instrument. They stress that the custom should be analysed at all these "explanatory levels" (Benga & Neagota 2010: 201).

[6] In 2009, B. Neagota tape-recorded such a healing performed by the *Căluşari* from Giurgiţa (the material is archived at ORMA Sodalitas Anthropologica, in Cluj-Napoca). One year before, in 2008, the same group of *Căluşari* cured the same person, a healing that was witnessed by researchers A. Giurchescu, F. Iordan, B. Iordan, and R. Pop, and recorded by S. Sifft (the material is archived at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest). Each type of illness inflicted by a taboo break is diagnosed and healed by a different dance (see Giurchescu 1992).

[7] See Cătălin Alexa's (2022: 353–372) discussion on the new challenges that this nomination brought about: the pride, the pressure, and a new reason for "specialists" to interfere with the *Căluş* ritual.

[8] A. Iuga conducted research on the *Căluş* ritual in Bârla in 2013, as part of the research project "Vechi paradigm epistemice – noi paradigm instituţionale integrative pentru studiile de folk-lore" (Old epistemic paradigm – New institutional paradigm that integrates folklore studies), coordinated by Dr Ileana Benga, and financed by the Ministry of Research, CNCSIS, grant number TE280. In the years 2014 and 2015 the team increased and A. Iuga, G. Vlahbei, and F. Iordan, researchers from the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, did research together in Bârla and Stolnici. In 2018, A. Iuga accompanied the *Căluşari* from Stolinci at their performance in the city of Piteşti.

[9] A. Iuga explored the *Căluş* ritual in the villages of Giurgiţa, Pietroaia (Dolj region), and Olari (Olt region), together with B. Neagota in 2009; in the village of Slobozia (Giurgiu region), together with B. Neagota and I. Benga, in 2012. These field researches were conducted within the ORMA Sodalitas Anthropologica research group. In 2021, together with G. Vlahbei and F. Iordan, we documented the villages of Sâr-

bii Măgura, Optaşi Măgura, and Coloneşti (in the Olt region). In 2022, A. Iuga and V. Bulza documented the village of Cezieni (Olt region), and G. Vlahbei the village of Titu (Dâmbovița region).

[10] The *Iele* (They), *Frumoasele* (The Beautiful Ones), *Dânsele* (They), *Rusaliile*, *Şoimanele* (The Falcon-like) are mythological feminine creatures active during the summer. It is believed that if someone (usually a man) sees them dancing and speaks about the encounter, he will remain mute.

[11] "*I am of the opinion that the Căluşari themselves personify the fairies. This is the first important conclusion we came to in the course of our investigation*" (Vuia 1935: 100; italics by the author). Some of Vuia's arguments are their appearance, the number of the *Căluşari*, the dance that imitates one of the fairies, and the knowledge of healing plants.

[12] The dance therapy applied for healing is accompanied by ritual acts: "The sick person is touched with herbs and spit on with garlic, a jug with water is broken, one black chicken is sacrificed, etc." (Eliade 1973: 119).

[13] The oath and the unfolding of the flag are performed in a secret place that only the *Căluşari* and the musicians would know, and no outsider is allowed to participate. For example, in 2012, in Slobozia, A. Iuga was not allowed to participate at the moment of the unfolding of the flag, at the end of the ritual, which was an important sign that for the *Căluşari* this ritual moment is still of great importance.

[14] Such rules and taboos refer to the ritual purity of the *Căluşari,* who are not allowed to sleep with their wives during the whole time that the dance is performed; another rule is that they should be part of the *Căluş* for a fixed number of years (seven years usually); yet another rule is that the *Căluş* must be performed during the whole ritual timeframe.

[15] Some interpreters have included the ritual in the group of dances of sword and sticks (Giurchescu 1992; Eliade 1973). From this perspective, the stick is considered as a symbol of power in relation to the group, which is seen as a military group.

[16] For example, Olari (Olt region) or Giurgiţa (Dolj region).

[17] In some regions, the ritual plant is wormwood, or both garlic and wormwood.

[18] More information about the choreography can be found in Oprişan 1969; Kligman 1999 [1981]; Giurchescu 1992; Petac 2009.

[19] The heritage-making process has been highly instrumentalised as a political tool, being used to strengthen the national identity (Lazea 2012), but most of all, it is a sign of a disruption of the present from the past: "When the past loses its original meaning and influence upon the present, heritage is born" (ibid.: 87).

[20] In 1935, for the performance in London, the *Căluşari* would not perform unless they had garlic on their flag, and the organisers had to find this plant at the market (see Giurchescu 2009a; Ştiucă 2009).

[21] *Căluşul Românesc* Festival [The Romanian *Căluş*] was initiated in Slatina in 1969, and later moved to Caracal, both important cities in the Olt region. Until the pandemic year, 2020, it was organised every year, and it eventually became a benchmark for all the *Căluşari* groups in Romania.

[22] See: http://www.cultura.ro/sites/default/files/inline-files/Petre%20Masala-EDITAT.pdf, last accessed on 4 October 2022.

[23] *Căluşarii din Bârla* (*Căluşarii* from Bârla) is a documentary directed by Adriana Oprea, produced by DigiWorld, in collaboration with the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, in 2014 (58 min.). It has been presented on the DigiWorld channel

every year since, and has been screened at several film festivals in Romania: ASTRA Film Festival (Sibiu 2015); TIFF – Transylvanian International Film Festival (Cluj-Napoca 2015); DocuArtFest (Bucharest 2015); CRONOGRAF (Moldova Republic 2016).

[24] In 1714, Dimitrie Cantemir, in his book titled *Descriptio Moldaviae*, describes the group of *Căluşari* from Moldova (the only document mentioning this ritual in the Moldova region). In his description, he writes that the *Căluşari* wear a white cloth over their faces and have coloured ribbons that hang over their heads. This is the only historical reference that alludes that the performers of the *Căluş* ritual were all masked (Vulcănescu 1970: 168; Oprişan 1969: 187).

[25] Actually, in the *Căluşari* group where they take an oath, the Mute always sits near the leader of the group, and the other *Căluşari* have to equally obey the masked character, not only the *vătaf* (Oprişan 1969; Ştiucă 2009).

[26] Horia Barbu Oprişan (1969) mentions that the sword is used to delimitate the area where the *Căluşari* are dancing but also to protect the performers from the crowd.

[27] Horia Barbu Oprişan (1969) described the wooden phallus from several regions where the *Căluş* was performed and mentioned that it was tied around the waist of the Mute with a string made from linden branches. Linden is a plant that is symbolically related to the Whitsuntide religious feast. During the ritual that we observed, we could see a regular string that was used to fasten the phallus.

[28] This is a common sketch present in other communities (Oprişan 1969; Kligman 1999 [1981]).

[29] For example: washing clothes, mowing, harvesting, working with horses, digging and so on (see Giurchescu 1992: 39 for the specific dances that heal each of the transgressions).

[30] Sexuality (or any other transgressive behaviour) can be seen as taboo only when viewed from the outside, exterior of an inner experience, as Georges Bataille observes (1986 [1957]).

[31] Defloration symbolically refers to a primal form of violence (Bataille 1986 [1957]).

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Interview materials from 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2018 are in possession of the authors and in the Ethnological Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

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Anamaria Iuga (PhD), is Head of Ethnology Studies Department at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest, Romania. Her field research includes the dynamic of material culture and intangible heritage, as well as traditional ecological knowledge.

anaiuga@gmail.com

Georgiana Vlahbei is an independent researcher, collaborator for the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant. Her main documentation topics over the last years cover cultural identity and intangible heritage, mainly focusing on masked rituals, researched in various sites and communities in Romania and the Balkans. She is presently active in the Romanian cultural sector also as a cultural manager and an art photographer.

georgiana.c.vlahbei@gmail.com

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THE RITUAL YEAR OF THE NEKRASOV COSSACKS IN TURKEY AND IN RUSSIA: REFLECTING ON THE ADAPTATION TO NEW ENVIRONMENTS

Nina Vlaskina
PhD, Senior Researcher
Federal Research Centre The Southern Scientific Centre
of the Russian Academy of Sciences
nvlaskina@gmail.com

Abstract: The Nekrasov Cossacks belong to an ethno-confessional group that had to cope with adaptation to new environments several times. This happened due to multiple rounds of migration. Originating mainly from the southern Russian provinces with agriculture as a predominant type of economy, we would expect them to follow the agricultural calendar well, but ethnolinguistic expeditions to the Nekrasovites in 2010–2013 showed only some remnants of these motifs in the descriptions of the ritual year. Analyzing the causes of this, the article traces the Nekrasovites' adaptation to the changing natural, economic, religious, and cultural context. The author pays attention to the different dominant in their economy in Turkey, where fishing acquired a higher status than agriculture. In addition to this, climatic differences between Turkey and southern Russia are noted, because they may underline the fact that some of the calendar omens and agricultural prescriptions may have lost their relevance. The necessity of religious consolidation of the Christians in the Turkish Muslim community led to the elaboration of the confessional dominant in the Nekrasovites' ritual year, which maintained its stability even later, in the atheistic Soviet state. After their re-emigration to Russia, the Nekrasovites adapted to the rules of the new Soviet atheistic society and another round of changes in the predominant activities, since part of them settled in the region specializing in viticulture and winemaking. The changes in the ritual system, which followed their migrations, are analyzed in the article.

Keywords: adaptation, agriculture, cultural dynamics, fishing, migration, military community, Nekrasov Cossacks, religion, ritual year

INTRODUCTION

The Nekrasov Cossacks make up an ethno-confessional group of the Russian people named after its leader Ignat Nekrasov. During their history as a community, they migrated several times (Zudin & Vlaskina 2016: 4–7). Having left their settlements (*stanitsas*) in the Don region in the first decade of the eighteenth century,[1] they lived in the Crimean Khanate (the Kuban River basin) for 30 years. Then they moved to the Ottoman Empire (the Danube Delta). In the last decade of the eighteenth century, they moved again – to the northern coast of the Aegean Sea and to the southern coast of the Black Sea (the vicinity of Lake Kuş, which the Nekrasov Cossacks called Mainos). After more than two hundred years of exile, they returned to Russia: one group in 1912, and another 50 years later, in 1962. Each time, the Nekrasovites[2] found themselves in different climatic conditions. As a result, their economy changed. For all these years, the main tasks of the group were:

1) to preserve the core of the culture, the ethnic and religious identity (and this tendency correlates with the general Old Believers' fixation on the maintaining of closed, conservative, and traditional societies);
2) to adapt to the changing environment (this tendency was brought about by necessity).

In this article, the causes of the conservation and adaptation processes are analyzed. It concerns their reflection in the regular round of Nekrasov Cossacks' calendrical rituals. The primary sources of the current research are several field notes of folklorist Fedor Tumilevich[3] from the middle of the twentieth century, made in the Krasnodar region. In addition, numerous interviews also served as the research material. They were collected by the author of the article and her colleagues from the Federal Research Centre The Southern Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences,[4] Southern Federal University,[5] and the Kuban Cossack Choir[6] during field studies of the Nekrasov Cossacks living in the Stavropol region in 2010–2013. Yet another source was the Chronicle of the Nekrasov Cossacks on the margins of the liturgical books from the first years of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century (Tumilevich Archive 1–2; Rudichenko & Demina 2012). Photographic and written documents stored in the Novokumskiy branch of the Stavropol Regional Museum of Fine Arts and in the private collections of the respondents were also used in the research. Lexical data from the *Dictionary of the Dialect of the Nekrasov Cossacks* are also added to the list of materials (Serdiukova 2005).

The study of the culture of the Nekrasov Cossacks in the chosen aspect correlates with the complex principle of studying cultural phenomena, the basis of which is the idea of the connection between (or co-development and inter-

dependence of) the economic and cultural history of mankind. Various implementations of this idea have been widely presented over the past century (Wissler 1923; Forde 1934; Levin & Cheboksarov 1955) and continue to be relevant in both European and American anthropology and ethnography. In Soviet ethnography, such studies elaborated the theory of *economic-cultural types* (the historiography of the issue is covered in Andrianov & Cheboksarov 1972). In American ecological anthropology, the same scope of the concept is expressed by the term *subsistence systems* (Moran 1982 [1979]: 42; Sutton & Anderson 2004: 43; see also Yamskov 2017 for a consistent comparison of the use of the two terms). Defining the subject of a comprehensive study of folk culture, which involves an appeal to the history and economy of the group under analysis, the author follows the representatives of the Moscow School of Ethnolinguistics, who postulate that "the entire 'plan of content' of culture, folk psychology and mythology, regardless of the means and methods of their formal embodiment (word, object, rite, image, etc.)" should be studied (Tolstoi 1995b: 39).

MAIN CHANGES IN THE ECONOMIC BASE OF THE NEKRASOVITES' COMMUNITY

The traditional Slavic system of time measuring and counting in annual cycles was oriented simultaneously to natural phenomena, predominant economic activity, life events, and church holidays. This was scrupulously reasoned by Svetlana Tolstaia (1999; 2005: 10). Originally, the Nekrasov Cossacks were mainly Eastern Slavs from the southern Russian provinces, representatives of different professional groups (peasants, fishermen, hunters, and military men (Mininkov 2021: 219–220)). Many of them fled from their home settlements to the Don Lands trying to get out of villeinage, because serfdom did not operate on the borderlands. In the new place, not all of them had the opportunity to engage in the kinds of activities that they had been engaged in before.

In this period in the Don Lands, agriculture was not the basis of people's existence. Up to the late seventeenth century, the Nekrasov Cossacks were mainly engaged in military campaigns, hunting, fishing, and cattle breeding (Pronshtein 1961: 73–78).[7] After the Nekrasovites left the Don for the Kuban basin, agricultural work was temporarily dropped from the list of possible activities. As they wrote in their Chronicle Notes in 1720, cereals were bought from the Don Cossacks who stayed in their homeland (Tumilevich Archive 1: 47). But theoretically, it continued to be considered as one of the decent occupations for the Cossacks. Discussing the list of Ignat Nekrasov's testaments[8] in 1733,

the Nekrasovites determined the following possible occupations for a Cossack: "a Cossack is a warrior, hunter, fisherman, craftsman, grain grower"; a special section of this text stipulated the rules for the life of grain growers (Tumilevich Archive 1: 64–65, 78–80).

But, supposedly, the male part of the Nekrassov Cossack society mainly participated in numerous military campaigns – it was this type of their activity that was captured in historical sources (Sen' 2001: 94–120). In the Ottoman Empire (in the Danube Delta, on the shores of the Aegean Sea and in a settlement on Lake Kuş, close to the Black Sea), their main occupation was fishing. Since 1775 (Efimov & Bakhrevskiy 2017: 94) and later, petitions and other types of materials were regularly recorded in Ottoman documentation, where fishing was mentioned as an occupation that the Nekrasov Cossacks were consistently engaged in.

Step by step, agriculture regained its earlier position. By the second half of the nineteenth century, a significant part of Nekrasov residents were already employed in it, which was reflected in oral narratives (Tumilevich 1958: 212–216). After their re-emigration to Russia, their major occupation underwent another change. The first Nekrasovites, who moved to the Russian Empire in 1912, settled on the north-eastern coast of the Azov Sea after several relocations, where they were engaged mainly in fishing. The second group, who returned to the USSR in 1962, settled in the Stavropol region and became important members of the winemaking collective farms.

As the reader may see, the economic base of the Nekrasovites' household changed several times. Further, the reflection of these changes in the symbols and events of the ritual year is analyzed. This process is considered from the angle of the main occupations and values of the Nekrasovites. Military elements, reflections of fishing and agriculture and religious axiology in their calendrical system are analyzed. In the ritual practices, the signs of different identities and predominant activities of the Nekrasovites do not line up in successive ranks and do not exist independently of each other. On the contrary, they are simultaneously marked by different cultural codes of the same ritual, and often the ritual represents a cluster of meanings, which, as Nikita Tolstoi wrote, can be expanded in the cultural text (Tolstoi 1995b: 63–77). This thesis can be illustrated by decomposing one of the ritual practices of the Nekrasov Cossacks into elements:

> *At Mid-Pentecost* [date of the Christian calendar, Nekrasovites as Christians],
> *the Cossacks went around the village with an icon, church banners* (*horugvy)* [religious attributes, Nekrasovites as Christians],

> *and the Nekrasovites' banner* [military attribute, Nekrasovites as warriors]
> *praying for rain* [ritual action aimed at fertility, Nekrasovites as farmers]. (Gulina 2010)

Another important point is that the descriptions available of the Nekrasovites' ritual year are partial, so it is difficult for the author to build consistent correlated series for each aspect of the issue. Hence illustrations of the chosen principle of analysis will be demonstrated.

MILITARY ELEMENTS IN THE NEKRASOVITES' CALENDRICAL YEAR

Military elements in the Nekrasovites' ritual year are represented as ritual attributes, objects, and actions. In the first group, there is an attribute or some feature ascribed to a saint. They say that when it thunders, Elijah the Prophet comes down from the mountains and carries gunpowder and a shot to load the cannons (Tumilevich Archive 3: 28 rev.). There are certain objects that are associated with military service, which were used in different ritual actions: the Nekrasovites' banner, rifles, and canons.[9] Informants described the performing of these actions as following the testaments of Ignat. Here are several examples:

> *We lived according to the testaments of Ignat. We went to the cross procession, carried Ignat's cannons and fired them.* (Tumilevich Archive 3: 32)

> *On the old banner of Ignat … when the banner was against the light, Ignat was visible in the fabric. The banner was made of silk. The banner was green. This banner was sacred. When it was carried out on Mainos* [lake] *for the Baptism* [the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, or Epiphany, January 6/19. – N.V.] *and for the First Feast of the Savior* [Procession of the Honorable Wood of the Life-Giving Cross of the Lord, August 1/14. – N.V.], *the Cossacks came up, crossed themselves and kissed it. When the cross was dipped into the water, Cossacks fired Ignat's cannons.* (Tumilevich Archive 3: 49 rev.)

> *In the year 7347* [1839] *of the month of October, on the 24th day, there was a military circle, Cossacks held a memorial service for Sir Ignat,*

> *and on the 25th–26th days of the same month, his book was shown in the circle, they read the testaments, and then for three days they honored the memory of Ignat: Cossacks on horseback showed themselves in battle, the young, the old walked with the banner of Ignat around the villages, fired cannons, rifles, pistols, there were feasting conversations around the villages, horse riding. Ataman Dementiy Selivanov handed out awards to horsemen.* (Tumilevich Archive 2: 128)[10]

The last quote also provides an example for both ritual objects and actions that characterize the Nekrasovites as warriors – there was horse racing and competitions[11] associated with the feasts. They existed in the folk calendar at the earliest stage of the existence of this community. In 1731, in the testaments of Ignat, Cossack games on horseback are mentioned as one of the possible ways of holding holidays (Tumilevich Archive 3: 73). After 100 years, as we see, they were carried out as a part of the commemorative event. Such competitions gradually ceased to exist by the middle of the nineteenth century. The interviewees born at the beginning of the twentieth century no longer kept horses either in Turkey or later, after their re-emigration to the USSR. Instead, fishermen's boat racing appeared. Shooting canons and rifles and taking out the Nekrasovites' banner during feasts were performed longer. They are mentioned in the descriptions of the festivities organized upon the return of the Nekrasovites from the winter fishing season and in the stories about the abovementioned religious processions at Mid-Pentecost.

The gradual fading away of the military component from ritual life occurred due to relations with the Turkish authorities, who considered the demonstration of the Nekrasovites' national symbols as a threat to their authority.

> *Mid-Pentecost is in the middle between Easter and Pentecost. And on this day, the Nekrasovites went out there, as we called it, "around the town". Well, it's like: there was a service in the church, then everyone came out with an icon, church banners, with an altar table outside the village. Earlier, they say, they went to the lake. And the Turks forbade it, and the Nekrasovites began to make their procession outside the village. At the same time, they carried the Nekrasovites' banner with them – the one with which they left Russia. The Cossacks walked in a procession and carried this banner with them. They are coming – these are icons there, an altar table, church banners and this banner. And then they began to ban it. The Turks say: how is it, they say, they have been living here for so many years, and they carry the Nekrasovites' banner. And now it was banned, that's all.* (Gulina 2010)

In Soviet Russia, this ritual action, without being subjected to formal changes, was transformed from the point of view of interpretation, as its form coincided with carrying out the Soviet flag during Soviet festivities.[12] The meaning of this action changes from the demonstration of the unity of the Nekrasovites' military society to the demonstration of the unity of the Soviet nation.

When analyzing the dynamics of ritual elements associated with the status of a warrior, a special point should be taken into account: in Imperial Russia, the preservation of such ritual elements was intended to emphasize the values associated with the military activity of the Cossacks and their loyalty to the Motherland. Military service was the most meaningful part of the life of every Cossack until the first half of the twentieth century. At the early stage of their history, military campaigns were a guarantee of their existence as freemen, and after 1721 (Speranskiy 1830: 367), the Don Cossacks were subordinate to the Military College of the Russian Empire and were obliged to serve the Tsar as border defenders.

After the Nekrasov Cossacks had emigrated from Russia, their evaluation of military service changed. Living in the Ottoman Empire, they had to take part in wars on the side of the Turks (against Russians) and tried to buy themselves out of the service. One of the repetitive motifs of the narratives depicts a Nekrasov soldier in the Turkish army, who shoots over the heads of Russian soldiers (Tumilevich 1961: 216; Elisiutikov 2010). So, the military values in the calendric rituals eventually ceased to be supported by the elements of everyday life, and corresponding symbolic elements are no longer recorded in the calendrical feasts.

RITUAL ELEMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH FISHERY IN THE NEKRASOVITES' CALENDAR YEAR

Since fishing was the main occupation of the Cossacks both before leaving Russia and in Turkey, we shall now see how it was incorporated into the system of the ritual year. Being subjects of the Ottoman Empire, the Nekrasovites fished in the Marmara, Black, Aegean, and Mediterranean seas and various Turkish lakes (Tumilevich 1961: 244). Wherever they emigrated, they tried to find a location near a river, a lake, or a sea.[13] This occupation was obviously reflected in the way Nekrasov Cossacks speak about themselves. In numerous narratives about their identity and history, they underline that they are above all fishermen: "Our Cossacks were fishermen. Every Cossack should work – this is Ignat's testament" (Tumilevich 1958: 213; see also ibid.: 201, 210; 1961: 217); part of

Ignat's testaments describe the rules for fishermen's lives (Tumilevich Archive 1: 81–83); in their requests to the Ottoman administration, the Nekrasovites said that fishing was the main source of food for them and asked for tax reliefs (Efimov & Bakhrevskiy 2017: 101).

The fishing industry organized the rhythm of communal life, including the events of the ritual year. The timing of outbound fishing determined the specific division of the calendrical year into two long periods: the winter and the summer ones. In earlier times, church feasts marked the beginning and the end of a fishing season: the Nekrasovites fished from autumn (the Day of Saint Demetrius (October 26 / November 8[14]), or the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God (August 15/28), or the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14/27)) to spring (Saint George's Day (April 23 / May 6) or Easter). It is to be noted here that Saint Demetrius' and Saint George's days denote turns to winter and summer in several Balkan traditions (Agapkina 1999: 93; Tolstoi 1995a: 497).

According to the respondents, in the middle of the twentieth century, the division into two periods in Turkey remained, but the dates were defined by the Turkish legislation – from September 1 when fishing opened until April 15, the day after which fishing was prohibited because of the fish spawning season (Banderovskiy 2010). Summer, when men were at home, was the time for solving important issues for the community: it was in summer that the Nekrasovites gathered during a *circle* assembly to select their leader (*ataman*) and solve public problems and needs. In summer, the Cossacks arranged marriages and worked in the field.

The beginning and the end of this period of outbound fishing were marked by special rituals of seeing off the Cossacks on a fishing trip and the subsequent meeting with the participation of the whole community. The Cossacks were greeted with Ignat's banner, firing rifles, and a cannon salute (Tumilevich 1958: 14).

Fishing activity initiates the emergence and functioning of special ritual practices. For example, if a Christian feast fell on the fishing time, the Cossacks could arrange boat races (which, as was mentioned above, replaced the horse racing competitions in the Nekrasov Cossack community). Because of the importance of fishing for this community, the vernacular explanation for the ban on eating fish during the Apostles' Fast evolved in their tradition (it lasts from the first Monday after Pentecost until the Day of Apostles Peter and Paul – June 29 / July 12). In a Cossack legend, the apostles Peter and Paul were fishermen selling their catch. Poor trade in the summertime compelled them to turn to God. At their request, God established fasting – forbade the eating of meat, eggs, and dairy produce and permitted the eating of fish (Zudin 2013: 41).

Finally, the importance of fishing in the economic system of the Nekrasovites resulted in the appearance of fish dishes in their festive menu: cold fish soup (*stiuden'*), catfish dumplings, doused fish (fried and stewed with onions and tomatoes) and others (Vlaskina 2022: 211).

After the Nekrasov Cossacks returned to Russia, the status of the fishing industry in their economy changed significantly. Some of them, who settled in the Krasnodar region, worked on the collective fishing farms during the Soviet period. The fishing crew included not only the Nekrasovites but also other residents of the area. In addition, the fishing methods were changed. In the Stavropol region, the Cossacks worked on a winemaking collective farms and longed for fishing (because they could no longer do it) and fish dishes. In Soviet Russia, along with the activity, the rituals of seeing off or meeting the Cossacks from fishing trips disappeared; the timing of the fishing catch was no longer linked to the church holidays.

AGRICULTURAL ELEMENTS IN THE NEKRASOVITES' RITUAL YEAR

The hypothesis that agriculture was not on the list of the main occupations of the Nekrasovites in the early eighteenth century is evidenced by an entry in their chronicle of 1720. The members of the circle asked: "'Is it possible to plow a field?' The circle instructed the council of the old people to delve into the business of grain growing and read the testaments out in the circle next year" (Tumilevich Archive 1: 63). At the same time, as mentioned above, 13 years after this entry, a special part of Ignat's testaments was dedicated to the decent life of grain-growers. Various Ottoman documents prove that the appropriate part of the Nekrasovites was engaged in agriculture, including those who decided to stop fishing and become farmers (Efimov & Backhrevsky 2017: 100–107).

Probably, due to the fact of abandoning agriculture at the stage of the group formation (when they lived in the Crimean Khanate) and some other factors that will be discussed below, the Nekrasovites preserve only some of the symbolic objects and ritual actions characteristic of the rich metropolitan agricultural East Slavic tradition. Many of the preserved fragments belong to the festive culinary traditions: the Nekrasovites cooked a lot of bakery products for Christmas (squash[15] and plum pies, donuts, cookies in the form of a hoof); at the end of the Shrovetide week (Forgiveness Sunday) the mother-in-law baked a special pie (*karavai*) for her son's wife, and the daughter-in-law brought it to her own mother. Furthermore, on the Day of Forty Martyrs (March 9/22), the

Nekrasovites baked cookies in the form of larks and gave them to children; on the second day of Christmas (December 26 / January 8), women baked a special bread *kalach* for the midwife who helped them in childbirth (the same pie the Cossacks brought and left in their church for memorial days); for Lazarus Saturday, they prepared pancakes with caviar and brought them to poor people and widows (Novokumskiy Archive: 7–14). On the Day of Vassiliy the Great (January 1/14), they baked a ritual bread *kanysh* with grain laid in one of its corners. Finding this part portended a good harvest for the one who found it (Mironova 2012: 392).

Old Slavic ritual actions related to the symbols of food production were almost completely replaced by religious ceremonies. Symbolization of nature signs at certain calendrical dates was also lost. The possible reasons for this will be investigated further below.

During the period of Cossack residence in the territory of modern Turkey, the share of agriculture in their economy gradually increased. But the schedule of agricultural work differed significantly from the southern Russian regions of the Nekrasovites' origin. For example, in Turkey, sowing of winter wheat was timed to coincide with Christmas, while among the Eastern Slavs it was usually timed to the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14/27). Legumes were sown on the Day of Elijah the Prophet (July 20 / August 2); in Russia they were usually sown at the end of spring. After Saint George's Day (April 23 / May 6), they sowed watermelons. On Candlemas feast (February 2/15), they drove cattle to pastures for the first time and hired a shepherd, while in many Slavic traditions it was done on Saint George's Day (Novokumskiy Archive: 11). After the first week of Great Lent, the Nekrasovites went to reap cattails, which they used to twist ropes (Serdiukova 2005: 222), then they opened ground in the vineyards. This change in the timing of agricultural works led to the fact that old signs, prescriptions, and omens timed for certain calendrical dates were unclaimed and therefore fell into disuse.

Another area of transformation is the change in the types of crops grown in comparison with the southern Russian regions. Legumes played a much more important role in the cuisine of the Nekrasovites than that of the Eastern Slavs. In Turkey, Cossacks had large melon fields and they grew many oriental fruits: pomegranates, figs, dogwood, oranges, lemons, dates, quince, and others; they also grew spices and used them widely (Vlaskina 2022: 212–213).

While analyzing the dynamics and transformations of the Nekrasov Cossacks' traditional cuisine, Tatiana Vlaskina says: "Any community that experienced long-distance migrations and long-term ethnic contacts has its combination of original and borrowed dishes in everyday and festive life, filling the recipe with exotic products" (ibid.: 208). In this article, much attention is paid to how new

crops, fruits, and vegetables have been included in the ritual dishes and practices. Here are several examples of this kind. Probably in the Turkish period, boiled beans became the main dish at Lent, and pea noodles were prepared on the Thursday before Easter. Boiled corn was a special dish in the first week of Lent. Cornmeal flour was used to prepare the ritual drink *buza*,[16] which the Nekrasovites drank on Pentecost, and that the midwife gave on the second day of Christmas to all the mothers she had helped in childbirth. Rice was taken up as the filling of the main ritual baking of the communal dinners on the patronal day (pies with rice). Lemons were included in the recipe of the ritual white fish soup (*stiuden'*) of the patronal feast. The Nekrasovites consecrated grapes primarily at the Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ (August 6/19). Young men gave oranges as special gifts to girls during Shrovetide festivities.

After the Nekrasovites re-emigrated to Russia, they returned to the southern Russian set of cultivated crops and also witnessed the mechanization of land cultivation. Therefore, the basis for the agrarian traditions was changed once more. Since then, most of the ritual practices connected with the agrarian calendar were preserved only in people's memories and rarely became subjects of performances of folklore ensembles.[17]

RELIGION AND THE RITUAL YEAR

Along with the key professional activities for the community, the religious history of the group is always directly reflected in the calendar. The religious path of the Nekrasovites was not easy. According to Fedor Tumilevich, in the hierarchy of Cossack identities, the military one has always occupied a dominant position, pushing the religious identity into the background. He wrote:

> *Indeed, there were religious motives in the Bulavin and Nekrasov movements, since a significant number of the participants were Old Believers. But they fought not so much for the restoration of the "old rites" as against the Orthodox Church as the backbone of the feudal-absolutist state.* (Tumilevich 1958: 9)

Some of the legends published by Fedor Tumilevich may also reflect the secondary role of religion, for example, "Ignat Cast the Bullets from the Crosses", which tells how Ignat Nekrasov fought with Empress Catherine I and ordered his master smiths to cast cannon balls from church bells and bullets from church crosses (Tumilevich 1961: 152–153). In the legend "Testaments of Ignat

Nekrasov", priests were ordered to obey the Nekrasovites' society: "A priest who does not fulfill the precepts can be killed as a heretic" (Tumilevich 1961: 172).

Nevertheless, it seems that, while expressing his point of view on religious history in the 1950s and 1960s, the folklorist was forced to correct it with an eye to the atheistic policy of the Soviet state. In the legend cited above, there was also other Ignat's testament: "The churches should not be closed in Turkey; the bell ringing should not be stopped" (ibid.); Tumilevich managed to save these fragments from censorship. Indeed, in the eighteenth century, the authority of the Church among the Nekrasovites was lower than that of the Cossack assembly, but it was still quite high and consistently rose throughout the nineteenth century as pressure increased from the Muslim population. One of Ignat Nekrasov's testaments was "to keep the faith of the fathers" (Tumilevich Archive 1: 54). So the Nekrasovites remembered, cited, and followed this precept. According to their Chronicle, when leaving the Don stanitsas (Tumilevich Archive 1: 46, 48, 50), they took old liturgical books and icons with them, sacredly kept these objects during their stay in Turkey and later brought books back with them when they returned to Russia.

The invariably high status of the faith and religion of the Cossacks is also demonstrated by documents about the Nekrasovites, deposited in the Ottoman archives. According to the documents mentioned, the construction of a church was mandatory for the Nekrasovites after moving to a new place of residence. For example, they built three churches and installed bells in the village of Donodzh Casa Babadag (near Lake Babadag) in 1795 (Efimov & Bakhrevskiy 2017: 96); in 1840 and 1851 they petitioned for permission to build a church in the village of Kizilhisar (near Lake Iznik; ibid.: 101, 103). Among the historical legends, there are also stories about the construction of churches in the Nekrasovites' new places of residence.

There is no doubt that life in a different confessional environment (among the Muslims) in Ottoman Turkey contributed to the consolidation of the community along religious lines. This tendency can regularly be seen in communities that find themselves in similar conditions (see, e.g., Cederström 2012; Mihaylova 2017). For the reasons that were discussed above, religious events gradually began to dominate in the events of the ritual year of the Nekrasov Cossacks and their ways of understanding time.

Religious feasts permanently defined the basis for dividing the Nekrasovites' ritual year. Church service was the main event of a feast, a starting point determining the timing of ritual actions: "The Liturgy of Hours is held, and after it we will play with Easter eggs"; "On Friday, it was the final service to celebrate Easter, and on Saturday, the last day to play with Easter eggs"

(Belikova 2010). It takes precedence over other rituals (e.g., wedding). For centuries, religious processions for Epiphany, Mid-Pentecost, and patronal feast were strongly preserved.

There are some minor but nevertheless important traits of the Cossacks' religious culture. Tatiana Rudichenko and Vera Demina (2012) point out the peculiarity of the Nekrasovites' church service – the fact that it goes on outside the church building. During the Christmas period, the priest and the clergy made congratulatory rounds through the village.

Concerning the USSR, religious rituals could not be practiced openly there, but the Nekrasovites held religious services at home, although the Soviet way of life, which did not involve the allocation of time for following Christian rituals, certainly influenced the daily practices of young people who were born in Soviet Russia. Nevertheless, religious rituals are the best-preserved part of the Nekrasovites' tradition today. Their patronal feasts are the heart of the Nekrasovites' culture, the visiting card of their society (Pismennaia 2007; Zudin & Vlaskina 2016: 117–122). Irina Belikova said: "If we stop performing our patronal feast, we will cease to be Nekrasovites." It is in the context of the patronal feast that the traditional costume and culinary traditions continue to live. In post-Soviet Russia, the preservation of this group of rituals may also be facilitated by a religious revival and an increase in public attention to confessional issues (Vlaskina 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up all the ideas of the article, it is important to underline its main aim – to show how the types of economic activities of the Nekrasov Cossacks changed over the 300-year history of the group. They were peasants, warriors, fishermen, farmers, Soviet collective farmers. And all these types of activity as well as the religious identity determined their ways of dividing the ritual year, actualizing symbols and performing ritual actions. It was religious identity that turned out to be the most stable in a changing environment and continued to determine the content and forms of the ritual life of the group from the very beginning of its history up to these days. The appeal to the traditions of the Nekrasov Cossacks who had to change their living conditions several times and adapt to new social and natural circumstances makes it possible to highlight the mechanism for reflecting such adaptation in the ritual.

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NOTES

[1] The first reason was to flee from the political persecution of the tsarist government (who tried to limit the Cossacks' governing autonomy). The second reason for leaving was a religious conflict since many Cossacks did not accept the church reform of Patriarch Nikon.

[2] Nekrasovites is another name for the Nekrasov Cossacks.

[3] Fedor Victorovich Tumilevich (1910–1979) was a famous Russian folklorist who devoted all his life to field research and publication on the heritage of the Nekrasov Cossacks.

[4] Tatiana Vlaskina and Natalia Popova.

[5] Natalia Arkhipenko, Inna Kalinichenko (Mironenko), and Lidia Uspenskaia.

[6] Anton Zudin.

[7] This does not exclude the fact that, in this period, an important part of the Don region population could have been engaged in agriculture. Historical sources from the late seventeenth century show that people brought agricultural tools from previous places of residence to the Don settlements and, accordingly, they might have inherited folk knowledge about nature and agriculture and, subsequently, the Slavic folk agrarian calendar, from their southern Russian ancestors (Pronshtein 1961: 44, 47; Vlaskina 2022).

[8] Ignat Nekrasov's testaments (zavety) are the laws or the rules of life of the Cossacks, which they established at their special assembly called *circle* (*krug*) in the 1730s and tried to follow throughout their history as an independent group.

[9] Cf. the regular ritual use of the same objects by the Don Cossacks (Rudichenko 2017: 257–258).

[10] Cf. the description of the celebrations of the same type in the Don Lands of the eighteenth century: "Every year, at the cemetery [of the monastery area] on Saturday of Cheese Week [Shrovetide – N.V.], the Cossacks commemorate the dead. Almost everyone, except for the oldest and youngest generations, go out and, after commemorating the dead, they eat and drink, sing, and then arrange horse races, and they make a real battle out of it for their training. There are cases of accidental killings in those races" (Rigelman 1846: 45).

[11] From the beginning of the Don Cossack history till the middle of the twentieth century, the Cossacks participated in military campaigns on horseback. The fates of a Cossack and his horse were closely connected. That is why the horse is one of the most mythologized and at the same time the most important animals for the Don Cossacks (Vlaskina & Arkhipenko & Kalinicheva 2004: 61); the Cossack and the horse are the main characters of the Cossack songs (Rudichenko 2004: 135). Equestrian competitions (horse racing, shooting guns and bows at targets on horseback) are recorded in

mid-eighteenth-century sources and are invariably present in later descriptions of holidays up to modern times (Yarovoy 2021).

[12] On the flag symbolism in different cultures see in more detail in Shanafelt 2008.

[13] Taking into account that the Nekrasovites were Old Believers, we can assume that fishing could be associated with a biblical spiritual activity for catching the souls (Holy Bible 2002: 5).

[14] Hereinafter, the dates are given first according to the Julian calendar and then according to the Gregorian calendar.

[15] In spite of the fact that the preparation of a wide variety of bakery goods from wheat flour can be considered as a Slavic heritage and the fact that the Cossacks had grown squash even before they left the Don area, this type of pie, called *pliashchinda*, was most likely taken over from their Romanian neighbors (cf. Rom. *placinda*) during the period of residence of the Nekrasovites in the Danube Delta.

[16] As Tatiana Vlaskina wrote, the recipe of *buza* "may be linked both to Old Russian and Turkish culinary traditions … but the Turkish recipe for *buza* is closer to the Nekrasovian one, since, like the local Turks, they ferment the drink with corn flour with yeast" (Vlaskina 2022: 215).

[17] The Nekrasovites' Shrovetide ritual dance procession *krylo* 'a wing' was performed specifically for the audience back in 1963, when director Vagram Kevorkov was shooting a film about the return of the Nekrasovites to their homeland, titled "The Cossacks Have Returned" (USSR, Piatigorsk Television Studio, with Fedor Tumilevich as a consultant). Later, when the folkloric ensemble The Nekrasov Cossacks was formed, *krylo* became one of its permanent performances.

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Gulina 2010 = Tatiana Vlaskina and Anton Zudin's interview with Elena Gulina, born in 1950, recorded in Novikumskiy village, Stavropol Krai.

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Nina Vlaskina (PhD) is Senior Researcher at the Federal Research Centre The Southern Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Her research interests primarily concern the traditional culture of the Don Cossacks and Old Believers of southern Russia.

nvlaskina@gmail.com

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EASTER TRADITIONS AMONG SLOVENES IN ITALY (NATISONE VALLEY)

Gleb Pilipenko
PhD, Senior Researcher
Institute of Slavic Studies
Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
glebpilipenko@mail.ru

Maria Yasinskaya
PhD, Researcher
Department of Ethnolinguistics and Folklore
Institute of Slavic Studies
Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
marusiaya@gmail.com

Abstract: The paper discusses some Easter traditions of Slovenes living in the Natisone Valley in Italy. The research is based on the authors' field data, ethnographic literature, and archival materials. Easter practices and vocabulary related to the celebration of Easter are analyzed in this paper. The paper covers customs that have not been previously described in the scientific literature or those that have had little attention devoted to them and have remained largely unexplored until now. On the one hand, in the vocabulary of the Slovenian dialect of the Natisone Valley, numerous borrowings from Romance (Italian and Friulian) languages are found, mainly in the field of ritual foods. On the other hand, Slovenian lexemes also penetrate into the Romance languages. The authors use data from neighboring Slovenian dialects in order to demonstrate the broader typological perspective of the study. The paper ends with excerpts from the narratives of informants describing the celebration of Easter, which are published with English translations. The detailing of a questionnaire related to Easter among Slovenes in Italy is a future research perspective.

Keywords: border area, Easter, festive food, Italian language, Natisone Valley, Slovenian language, traditional culture

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the authors examine some customs related to the celebration of Easter among Slovenes living in the Natisone Valley, a region on the Romance-Slavic border. The description of traditional practices that have not been previously analyzed in scientific literature and the vocabulary related to Easter are the central focus of this paper.

The data for this paper was collected by the authors in 2017 and 2018 by means of field research carried out among Slovenes living in the province of Udine (Italy) (Pilipenko & Iasinskaia 2018). Information from ethnographic literature, archival materials from the index cards of the *Slovenian Linguistic Atlas*[1] (SLA), and from lexicographic sources, both Slovenian and partially Italian, were further added to field data. The characteristic features of the Slovenes living in the Natisone Valley in the province of Udine are their relatively longer habitation in Italy and longer exposure to linguistic and cultural influences from Romance cultures, which are in contrast with the characteristics of Slovenes in the more southern regions of Gorizia and Trieste (the Italian influence on this dialect is discussed in Skubic 1997; Zuljan Kumar 2003).

EASTER EVE

In the system of the traditional Catholic calendar, Easter is not given as much importance as Christmas. However, it is the second most important point of the annual cycle of holidays.

Slovenes in Italy refer to the week before Easter as *velik teden* ('great week', Sl. dial.[2] *velik tiedan*), the Sunday before Easter as *oljčnica*[3] (Sl. dial. *ojčinca* in Mersino; according to SLA, Sl. dial. *cvietna nedeja*), and Easter as *velika noč* ('great night', Sl. dial. *velika nuoč/nuoc*; in the materials of SLA we found *velika noc* (San Pietro al Natisone, Montemaggiore, Pulfero), *velika nuoić* (Mersino)). In the Holy Week, Slovenes went to church for services (Sl. dial. *andohti* 'mass'). In the regions of Gorizia, Kras, and Slavia Friulana, bouquets (Sl. *oljke*, in our field data Sl. dial. *ojke*) consisting of olive twigs were blessed on the Sunday before Easter. Additionally, in the village of Tercimonte, a twig of viburnum was blessed and subsequently used to drive cattle to the pastures. In the village of Cergneu, viburnum twigs were carried to church and then kept at home as talismans against witches. People also carried them to the fields as a protection against poisonous snakes (Kuret 1989 [1965]: 142). These twigs were also kept at home and burned during hail or thunderstorms with an intention of "driving away the thunder" (Sl. dial. *da peržené tuono*).[4] In the Canal Valley,

people referred to bouquets blessed on the Sunday before Easter as *prajtelj*. Such bouquets consisted of willow twigs decorated with needles, flowers, and potatoes and were placed in the fields on long sticks, where they stood until the end of the harvest as a sign of blessing.

From Great Thursday (Sl. dial. *velík četartáḱ*) to Great Saturday (Sl. dial. *velika sabota*), the bells in the churches did not ring (they rang for the last time when the priest sang "Gloria" in front of the altar). Instead, special rattles, which were boards with a wooden bill, were used (*sablívka*, *klepetawka*, *klepetec*, *crlevka*, *škrtálca*, *štrgótec*, *škrtáča*, *brlínka*, *drečála*, *klapotála* (Kuret 1989 [1965]: 152)). Children ran around with rattles and made noises and sounds. Niko Kuret describes the tradition among Slovenes and Italians in Trieste as follows: a "God's coffin" (*Božij grob*)[5] is laid down on the roads, and people then walk door-to-door carrying it (or it is put in a closet at home, like a Christmas nativity scene) (ibid.: 154). There is no such custom in Slavia Friulana. Instead, on the Friday of the Holy Week (Sl. dial. *velik petak*), a procession (Sl. dial. *precesija*) called '*Križeva pot*' ('the way of the Cross', Via Dolorosa) took place. All agricultural work was stopped, and cattle were confined to the barns (ibid.: 168). The following custom was attested in the Natisone Valley: on Good Friday, children ran and dragged hearth chains along the road to clean them from soot (in older times, there used to be hearths in houses; food was cooked in boilers hanging on a chain over the hearth). This custom of dragging chains (Sl. dial. *katenjáč*) is also known to be prevalent in mainland Slovenia (in Posočje), as mentioned by Niko Kuret (ibid.: 169). This action is referred to as *kietne vlec* 'to drag chains' or *očedit kietne* 'to clean chains' in the Slovenian dialect of the Natisone Valley (cf. *kietna* (Špehonja 2010: 79)). It should be noted that the word *kietna* is borrowed from the Romance languages (It. *catena* 'chain').

BLESSING OF THE FIRE AND WATER

On Holy Saturday in the Natisone Valley, the blessing of the fire was performed on the threshold of the church (Sl. dial. *žéynjen wóyinj* 'blessed fire') – a common practice in Italian towns, such as Florence (Krasnovskaia 1977: 24–25). Our informants recalled their childhood experiences of waiting for the blessed fire to be lit and competing for being the first to take it, after which they would carry it home on a lit and smoldering wood tinder fungus that would be broken into pieces and distributed to the owners, who would then fan the fire again and heat their furnaces with it. To infuse it with flavor, juniper was added to the blessed fire on a smoldering mushroom. The fire was also carried to the fields, which were "baptized" with it while asking for God's blessing (Kuret

1989 [1965]: 183). This custom is widespread throughout Slovenia. A practice of blessing the water on Holy Saturday is also prevalent. In Slavia Friulana (Tercimonte), children washed their feet when the bells started ringing again after three days (ibid.: 190).

EASTER FOOD

A particular importance is given to the preparation of special festive food in Easter traditions. According to the testimonies of our informants, the fire blessed on Holy Saturday was often used for cooking this food. The informants mentioned painted eggs (Sl. *pirhi*) (according to the SLA archive: *pofarbane jajca* (San Pietro al Natisone), *jaica ofarbane* (Mersino), *iaici ofarbane* (Montemaggiore), *jaica kolorane* (Pulfero)); homemade bread, or sweet pastry rolls *gubana* (*gubana, gubanca* (Špehonja 2010: 61)) as examples of Easter food. This pastry is called *hubanca* in the SLA archive. In Lusevera (Torre Valley dialect), *paača* is found instead of this (cf. *paača, pagača*) (Spinozzi Monai 2009: 570). The term *pugača* from the Natisone Valley dialect is translated as *pane* 'bread' in Italian and as *focaccia* (Špehonja 2010: 203)). Easter bread is also known as *fujaca/fujača* (ibid.: 52). In the Brda region (Gorizia community), *fulje/fuje*, pieces of dough with sweet seasonings, were cooked in water from boiled ham (*kuhan pršut*). Jelly (*žowca*) and wine were also mentioned to be festive dishes by the informants.

To refer to Easter bread, the informants use four lexemes that often function as synonyms – *puɣača*, *fujaca/fujača*, *ɣubanca* – and descriptive terms in their speech *ta obiejen kruh* ('richly-oiled bread'). The following utterances may indicate synonymy: '*an su kuril tu forne, zok su miel nardit ɣubanco, su miel narest fujacu*' ("and they heated the furnace, because they had to make *gubanca*, they had to make *fujaca*") (Informant G., San Pietro al Natisone, recorded in 2017); '*allora, tu cajno se j stavila ɣubanca, puɣača, puɣača smo klical*' ("so, they put *gubanca*, *pogača*, in the basket, we called it *pogača*") (Informant C., San Pietro al Natisone, recorded in 2017).[6] In addition, the synonymy of lexemes is revealed in the SLA materials: in settlements on the territory of the Natisone Valley we find the lexeme *hubanca*, whereas in the dialects of the Torre Valley, its counterpart is *paača* (Sl. *pogača*). The term *fujača* is also attested in the dictionary of the Natisone Valley dialect (Špehonja 2010: 52). In the J. Baudouin de Courtenay dictionary, there is an indication of the Friulian origin of the *fujace* lexeme near the term *paača* (Spinozzi Monai 2009: 570). In the Slovenian-Friulian dictionary, the counterpart to the Friulian *fuiace* is *pogača* (Erat 2008: 350). In the Friuli region, the ancient origin of *focaccia*

pastries (Friul. *fuiace*), which are very common during Easter, is mentioned (Perusini 1957: 146); the Friulians make them from yeast dough, and they have a round shape. In Friulian, the lexeme *gubana* is known; it means 'puff pastry with filling'. *Gubana* is used during Easter as well as on other holidays[7] and is known to be found among Slovenes in the Natisone Valley (ibid.). In the dictionary of the Friulian language, the meaning of *gubane* is "a kind of puff pastry with grapes and nuts" (Erat 2008: 375), while there are no indications of its ceremonial character. It is obvious that the term *gubana* in Friulian is a loan from the Slovenian language. The lexemes *gibanica* and *gubanica* are common in Slovenian; they are semantically related to the verbs *gibati*, *upogibati* 'to bend' and *gubati* 'to wrinkle' (Snoj 2015 [1997]), cf. also **gъbanica* in Trubachev (1980: 187).[8] It is noteworthy that *pogača* and *fujaca / fujača* have a Romance origin from the Latin *focus* 'hearth, fire' (Snoj 2015 [1997]). However, they are not evenly distributed in Slavic languages. If the term *pogača* is known in Russian, Bulgarian, and Serbian dialects, it is likely to be borrowed before the seventh century (Baš 2004: 433), while *fujaca / fujača* is a local term on the Friulian-Slovenian borderland.

The pastries were made in the form of a pigeon (Sl. dial. *golobíca*), which was baked from dough, and an egg (Sl. dial. *icé*) was placed in the head[9] (occasionally, a nut was added there), a blessed olive twig (Sl. dial. *ójka žégnjena*) was placed in the beak, and the eyes were made of black pepper. A pastry named *menih* ('monk') was also mentioned. It is known in the regions of Primorska and Notranjska in Slovenia (SSKJ 2014), and an egg or an eggshell from blessed eggs was also known to be put in it. The number of pastry figures that were made was based on the number of children in the house – one pastry for each child. Easter pigeon (It. *colomba di Pasqua*, *colombina*) is a widespread type of pastry in northern Italy, in particular, in Friuli.[10] No evidence of it was found in the materials that N. Kuret collected among Slovenes, while the data from Friulian settlements confirms that Easter pigeons made from sweet yeast dough and having a colored egg placed in the center to represent its head are fairly common (Perusini 1957: 144–146; Krasnovskaia 1977: 25). In Carnia, such pastries with Easter eggs are given to children. At the same time, the distribution of such pastries depends on the size and remoteness of the settlement – they are unheard of in small villages, whereas in large settlements they are associated with commercial bakery firms from the regions of Veneto and Lombardy. The Slovenes in the Natisone Valley are familiar with these pastries (Perusini 1957: 145). In our field data, the Slovene lexeme *golobíca* is found to be ubiquitous. It would be logical to expect the influence of the neighboring Romance languages here. In order to clarify this issue, additional research should be conducted by means of field study. It is noteworthy that in the Torre Valley dialect, as well

as in the materials of J. Baudouin de Courtenay, along with *galob* (Spinozzi Monai 2009: 529), the original lexeme for referring to the pigeon, there is also a Romance loan of *kolomba* (ibid.: 543), which could theoretically contribute to the penetration of borrowing in the dialects of Slovenes in Italy. In *Nediško-Italian Dictionary* (Špehonja 2010: 57), only the Slavic root for "pigeon" is attested: *golob*, *golobičica*, *golobica* – perhaps the stability of the Slavic name for the Easter pastry is due to the similarity of sounds in the Romance languages (cf. more in Trubachev 1979: 215–217).

BLESSING OF EASTER FOOD

The Easter items were put in a basket and carried to the church to be blessed. The basket of items blessed at Easter was called *žéynanca* (from Sl. *žegnati* 'to consecrate', 'to bless'), and the items blessed at Easter were also called *žegnanca* (Špehonja 2010: 319), a term sometimes used to denote bread baked at Easter. The word *cajna* used to refer to the basket in which the items were blessed is also attested (see also Špehonja 2010: 29), cf. It. *zaino* 'basket', 'bag'. Baked goods, bran, flour, and salt were put in the basket. Sometimes the cattle were given the leftovers of the blessed food that was meant for people. For example, a piece of bread blessed at Easter was given to a cow to facilitate the birthing of her calf. The basket was covered with a beautiful tablecloth (Sl. dial. *tavajúč*). In *Vocabolario Nediško-Italiano* (ibid.: 266) we find it as *tovajuč* with a mark that it is borrowed from Friulian. In the dictionary of J. Baudouin de Courtenay, we also find a reference to the Friulian origin (*tavajuz*) for the lexeme *tauajuč* in the Torre Valley dialect (Spinozzi Monai 2009: 603).

These interesting customs related to the Easter basket were recorded during our stay in the Natisone Valley in 2017. According to one of our informants from Mersino, for girls getting married, in the first year of marriage, the mother collects an Easter basket for her daughter, in which, in addition to festive food, a plate, a glass, a spoon, a fork, and a knife are placed. An elegant tablecloth is used to cover this arrangement. The tradition of preparing such a basket for a daughter is called "The Holy Spirit" (Sl. *sveti duh*). A prayer is read along with this, in which it is said, "May the Holy Spirit remain forever with you, in your house." This was done with the belief that it would ensure no shortage of any commodities in the house. The daughter uses this cutlery received as a gift in the household. At Easter, they eat food from this blessed Easter basket.

Our informants also mentioned games involving colored eggs being practiced at Easter. For example, a coin is thrown into an egg placed vertically such that the coin should get stuck in the egg. The person accomplishing this takes the

egg for him/herself. The shells of the blessed Easter eggs are placed around the house with the belief that they would prevent wild animals from entering.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the Easter customs of the Slovenes of the Natisone Valley and the vocabulary associated with them are examples of Slavic-Romance interaction in the border region of interest. Our fieldwork data significantly complements the ethnographic information and linguistic observations obtained from this part of the Slavic world, which is located on the border of cultures. In the Slovenian language of the Natisone Valley, there is a large number of Romance loanwords (in particular, the ones used to denote pastries as Easter culinary products). However, there might be a linguistic influence in the opposite direction as well. The example of the lexeme *gubana* in the Friulian language confirms this. Some phenomena resulting from the influence of Romance cultures are unheard of in the rest of the Slovenian territory (e.g., Easter pastries referred to using the same word as that for "pigeon"). In the future, the authors plan to use a detailed questionnaire to identify the features of Easter rites in other areas of the Slovenian-Italian border, which will differentiate the vocabulary and ritual practices depending on the region of residence of the Slovenes.

In conclusion, we present some transcribed recordings in the Natisone Valley dialect, which were obtained from informants describing Easter traditions. Slovenian texts are given with an English translation in a simplified orthography that is close to the standard Slovenian language. They facilitate the understanding of the features of the narrative structure, phonetic, lexical, and morphological phenomena, as well as the Romance influence and the impact of the standard Slovenian language. The narratives were recorded from informant I.T. in the village of Tercimonte in June 2018.

> *Za veliko nuoc je blo puno rečí, recimo. Allora, na velík pétak, kar za nas otroké velik petak, tist petak pred veliko nocjó, ne. Allora, tist teenčas ne zvonije, ja. Je blo vse povezano no malo z viero, zak judjé so bli zaries, so verval… Na velik petak se nije smielo zvonit, mi smo miel sablíuke, an klepetauke, no. Klepetauke so ble pa, je bla na daská, an je miela no ročico ta zdola, yo na vrh je blo no kladvo, an s tisten kladvan se je tuklo. Tole je blo na posebno zvičer, kar je bla Ave Marija.*
>
> There were a lot of things at Easter, let's say. On Good Friday, for us children, Good Friday, this is the Friday before Great Saturday. Then

they didn't ring the bells. Everything was connected with faith because people really had faith… On Good Friday, as it was not permitted to ring the bells, we had rattles. A rattle was a board with a handle at the bottom and a hammer at the top, and they knocked with this hammer, especially in the evening when Ave Maria was sung.

Potle je bla navada tud za kietne ulec, no, ylih tako na velik petak smo kietne wlekl, kietne, ma, verige po slovensko. Tiste ma kere kietne? Ankrat so ble oynišča, an tu oynišče je bla na kietna, ki je miela rinke buj debele, an na tu se je obieslo lonác al pa rinkón smo pravli. An seveda tale kietna je bla vsa ukajená, no, an za očediet jo je bla navada parpet tole kietno cje za konác varcé al pa cje štrink smo yworil mi, no, an wlačét. Tekrat ni blo cieste, ašfalta. So ble stazé s kokulát, so s kámanjan narette. An ta po telin kukulat, de se jo očedla tale kietna, an de se jo parnesló damú, da se je laščéla, no. Za velik petak. Zak za veliko nuoc so očedli vso hišo, an tisto je moralo bit čedno. Pero jas kar sam se rodiu jest, je blo malo oynišč, so ble ostale smo dvie oynišča. Pa ylih takuo, smo letál s telmi kietmi, je bla taka navada, da ylih takuo smo šli napriej s telmi kietmi, smo wlačél otroci.

Then there was the custom of dragging chains, and it was on Good Friday that we dragged chains, *veriga* in Slovenian. What kind of chains? Then there were hearths, and there was a chain in the hearth, it was thicker, and a boiler was hung on the chain, we said *rinkón*. And of course, this chain was completely blackened, and to clean it, the custom was to tie this chain by the end of the rope, we said *štrink*, and drag. Then there was no good asphalt road. There were paved roads made of stone. And they dragged along this paved road to clean this chain. And they brought it home and it was all shiny. As it was Good Friday, the whole house was cleaned at Easter, and everything had to be clean. But when I was born, there were few hearths, there were only two hearths left. And we ran with these chains, there was such a custom that we walked with these chains, we dragged them as children.

Na veliko sabotu, tu sabotu smo nešlí žeynjavat, žeynanco smo yworil, se je klicalo. Je blo vse, kar se je nesló požeynjavat. Ponavad je bluo ta obiejen kruh, je biu sladki kruh, an yolobíce, so nardíl otrokán, an vse pečenó. Potle salam se je dielo, no malo solí, an nič druzya se mi zdi.

On Holy Saturday, we carried a basket with products to be blessed, we said *žeγnanca*. There was everything that was carried to be blessed. Usually there was bread, richly oiled, there was sweet bread, and the pigeons were made with everything baked for the children. Then they added a sausage, a little salt, and nothing else, it seems to me.

Jajca so ble kuhane, s kajšnem listjem, o š čebulo. An tiste smo potle na veliko nuoc to nediejo zjutra ta parva rieč se j moralo pokust tiste. Pero je korlo čakat tekrat, je korlo počakat štier ure, korlo wstat pried, zak je moralo bit štier ure pried ku obhajilo. Maša je bla ob deset, zak smo morali wstat ob šest za an kwart, zak od šest an naprej se ne smielo nič take miet.

The eggs were boiled with some leaves or with onions. And then on Easter Sunday morning, the first thing you had to do was to eat them. But you had to wait for four hours, you had to get up in advance, because it was supposed to be done four hours before Communion. Mass was at ten, we had to get up at fifteen to six, because from six onwards we couldn't eat anything like that.

Ojčinca pravimo mi. Smo nosil ojko požeγnjavat, an potle je bla cieló lieto dol domá suha, an potle se je nije smielo mai vriec, ma nimar zažyat, ne. Se je zažyalo tu šporyetu. An tekrat je biw tu vsaki hiši an križ, an cje za križ dvie perá od ojke zmieran se j dielo, ne. Seveda so skuhal na veliko nuoc kiek bujšeya, nič posebneya... Za veliko nuoc je bla navada za tole, ta obiejen kruh, ki je bil sladki kruh, pečén domá, tele γolobíce. Pero za veliko nuoc … ma ne γubanca, γubanco pa je blo za svet Ivan, zak par nas na Tarčmune je bil praznik, je biw γod. Zak svet Ivan je sveceník od cierkve tarčmunske.

We say *ojčinca*. We took a bouquet with olive twigs to bless, and then it was kept dry at home all year, and it could not be thrown out, but always only burned. It was burned in a furnace. And there was a crucifix in every house, and two twigs from that bouquet were always placed behind it. Of course, something better for Easter was cooked, but nothing special... At Easter there was a custom, it was richly oiled bread, it was sweet bread baked at home, these pigeons. But, on Easter ... not *γubanca*, *γubanca* was on St. Ivan, because we had a holiday in Tercimonte, a temple holiday. Because St. Ivan is the patron saint of the church in Tercimonte.

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NOTES

[1] The authors express their gratitude to Dr K. Kenda-Jež for the opportunity to get acquainted with the archive materials of the Fran Ramovš Institute of the Slovenian Language (Ljubljana, Slovenia).

[2] The following abbreviations are used to denote the languages: It. – Italian; Sl. – standard Slovenian language; Sl. dial. – Slovenian dialect of the Natisone Valley.

[3] *Oljka* (Sl.) – an olive twig, blessed on this day. In Italy it is called the *day of olives* (It. *giorno delle ulive*) (Krasnovskaia 1977: 22).

[4] The same custom is also attested in Italy (Krasnovskaia 1977: 24).

[5] This refers to an object resembling a Christmas Nativity scene (cradle), only with an Easter theme: a scene with figures, in the center of which is the figure of the dead Christ.

[6] Cf. a quote from the article in the Natisone Valley dialect about Easter customs by the local press: '*Blizu tega je bla fujača al' obiejen kruh*, *ki so ga jedli na tešče*' ("Nearby was *fujača* or richly oiled bread that was eaten on an empty stomach") (see http://dom.it/na-solarjeh-delavnica-pirhu_laboratorio-per-imparare-a-fare-i-pirhi/ last accessed on 7 September 2022).

[7] Although in Baš (2004: 141) we find that *gibanica* is a festive dish.

[8] According to the data of the Etymological Dictionary of Slavic Languages (Trubachev 1980: 187), words derived from the verb **gъbati* designating various types of pastries exist in Bulgarian, Macedonian, Slovenian, and Ukrainian languages.

[9] Cf. the custom of baking whole eggs in Easter bread that is common among the Southern Slavs (Agapkina 2002: 149; Agapkina 2012: 421).

[10] The custom of decorating the Easter bread with figurines, flowers, and birds is known mainly among the Eastern Slavs (Ukrainians, Belarusians, and in the southern provinces of Russia) and Southern Slavs (Bulgarians, Serbs) (Agapkina 2012: 421). The festive pastry in the form of a pigeon is also found in other Slavonic regions, in particular in Ukraine, where on the day of the Forty Martyrs, birds are baked (Gura 1997: 615).

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Gleb Pilipenko, PhD, is Senior Researcher at the Department of Slavic Languages at the Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, Russia. His research interests are in the field of dialectology, sociolinguistics, language contact, minority languages in Central Europe, and mixed languages.

glebpilipenko@mail.ru

Maria Yasinskaya, PhD, is Researcher at the Department of Ethnolinguistics and Folklore at the Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, Russia. Her research interests are in the field of traditional culture, folklore, and Slavic ethnolinguistics.

marusiaya@gmail.com

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MEDIATED EASTER: CONSTRUCTING RELIGIOUS RITUALS IN A LOCKDOWN

Daria Radchenko
PhD, Senior Research Fellow
The Russian Presidential Academy of
National Economy and Public Administration, Russia
darradchenko@gmail.com

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic led to major lockdowns over the world in 2020. This situation severely limited the possibility of several social activities, including religious gatherings. In Russia, the peak of the pandemic coincided with the central period in the Orthodox calendar – the last week of Lent and Easter. As the Patriarch blessed stay-at-home politics, churches were officially closed for everybody but the clergy, and live streams of services on social media were organized; believers had to adapt swiftly to a new mode of copresence in church by participating in services online. To do this, they had to make a choice from the places from which the live stream was organized, transform the space of their homes to accommodate sacrality of the event, rethink the locality of their own body in being instantly at home and "in church", and manage communication with the priest, fellow parishioners, and family members during Easter night. This involved subtle mechanisms of balancing authority within the network of sacred objects, gadgets, and people. Based on digital ethnography (including participant observation online) and 40 in-depth interviews, the paper investigates how believers constructed and reflected the space of the Easter service in their homes, and presents three key strategies: synchronization, spacing, and appellation to experience.

Keywords: copresence, COVID-19, Easter, kinesthetics, media, mediatization, religion, ritual, sacred space, service

INTRODUCTION

I switched the TV on. Dressed up, complete with my headscarf. My daughters were with me. My husband, although he is not a believer, was also with us. Then after the church service, we sang, "Christ is risen" with my older daughter. Easter came to our house.[1]

This text was posted on Instagram by a woman from Russia on April 20, 2020, the day after the Orthodox Easter celebration during COVID-19 lockdown, when many Orthodox believers faced the reality of celebrating the main Christian feast away from their parishes, watching the night service online or on television.

The lockdown in most cities of Russia in the spring of 2020 was a serious challenge for the church. The prohibition to attend church services during Lent and especially Easter was met with severe criticism, and believers hoped that at least they would be allowed to attend the Easter service. However, on April 15, the lockdown regime was strengthened, and only certain groups of professionals were allowed to travel around the city, the clergy among them. Unprecedentedly, the night Easter service was to be carried out in empty churches, with only members of the clergy and people working there being allowed to allowed to go inside. The rest of believers had to contend with synchronous broadcasts of church services, which used to be provided from a few churches, cathedrals or monasteries even before the COVID-19 pandemic (mostly on Russian Orthodox TV channels) but became a more popular digital product in the spring of 2020, several weeks before Easter, during Lent and the Passion Week. Depending on the resources of particular parishes, these could be professional TV broadcasts or live streams on social media performed from someone's smartphone placed on a tripod in front of the altar. By mid-April, a significant part of believers found themselves in a situation of mediatized participation in religious rituals.

The word "participation" seems paradoxical in this context. However, this is precisely the word used by both the clergy and believers who were physically separated during the lockdown. As the former performed the service in empty churches and the latter watched the ritual in their homes, both framed this situation as participation and cooperation. In this paper, I will focus on the practices which made the "augmented reality" (Berger 2020) of the distributed church service possible. The "COVID Easter" is not just a way to look at ritual practices of a particular Christian denomination, but rather a convenient case to analyze how copresence and engagement are constructed in a mediatized environment.

Religious practices in digital spaces have been studied for decades. Starting from Christopher Helland's seminal work (2000), research in this field has focused on two types of integrating the digital into religion (and vice versa): "religion online" (online resources with information on religion) and "online religion" (practices of performing religion online). Helland examined primarily the second one, studying online religious practices through the lens of "lived religion" approach (Helland 2005), with a focus on non-institutional web platforms where they are performed. For him, online religion is constituted horizontally through non-hierarchical engagement of believers, and to a certain extent it is

an opposition to official churches, which use the Internet primarily to spread information and perform missionary work rather than rituals online.

The first researches into online religious performances were almost exclusively based on the material of English-speaking protestant Christian communities or New Age / neo-pagan groups. However, soon the researchers noticed that online religion could also be practiced within the more traditional religious denomination. The works by Heidi Campbell published since the early 2000s (Campbell 2004, 2005a, 2005b, etc.) discuss the notion of networked religion based on an online community of people who construct their identity on the grounds of participating in religious practices developed in multisite spaces, online and offline at the same time. Along with these studies, researchers discuss traditional religious offline practices as ways of constructing virtual realities. "Virtual" in this sense is not a synonym of "offline", but rather an opposite to everyday experience. Religious practices are seen as non-temporal or non-historical (e.g., the Eucharist is not a re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice or commemorative practice, but takes place here-and-now each time it is performed), and involve immaterial subjects (e.g., there is a common belief in Orthodox Christianity that angels are present at the liturgy unseen). For example, Stephen O'Leary suggests considering Catholic Mass as a mechanism of producing virtual reality, "a reality supported by a panoply of sensory impressions but created wholly through language and symbolism" (O'Leary 1996: 800). If we look at the online practices from this perspective – as situations in which objects are created with the help of a certain symbolic code – they cease to be something principally new and become an organic part of religious tradition.

Following Henry Jenkins's influential concept of participatory culture, researchers define online religion as a set of practices performed by a community for the same community. For over a decade, online religion was perceived as a product of purely horizontal interaction inside communities, putting a rigid border between vernacular online practices with their focus on belonging and the hierarchical models of "official" churches, "participatory religion" with active parishioners and "vicar religion" in which believers are focused and dependent on the clergy rather than being active and focused on the community, follow the prescribed ritual rather than construct it (Davie 2007; Lundby 2011).

Putting this position to a question, I will discuss how individual practices merge and interact with officially sanctioned ones in the mediatized ritual to form a common sacral space within the context of a traditionally "vicar" Christian denomination – Russian Orthodox Church. It will be essential to define how people construct their communication, their copresence and participation in a situation of a distanced church service. I will rely here on John Urry's concept of copresence in virtual practices: both distanced and near, present and

elusive, weird and strange (Urry 2002: 255). To define the notion of space, I will follow Doreen Massey who sees it as a product of relations between people and objects, always in the process of construction (Massey 2005).

In this paper I will show how, in the situation of forced isolation, people construct their copresence and participation in the ritual, bridging physical and virtual spaces with discursive and bodily practices and forming translocal social entanglements in the "embodied space" (Low 2003: 10), where experience and consciousness assume material form, with the help of technology. In this sense virtual and physical are not opposites: "If actors are in presence of objects and living beings to which they can take a position, which they can manipulate and which they synthesize through perception, feelings and thoughts, a space is constituted for them" (Berger 2020: 606).

TALKING RELIGION ON ZOOM: RESEARCH DURING LOCKDOWN

This research was initiated accidentally and as an autoethnography. Being an Orthodox Christian, I was involved in online religious practices during COVID-19 lockdown in spring 2020 and started a field diary with descriptions of live streams, my own practices and feelings – and also carried out a social media listening project on the topic.

Then a series of semi-structured interviews were undertaken. Three weeks after Orthodox Easter, I published a post on Facebook aimed at recruiting research participants and got a surprisingly high number of replies coming both from my immediate contacts and from reposts made by my friends. The timing of recruitment turned out to be very productive: the remembrance of Easter online was still relatively fresh, but people had already had a chance to participate in a few more online services and reflect on their experience. The churches were still closed for lockdown, so the emotions were still very intense, and people were eager to share their feelings and thoughts. Many of the research participants felt quite isolated – both due to lockdown and inability to find a person within an immediate social circle to discuss religious problems – so speaking with me as not just a researcher but also a fellow Christian became a part of their coping with the situation; in many cases the resulting interviews turned out to be very open and emotional (see also Urbanovich 2015 for an account of a similar experience).

In total, I conducted interviews with 40 people. The convenient sampling organized through Facebook led to certain biases though I aimed to achieve as varied a group of research participants as possible. First, the majority (33

out of 40) were women: this is a result of both myself being a female (and the resulting deviation in my contact list), and of the fact that females form the majority in most Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) parishes in Russia. 25 of the research participants lived in Moscow (also a result of the social structure of Facebook and my own contact list), and the others lived in Moscow region, Saint-Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Kazan, Nizhniy Novgorod, Sochi, Tver, and four participants were Russian-speaking people with post-Soviet background living temporarily or permanently in the EU countries. All of them have a university degree; some are social researchers or practicing psychologists and are deeply involved in digital practices. This means that the results of the paper are valid primarily for the well-educated and (at least relatively) well-off believers, mostly from big cities (or living out of the cities as a lifestyle choice rather than as a confinement), whose digital involvement is not limited by lack of digital literacy, fear of technology or infrastructural deficit.

My research focused on the practices of Russian Orthodox Christians who formed the majority of the sample (35 people). However, I also conducted a few interviews with Catholic and Protestant believers, both to have some comparative material and to help myself to estrange from my own religious field (Levkievskaia 2015). Although I did not plan it, the Orthodox research participants also proved to be from very different religious communities, currents, and positions: from conservative to liberal and ecumenist, from people routinely involved in collective religious practices online to people strongly opposing any digitalization in religion.

All the interviews were conducted through different media (video calls on Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Zoom, Skype; in just one case it was a telephone call without video connection). I used desktop versions of the abovementioned to ensure stable connection, good quality of audio recording and also to be able to see the facial expressions and emotions of the research participants. They, in their turn, could engage in the interview on computer or on mobile phone, but even being on the move during the interview, they tended to switch on the video if their Internet connection allowed them to do so. Distanced interviews allowed me to get almost simultaneous reflections of people living in different cities (the majority of interviews took place within only 10 days), which was very important in the unstable and uncertain situation of the pandemic. Of course, discussing sensitive questions in this way was a challenge: technical problems and low sound quality were disrupting the talk and its confidential feeling; in some cases, we had to abandon video in order to maintain the web connection and this emasculated the non-verbal communication. Still, distanced interviews provided a certain feel of safety for the interviewees and helped them to be open with a total stranger (see, e.g., Croes et al. 2016;

Howlett 2022 for similar experience). Video connection, in its turn, allowed both me and my research participants to look inside each other's privacy. Looking at the bookshelves behind my back, they got a verification of my professional belonging (as they confessed); for me, in my turn, it was important to see the spaces where they celebrated Easter online.

APOSTASY OR OBEDIENCE?

Inaccessibility of church services on Holy Week, Easter, and Easter week (the Week of the Renewal) proved to be traumatic for many believers. Some of them decided not to attend services regardless of the lockdown because of the risks to themselves, their family and other parishioners. This rational decision made the situation more bearable, though hard for them.

Still, most of the research participants did not consider the pandemic risks significant, and for them non-attendance at services was an involuntary decision taken under fear of being stopped by the police and fined for the violation of the lockdown regime. This category of believers typically reported a feeling that they had failed an important "loyalty exam". For Christians and Russian Orthodox believers in particular, the idea of profession of the faith up to the level of martyrdom is an important part of their identity and aspirations as believers. In post-Soviet countries, this idea is strengthened by frequent exploitation in the religious discourse of the image of the new martyrs who stood for the faith during anti-religious persecutions in the Soviet period. The closing of churches reminded many believers of this period, and they felt they had to behave similar to the people who attended church services despite hardships and fear of oppression and even death. It is not surprising, then, that they commonly spoke of a feeling of apostasy and betrayal.

The opportunity to participate in the mediatized ritual was also perceived ambivalently. Though many people used this opportunity, they spoke of this experience in terms of alienation and imitation. This was not an effect of the media per se, because in most cases digital platforms were not even mentioned (however, few people noticed that it was embarrassing to watch a religious service on YouTube – a platform associated with light-minded videos with cats and makeup tutorials). This sense of alienation, the weirdness and loss stemmed from other reasons.

The first of them seems to be the lack of previous experience of watching live streams of services. Research participants often told me that their older family members used to watch the Easter service broadcasted from the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow led by the Patriarch, but they rather avoided

this before lockdown even if they could not manage to attend the service (for example, mothers of small children frequently have to abandon the night service because they have no one to look after the child while they are absent from home and cannot take the infant with them because the Easter service ends hours after midnight). Being asked about the reasons of this avoidance, they mostly mentioned the commentary behind the screen accompanying this live stream, aimed to inform viewers of the scenario of the Easter service, its symbolic system, and the overall meaning of this festivity. This commentary was perceived as a nuisance and an obstacle, turning the religious practice into a lay spectacle and interfering with the sound of the service; some compared it with a football match commentary. The image of the service was also disturbing for many: the demand of spectacularity leads to constant changes of different camera positions and angles, which is also associated rather with a TV show or a movie than with a religious ritual. Since the broadcast from the Christ the Savior Cathedral kept a monopoly for the Easter service on TV for years (other broadcasts were rare, marginal, and not widely known), this format became the key association with religious broadcasts and prevented many believers from even trying to watch one.

Still, many of the research participants had some previous experience of consuming mediatized religious content: they commonly listened to sermons or *akathisti* (religious hymns of particular form) on the Internet, on the radio or TV. Some used to watch the broadcast of the Descent of Holy Fire in Jerusalem. Finally, some of them started to watch live streams of services during lockdown before Easter and developed certain patterns of interaction with this new format. This group of "experienced audience" was generally less frustrated by the lack of instructions on how to behave during a service broadcast than those who had never had this experience before Easter 2020.

The second reason is based on bodily practices. It is important here to notice that in Russian Orthodoxy the patterns of behavior during religious rituals (including one's clothing, gestures, body position, speech acts) are quite rigid and traditional. Moreover, this formal and visible side of practicing religion is crucial for a person to be identified as a member of the ROC community by oneself and by others. For example, it is considered a particular virtue to be able to stand still without moving during the service lasting sometimes for several hours – "stand like a candle in front of the icon"; making the cross gesture in the wrong way or at an improper time during the service may result in a reproach from a person standing near you, etc. This means that instructions on bodily practices sanctioned by the church hierarchy are not just welcome but vital for any new religious practices.

However, these instructions for participating in the liturgy online started to appear only weeks after Easter – and even then, in the form of private opinions of priests rather than official regulations. As a result, my research participants had to improvise during the main service of the ritual cycle, reinventing the ritual for themselves. This had a twofold effect. Some perceived it as a challenge strengthening the feeling of uneasiness and alienation. Others felt it as a long-awaited opportunity to increase one's agency within the Church. Further, I will investigate the models and mechanisms of ritual reassembling during the mediatized service.

PRIVATE SPACE AND MATERIALITY OF RITUALS

Both in social media texts and in the interviews about Easter online, one frequently notices a phenomenon of crossing the border between home and inaccessible churches with the help of a speech mechanism that I shall call here "discursive transgression". Fully aware that they spent the Easter night at home, people framed their experience as movement to and presence at not just an abstract "service", but a specific physical space. To list just a few examples, they could say, "I went to (a particular) church", "my place is in my church", "you are not supposed to go to church in your pajamas" (a person said this to explain why he changed his clothes before the broadcast of the service started), etc. We see that the border between the two spaces disappears in the virtual space of broadcast, and a viewer becomes (as many of the interviewees stated) a participant in the ritual. In the next paragraph, I will investigate what helps this transgression and what blocks it.

The key problem of participation was the lack of possibility to receive the Sacraments during the service. This practice is the core of the Christian community, physically linking the faithful to Christ and to each other, forming the material church as Christ's earthly body. Along with minor bodily practices like kissing icons, the cross or Gospel Book, personal bodily contact with other people, such as getting a blessing from the priest (in which a parishioner kisses the priest's hand and the priest simultaneously touches the person's head), and participation in the Eucharist accentuates the importance of material communication and copresence in the ritual. Inaccessibility of these practices during lockdown leads to a sensation of deprivation and loss (Suslov 2021). It is important to mention that for many the possibility to receive the Sacraments might be purely theoretical but still important. For example, Anna[2] (60+ y.o., a retired woman from Moscow) told me that before the COVID-19 pandemic she sometimes used to sit in the churchyard and listen to the service through

a loudspeaker rather than stay inside, but she felt that she still had the possibility to enter and take the Sacraments if she wished to do so, and this potential kept her feeling her participation in the ritual.

In the situation of the lack of a key element of the service, other things became focal in maintaining copresence. The most important element was the unity in time: the believers wanted to follow a unique liturgy taking place synchronously, now – if not "here and now", – a broadcast rather than a record. As Maria (60+ y.o., a psychologist from Saint Petersburg) put it, if the prayer takes place simultaneously in churches and in believers' homes, it is a form of a synodic prayer (which differs considerably in essence and effect from the individual one). Another person I talked with, Rina (35+ y.o., a housewife from Moscow), even said that if she watched the record of the night Easter service next morning, she would perceive it as totally another (morning) liturgy.[3]

Another key factor was a smooth online connection without ruptures. When being present in a church physically, people tend to change places, divert their attention from the prayer to speak to someone, light a candle, or even take a pause and go out of the church. Still, they feel that they are inside the ritual space. In the situation of an online live stream, any pauses (technical ruptures or purposeful disconnections) were perceived as being forcefully "thrown out" of this sacral space and estranged.[4] In some parishes, live streams were put on pause during the Cross Procession or giving communion to the faithful in order to hide the illegal presence of laymen in the service. Understanding this, the viewers often felt maximal frustration and guilt because they did not make an effort to participate physically in the service at risk of being sanctioned or persecuted, while others did so.

The viewpoint of the broadcasting camera also proved to be important for maintaining copresence. For example, the camera could be positioned to mimic the point of view of a believer during the service: located at eye level with a straightforward view of the iconostasis and the altar. As the research participants used to define it, this viewpoint was perceived as an invitation to participate (and being lucky enough to stay in the first row with no one in front closing the view – which is not a frequent opportunity during the crowded festive services). As Andrey (40+ y.o., a manager from Moscow) put it, "it was as if someone took my eye and put it in the church".

A different effect was produced in more professional broadcasts with several cameras showing different views: the service in front of the iconostasis; the choir; candles somewhere in the back of the church; the ritual inside the altar part of the church (normally invisible for the ROC laymen); a view of the church from above; etc. In most cases, people perceived this as a spectacle, with a feeling preventing them from immersion into the ritual space, while others saw it as

a way to promote an idea of the uncommonness of what was taking place. For example, Marina (35+ y.o., a teacher from Saint Petersburg) told me that she perceived a possibility to look inside the altar as a truly Easter phenomenon: "the doors are open, and we are invited inside"; on the other hand, for Svetlana (40+ y.o., a literary worker from Tver region) the same seemed unnatural, because as a female she was not normally supposed to enter the altar space, so her mediated "presence" there seemed to her as a violation of the normal practice and rules. Thus, camera operators and directors of the broadcasts became important actors in the Easter service. Heidi Campbell and Oren Golan have noted that "new authority roles such as the webmaster, moderators or forum managers who govern behavior online serve as gatekeepers, allowing or denying access to the community and setting standards of accepted practice" (Campbell & Golan 2011: 717). In my case, the people producing the live streams became these gatekeepers, allowing (or not) the viewers to participate in the ritual throughout the service. Actually, the participation was only possible when the gatekeepers' actions were either invisible or corresponded to the regular scenario of the service.

The possibility to adapt the space to the needs of the body or, vice versa, the necessity to adapt oneself to the space turned out to be another feature that defined copresence. My interviewees frequently told me that it was more comfortable to stay at home on Easter than go to church: one could sit on a soft sofa (normally the ROC members stand throughout the service, even if it lasts for hours), take a cup of tea or coffee, have unlimited access to the toilet, etc.; all these features are more or less inaccessible in the majority of ROC churches. One's home is a territory of comfort where one can follow one's bodily needs rather than prescriptions. Still, this comfort destroys the sensation of copresence. As many people related, it was often hard to stand during the hours offline service and experience pains in the legs or back, sultry air, people pushing their way through the crowd or talking and distracting from prayer. But exactly this uncomforting experience denominated the physical presence in the church, the need to discipline one's body in the ritual space and, hence, to be involved in the ritual.

This sensation is not limited to the idea that asceticism and bodily deprivation are essential to progress in faith (though, of course, they are strongly connected with it). Research participants frequently referred to a whole complex of bodily sensations, which they found to be characteristic of being present in church but were unattainable at home. First, these were kinesthetic sensations: the feeling of the location of one's body in space in relation to material objects and other people's bodies. During festive services, a church is often crowded, and people stand elbow to elbow (on the importance of touch as constitutive

element of reality see Ratcliffe 2013) and have to control their movements in order not to push someone while making the sign of the cross, not to set the hair or headdress of a person in front on fire with the candle they are holding, and to avoid bowing to icons or being dangerously close to a candlestand. Other types of sensations that were mentioned were sounds of people moving and whispering or children crying; olfactory sensations of burning incense and candles; the smell of people; stuffiness; and a sensation of people breathing – hard to describe but nevertheless very frequent in interviews. All these sensations form a feeling of copresence in a thick space full of information, which is essential for sociality (Boden & Molotch 1994). Donnalee Dox has stated, "As quarantine disrupted visible body-to-body religious gatherings, it also disrupted the ways those gatherings bind people's bodies – eyes, mouth, skin, nose, ears, and organs – to a shared sense of transcendence" (Dox 2020: 6).

Interestingly, copresence was sometimes ruined not only by the lack of physical closeness but also by the lack of physical distance between the sacral/public and profane/private. Nikolay (30+ y.o., a researcher from Moscow) said that after the service he and his wife decided to go out to restore the feeling of participation by sensing the movement of air and seeing a "real church". Irina (30+ y.o., a media manager from Moscow) followed this thesis by saying that she lacked the need to "stand up and go out", make an effort, and walk a certain distance to the church.

People make special efforts to close performatively this gap through precisely keeping to ritual regulations on gestures, singing, and exclamations. In other words, they follow the customary practices to disconnect from the space of their homes and connect to the ritual space of the church. As Elena (30+ y.o., a researcher from Moscow) put it, it is important to behave during the service in the same manner as in church, for example, to stand or kneel when needed, because this is an act of transforming the space around. Some of the interviewees selected specific practices from the ritual vocabulary without following the Typicon literally; for example, they sat down during watching the live stream of the service and only stood up in particularly important moments, watched it standing on their knees; sat still through the service but made the sign of the cross and bowed where appropriate (as they often said, reflexively). Dina (25+ y.o., an IT schoolteacher from Moscow) said that she decided to take the occasion and sit through the service to focus on the rituals rather than her aching legs, but for ascetic purposes, she selected a hard stool instead of a soft chair.

Some people even tried to reenact some activities that do not suit the space of a house – a cross procession among them. Such processions are performed before the beginning of the night Easter service: all present, led by the clergy carrying icons and crosses, exit the church and go around it in a candle proces-

sion with festive chants and prayers before entering the church again for the service proper. For example, Yana (20+, a speech pathologist from Moscow) said: "I made a cross procession with a candle around the flat, because the live stream was not taken out for the procession, they left the camera in front of the iconostasis". This practice was more frequent for larger families with children but not limited to them. Some people only switched on the broadcast after they had performed the improvised cross procession.

In the meanwhile, some of the interviewees noticed that participating in the ritual online allows one to behave and express one's religious feelings more freely than in church without risking being reproached or frowned upon by the people around them. For example, some of them felt the urge to kneel or raise their hands at certain moments (which is not a common ritual gesture in ROC). Others said they could finally allow themselves to sing the chants loudly, while normally they would avoid it so as not to mess with the sound of the choir. In other words, online participation led to the growth of one's agency to develop one's own practices of prayer (Dubovka 2020: 16).

Many people (especially women) were very attentive to their choice of clothing and overall preparation of their body for the service. During the twentieth century, ROC developed a specific vernacular standard of dressing for the church for females, which includes a compulsory long skirt covering the knees and a head scarf (or other object to cover one's hair) and implies overall modesty: covered body parts, lack of decoration, and specific colors (currently, the tradition of dressing in dark colors is eroding and an unspoken custom to dress in the colors of the festivity – e.g., red for Easter – is becoming more popular). This standard deviates significantly from everyday wear and requires that a woman prepares herself for a church service specifically, and this makes routine visits to church unrealistic – one cannot pop in on one's way wearing jeans – so the sacral space of the church becomes alienated from the profane daily life. This form of clothing is also quite welcome for private prayer, but in this case, it is followed by few women. In the situation of a mediated ritual, many of the interviewees felt lost: they found themselves in a hybrid space of "church at home", which made both possible variants – dressing for the church or staying in home clothing – not quite appropriate. As a result, they sought for some balance between their "everyday body" and "ritual body": for example, they put on the skirt but not the headwear (or vice versa), put on "decent" home clothes instead of comfortable pajamas, put on makeup or not. For example, one of my Catholic interview participants, Svetlana (25+ y.o., a researcher from Belarus), said that she put on a smart dress appropriate for a festive occasion but skipped makeup, though she normally applies it when preparing for a church service. Svetlana, like many other women facing this difficult choice, spent the Easter

night and the service alone, without anyone seeing them – so these preparations were not aimed to gain praise from family members or friends.

The spaces of homes were also prepared to incorporate the mediated sacral space of the ritual. Cleaning or replacing objects, including changing their function from profane into ritual, literally created a space of (and for) prayer. Some of the research participants paid more attention to Easter house cleaning than usual (and were particularly precise about the tidiness of the room where they planned to watch the service) because, as they said, the liturgy was to take place in their house. As we have seen above in the case of the ritual wear, the one-way connection between the house and the church was often perceived as mutual. Though obviously no one in the church could see what happened in the homes of believers, they often said that it was important to maintain tidiness, at least in the frame of the gadget camera.[5] They also created a particular atmosphere by turning off the lights and lighting candles, putting icons on the tables and window stills, in other words, by focusing on sacral objects and "switching off" the profane ones to concentrate on what was going on on the screen rather than around them.

RITUAL ON SCREEN

Another important challenge was locating the gadget with the broadcast in relation to other objects and the bodies of people. In the interviews, three different strategies appeared. The first was locating the gadget close to the icon corner or even in it – in other words, to physically mix material icons with the virtual image of the church. This approach placed the participation in a mediated ritual into the customary frame of a daily private prayer. On the one hand, this was convenient because a person did not have to invent his or her prayer space: it was already prepared and helped to focus on the ritual. On the other hand, however, it was not associated with (and even contradicted) the communal church prayer. The second strategy was to locate the gadget away from the icons. This often happened with larger and less mobile screens (a TV or a PC), which turned out to be mostly located in the corner opposite the icons as ultimately profane objects.[6] People characterized this as a weird experience: they had either to turn their back to their icons during prayer or, addressing the latter, to miss the visual side of the broadcast, limiting the experience to sound. It appeared (and my interviewees confirmed) that material icons have a higher sacral status than their image on screen, though normally a church icon has a higher status than a home one. The third strategy was to place a material icon on the gadget, leaning it against the screen. In a certain way, the icon made the space deeper, more tactile and "real", connecting the home with the church.

Importantly, many people used more than just one gadget during the broadcast. The problem of the first screen and the second screen has been well investigated in football studies: the second screen during broadcasts is often used to browse for additional information on the web, communicate with other fans, or participate in interactive games and gambling (Pfeffel et al. 2016). The situation with online rituals appeared to be similar.

The main (first) screen used to host the live stream of the service was perceived as an icon of the church and treated with corresponding respect during Easter night: it was placed among icons with a candle in front of it and was rarely moved during the service. Other digital applications were turned off so as not to interfere with the service. The second screen (most often, a smartphone) was used as an online prayer book and as a means to communicate with other members of the "virtual parish" during technical ruptures to ensure that they were not alone with the problem. Sometimes another live stream from a different church was switched on on the second screen (constantly or from time to time, to compensate for the ruptures in the original broadcast). For example, Evgenia (30+ y.o., an advertising professional from Moscow) said that during Lent she used to watch broadcasts of services not from her own parish, where live streams were not performed, but from a different church, and developed a strong emotional connection and sense of belonging to the latter (even though she had never been there physically). On Easter night, her parish announced a live stream, which Evgenia was very glad to hear, but she felt a need and a moral obligation to connect to her new virtual parish as well. As a result, the main screen hosted the service conducted at the "native" church, and the second screen showed the broadcast from the new parish.

The second screen was also used to develop a certain virtual community of people participating in the same service distantly and recreate the feeling of belonging (Lundby 2011). Zoya (20+ y.o., a student from Moscow) said that she spent Easter night with her parents, but her grandmother had to stay away from them at her home. Nevertheless, they all watched the service conducted in the same cathedral. Both Zoya's family and her grandmother used their TV sets to watch the service and connected with each other through a WhatsApp video call on their smartphones, so they could feel that they were visually together and could discuss what they saw in parallel to the service. This was a popular strategy: connecting with relatives and friends could be constant or temporary, with different practices performed through the second screen – from text greetings to prolonged video calls. For example, Yana took her second screen with the video call to the improvised cross procession around her flat, and then they performed the traditional Easter egg tapping "through" the screen. Nina (50+ y.o., a researcher from Yekaterinburg) said that they offered her teenage

son's girlfriend to take her to the night service with them, but could not do it due to the lockdown. So, they called her on WhatsApp and watched the service broadcast on the same first screen together despite the distance.

At the same time, maintaining the connection with the parish and particularly the priest was a problem for many due to a lack of feedback from the live stream. Obviously, the clergy could not see or hear their distributed congregation, and did not have the possibility to read comments during the live stream and react to them (which is an important and already customary and expected feature for YouTubers). However, both the clergy and the faithful made certain steps to transgress the distance and the border visualized by the screen. As Lucy Osler states, "even though online sociality is often depicted as disembodied communication … our lived bodies can and do enter online space … we have direct empathetic access to others and their experiences even when their bodies are technologically-mediated" (Osler 2021: 3).

It was very important for believers to see the emotions of the clergy and feel their own involvement and participation in the ritual, to gain the sensation that they feel the same as those who are physically present at the church. Because of that, many people sang the chants along with the choir and answered the ritual statements of the priest, even if they were alone in their homes or felt uneasy addressing this to the screen. As Dina told me, when the priest exclaimed, "Christ is risen", she always answered aloud, "Indeed He is risen!"[7] not because she believed the priest could magically hear her, but because she knew that the priests would expect the distant believers to keep the ritual. For her, the answers maintained the shared ritual space and copresence at the liturgy. As Lyubov (40+ y.o., a psychologist from Moscow region) mentioned, she had a feeling that "her home absorbed into the church along with the thousands of other homes". Some research participants also referred to the concept of the unity of Christians in the Holy Spirit, acting above distances and borders, and their exclamations were a part of this unity.

CONCLUSION

The mediated Easter service produced a complex system of communication and co-action between the actors of the religious ritual. The first screen allowed the believers to interact with the priest in the church, at the same time involving one's home icons in the church service. The second screen enabled people to expand ritual communication to involve one's friends and relatives, other viewers of the same service, and even other communities and locations, constructing an individual ritual network. This description only partially complies with the

idea of "online religion": rather than being more or less stable "virtual communities" or "virtual parishes", these networks were temporary and fluid translocal constructs. Rather than being "ad hoc publics" in the strict sense (Bodrunova & Smoliarova & Blekanov 2017), they were complicated entanglements of human and non-human actors, all fulfilling active roles in this communication between people and the transcendent.

To ensure one's copresence and agency in a distant service, believers used various strategies (or combinations) of engagement with time, space, and their own senses and bodies. The first was synchronization: watching simultaneous broadcasts or live streams of the service, acting ritually together with the priest and people in the church, communicating with other people involved in the same service. The second was the strategy of spacing (Löw 2016 [2000]). By constructing relations between the material objects of one's private space (icons, gadgets, and furniture), one's body, regimes of lighting, etc., people transformed the space around them to enable connection between home and church without trying to actually transform the first into the second. Paradoxically, the loss of physical experience in virtual communication made people focus on the role of bodily practices in religious life. Finally, the third strategy was the appeal to the customary: people tried to find grounds in their normal experience, like watching the live stream from their church, reenacted traditional practices and found analogies between deprivations of the mediated ritual and more customary hardships of being physically present at the church. The possibility of empowerment and growth of individual agency during the distant service, away from the eyes of others, often appeared unwelcome and fearsome.

Many of the people whom I interviewed described this experience of the Easter broadcast in the situation of lockdown as something new and productive for their religious life, something that helped to re-estimate certain aspects of the ritual and to return to the original meaning of Easter. However, almost nobody continued to watch live streams of services after Easter on a regular basis. Even on Easter week, they often tried to "repair" the experience by coming to churches and meeting friends despite all lockdown restrictions; the physical copresence and contact with material sacred space turned out to be crucial for the authentic religious experience.

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NOTES

[1] Available at http://instagram.com/p/B_MmnkspApF/#17890910959505837, last accessed on 16 September 2022.

[2] Hereinafter the names of research participants were changed to maintain anonymity.

[3] It is a frequent practice in many ROC churches to serve two Easter liturgies: the main one at night, and another the next morning so that children and the elderly who cannot stay up at night could participate.

[4] For example, in a research on watching a football match broadcast, it was found that even a one- or two-second delay is perceived as significant unsynchronization (Mekuria & Cesar & Bulterman 2012).

[5] It might be important that during the lockdown, most of my interviewees worked online, and before Easter they had already had significant experience of participating in Zoom meetings and the like, during which they maintained a certain "business look" for the camera.

[6] In many families in Russia (especially in rural settlements), TV is often placed in the sacral corner with the icons above or even on it; my interviewees turned out to have a very different attitude towards both profane and sacred things.

[7] A ritual exchange of exclamations at the Easter service in ROC and a believers' greeting until Ascension.

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Daria Radchenko, PhD, is Senior Research Fellow at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration. Her fields of interest are digital anthropology, urban studies, and Internet folklore.

darradchenko@gmail.com

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PILGRIMAGES IN TIMES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN ROMANIA

Irina Stahl
MA, MS, Senior Researcher
Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy
Associate Lecturer in European Ethnology
University of Bucharest, Romania
irinastahl@yahoo.fr

Abstract: In 2020, religious celebrations in Romania were greatly affected by restrictions meant to control the COVID-19 pandemic. Easter, the highlight of the Orthodox Christian ritual year, was celebrated in empty churches during the spring lockdown. Participation in religious activities was later progressively permitted. During autumn, pilgrimages were allowed, but only in compliance with strict regulations. This article focuses on the restrictions imposed by public authorities, the solutions found by church representatives, and the faithful's reaction to the new situation. The Orthodox liturgical year begins in Romania on the 1st of September, marked by a series of pilgrimages, occasioned by feasts for several saints whose relics are venerated in local churches. Some of them, centuries old, attract thousands of people. The celebrations last several days, during which people wait patiently, for hours, to touch the holy relics. In 2020, governmental measures limited participation to local residents, without previous consultation with the church authorities. This caused great discontent. Still, the number of pilgrims was not substantially less than in previous years, in large part due to the direct negotiations between the faithful and the local law forces.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Orthodox liturgical year, Orthodox pilgrimage, relics, religion, Saint Demetrius, Saint Nektarios, Saint Paraskeva

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the Orthodox liturgical year (1st of September) is marked in Romania by a series of pilgrimages, occasioned by the feasts of several saints whose relics are preserved and venerated in local churches. The oldest and largest pilgrimage takes place in Iaşi and is dedicated to Saint Paraskeva (Rom. *Sfânta Cuvioasa Parascheva de la Iaşi*[1]), celebrated on the 14th of October. The

saint, venerated throughout the Balkans, is a tenth-century saint, originating from Thrace.[2] Her relics arrived in Iaşi, the capital of the historical Romanian province of Moldavia, in 1641. Since then, she has been the protector of the province.

This annual pilgrimage is followed, less than two weeks later, by another one, in Bucharest, dedicated to Saint Demetrius the New (Rom. *Sfântul Cuvios Dimitrie cel Nou*). Celebrated on the 27th of October, Saint Demetrius the New is a thirteenth-century saint, whose relics were brought from across the Danube, in Bulgaria, in 1774. The saint is the protector of Bucharest, capital city of Romania.

These two major historical pilgrimages are followed by a relatively new one, occasioned by the celebration of Saint Nektarios of Aegina (Rom. *Sfântul Ierarh Nectarie de la Eghina*), on the 9th of November. Saint Nektarios is a recent Greek saint, canonized in 1961. In 2002, a piece of his relics was brought to Bucharest, starting one of the fastest growing cults in Romania since the fall of communism. While both Paraskeva's and Demetrius' relics contain most body parts, the relic of Saint Nektarios consists of only a small piece of bone. The size of the relics, however, seems to have no influence on pilgrims' veneration.

Before the end of the calendric year, two more pilgrimages take place in Bucharest: one is dedicated to Saint Menas (Rom. *Sfântul Mare Mucenic Mina*, the 11th of November), and the other to Saint Nicholas (Rom. *Sfântul Ierarh Nicolae*, the 6th of December).

In 2020, the exceptional measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic had a heavy impact on the liturgical year. The restrictions varied. The most restraining and sudden ones were enforced during lockdown, in early spring, when people were not allowed to celebrate Easter in church. By autumn, restrictions were considerably relaxed, but still had an impact on the annual pilgrimages. This article describes the changes that occurred in the local pilgrimages during the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania. A particular focus will be given to restrictions imposed by state and local authorities, the response of religious authorities as well as the public reaction to the newly created situation. Although all pilgrimages marking the beginning of the liturgical year are interesting, having their own particularity, for the purpose of this article only changes in the first three mentioned pilgrimages will be developed. The first two pilgrimages with centuries-long history served as experimental grounds for the measures taken by political authorities. The conflicts and the discontent registered among the clergy and the population established new grounds for dialogue between state and church authorities, which later led to a suitable compromise. After the first experiences, the pilgrimage to Saint Nektarios was an example of success, illustrating the fact that when there is will, solutions can be found. The evolution of

the measures, and the constant trial and error, as well as negotiations between the three parties involved (State, Church, and the faithful) are at the centre of this article. The last two pilgrimages (to Saint Menas and Saint Nicholas) are not addressed. By the time they took place, the discord had been resolved and the situation entered into a pandemic-routine. The new normal had been assimilated and accepted by the population, the clergy knew how to anticipate and avoid potential problems, while law enforcement officers were more prone to bend the rules, as long as public order was maintained.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed (qualitative and quantitative) research methodology, combined with a variety of media sources. The pilgrimage to Saint Paraskeva, in Iaşi, was analysed by using the data collected via TV, radio, and internet sources (articles, press releases, laws and regulations, photographs, videos, etc.). Data on the pilgrimages to Saint Demetrius the New and Saint Nektarios were gathered by ethnological observation, supplemented by media sources.

The author has conducted fieldwork on these two pilgrimages since 2016 and has made systematic estimations of the pilgrims in attendance. Some of these data were used for comparison with the attendance data collected in 2020, during the pandemic. Due to the restrictions, the author was constrained in the same manner as the pilgrims, requiring a spontaneous adaptation of the methodology previously employed and perfected over the years. European and national surveys provided insight into Romanian religious practices, beliefs, and values, demonstrating the impact of the restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE PANDEMIC

During the COVID-19 pandemic, state and local authorities took various measures to reduce the number of people in public spaces. The intention was to slow the contamination rate and thus avoid overburdening the hospitals. The circulation of people was restricted, and public gatherings were limited. Although churches were never closed, the presence of the faithful was closely regulated: at first, churchgoers were only allowed to attend the services from outside of the edifice; later, the presence of believers at services was completely banned. New measures were announced weekly, depending on the number of

new contaminations. While authorities focused on maintaining "social distancing" – an incorrect term used worldwide, and later replaced, at the recommendation of the World Health Organization, with "physical distancing" (Sarbu 2020) – the Orthodox Church authorities focused on maintaining the "spiritual communion" (Ioniţe 2020a) of its members.

Since the early days of the pandemic, the Orthodox Church provided constant guidelines to the clergy and the faithful, anticipating, adapting, and clarifying regulations imposed by the State. One day after the first COVID-19 case was reported in Romania (27th of February 2020), the church authorities gave their first press release (Dumitraşcu 2020a).[3] Concerned by the situation, they advised the faithful, fearing contamination with the new virus, to use their own spoon when receiving Holy Communion and to temporarily avoid kissing icons in the church. These simple recommendations raised an intense debate in the media, reviving the old rift between believers and non-believers, religion and science. The following week, a special prayer, meant to stop the pandemic, was transmitted to all eparchies for daily public reading (Totorcea 2020a). Specific instructions were given to priests to disinfect and aerate indoor spaces, and to avoid crowding (Anghel 2020a). They were also advised to install loudspeakers outside of the edifice, so the faithful could listen to the service taking place inside, without entering; or, if possible, to celebrate religious services outdoors. Many started to build summer altars outdoors. Beginning in March, the Church initiated a series of charitable actions: from donations of sheets, sanitary masks, and medical equipment to hospitals, to laptops and tablets for children with no financial means to connect to the online school system and spiritual counselling.

The first measure taken by the state authorities came much later, on the 17th of March, when it was decreed that people could only attend outdoor church services, and even this in a limited number (Ordonanţa militară 2020a). Days later, the first restrictions of movement were imposed by the government. People were allowed to leave their home only under specific conditions and with a travel declaration, which did not include church attendance (Ordonanţa militară 2020b; 2020c). After consultation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Chancellery of the Holy Synod formulated a set of guidelines addressing the clergy and the faithful (Dumitraşcu 2020b). Churches remained open, but the services were held in the absence of the public, confined at home. The faithful were advised to maintain contact with the clergy and continue their prayers.

The lockdown in Romania lasted from the 24th of March until the 14th of May. The peak coincided with Orthodox Easter (19th of April), which was celebrated in empty churches by the clergy and in front of the computer or TV screens by the faithful. In a country where 99% of the population celebrate Easter, and 84% attend the Resurrection midnight service in church (IRES

2012), the shockwave was profound. In addition, family reunions were forbidden. Easter preparations (colouring of eggs, cooking and baking traditional foods) and the Easter meal took place within the close family unit. The perturbation of Easter traditions was a heavy burden for Romanians, already stressed by the daily reports of COVID deaths. The Church issued new guidelines, instructing priests how to deal with the unique situation (Dumitraşcu 2020c). Simultaneously, new consultations took place with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ioniţe 2020b), resulting in permission for people to go to church for receiving consecrated bread (Rom. *paşti*[4]) during the two days preceding Easter.[5] The Ministry also agreed to allow priests and volunteers to distribute the Holy Light after the Resurrection service. Furthermore, public police and other officers subordinate to the Ministry would distribute the light to people in transit. These exceptions were, however, quickly withdrawn, after the Chief of State, President Klaus Iohannis, publicly criticized the agreement. Changes were made, allowing only the clergy and volunteers to distribute consecrated bread and the Holy Light to the faithful (Totorcea 2020b).

In compensation for the lockdown, local religious services as well as those in Jerusalem were broadcast during the entire Holy Week. On Holy Saturday, the Resurrection service from the Holy Sepulchre, followed by the service at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Bucharest, were televised. In his sermon, Patriarch Daniel thanked the priests and volunteers who took the holy light and the consecrated bread to the faithful, allowing them to commune with the Universal Church: "Through the Holy Light we have been, this year once more, in communion," he said (TRINITAS TV 2020).

During lockdown, miraculous icons and holy relics were driven around regions, cities, towns, and villages in so-called "processions", though in the absence of people.[6] The cars carrying the precious cargo stopped in front of churches and hospitals, while prayers for the cessation of the pandemic were read.

In early May, the National Institute for Public Health issued a list of recommendations for the post-lockdown period. Among others, people were advised to avoid kissing the icons, to avoid taking Communion in any other way than from a single-use utensil, and to avoid taking part in pilgrimages. Within hours, the Church replied that the matter of Communion belongs exclusively to the Church (Anghel 2020b). Summoned to debate it, on the 11th of May, the Holy Synod rejected replacing the Communion chalice with single-use spoons or cups and chose instead to cancel the administration of the collective Communion, until the 1st of June (Mihăescu 2020). Announcing the decision, the spokesman for the Patriarchate invoked similarities with the plague in 1829, when the collective Communion was not administered for two months (Popescu 2020a). The same day, the Patriarch addressed the faithful with a spiritual message

in which he encouraged them not to lose faith and to stay connected with God and the Church through continuous prayer (Dumitraşcu 2020d).

Prior to the end of the lockdown, on the 14th of May, the Romanian Patriarchate issued detailed instructions meant to prepare priests and the faithful to return to church (Anghel 2020c). Among others, the faithful were asked to maintain proper physical distancing inside and outside of the church, to wear sanitary masks, and to avoid touching and kissing icons, relics as well as the hand of priests. For more safety, the services were to be held outside of the church.

On the 15th of May, the lockdown in Romania ended (Legea 2020). People were allowed to leave their homes and travel under specific circumstances. On the 1st of June, all travel restrictions, national and international, were raised (Hotărârea 2020a). Public transportation was reinstated. A few days later, on the 5th of June, Basilica Travel, the travel agency of the Romanian Patriarchate, resumed its pilgrimages (Ioniţe 2020c).

The churches were reopened to the public (in- and outdoors) on the 16th of June. Maintaining physical distance and masks were required (Hotărârea 2020e). Stealing the start, the first public liturgies were held outdoors on Sunday, the 15th of June. Once again, the Patriarchate issued new instructions, reinforcing the main sanitary requirements: physical distancing, aeration of the church, and disinfection of the liturgical objects after each service (Dumitraşcu 2020e). Taking advantage of the summer, many priests preferred to continue the services outdoors. The grounds around churchyards were marked with white paint, indicating where people were to stand, in such a way as to keep a safe physical distance between each other.

PILGRIMAGES IN ROMANIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By the autumn of 2020, the COVID-19 restrictions were considerably relaxed, and the faithful were looking forward to visiting their beloved saints. The Church, which by now had become accustomed to the sanitary requirements, started preparations for the annual pilgrimages.

Saint Paraskeva, Iaşi, 14th of October

In September, a new liturgical year started, and the Metropolitanate of Iaşi prepared to receive hundreds of thousands of pilgrims expected to attend the

feast of Saint Paraskeva. Precautions were taken to comply with the safety regulations. The programme was announced three weeks before the event (Malache 2020; Arhiepiscopia Iaşilor 2020). Contrary to previous years, no relics were invited from abroad.[7] In order to avoid crowds, the traditional procession called the Path of the Saints was to be carried out in the absence of the public. As with previous processions held during and after the lockdown, relics were to be driven around the city in an open car, before being laid in the canopy prepared outside of the Metropolitan Cathedral. The pilgrimage was planned to take place between the 8th and 15th of October. Nearly twice as many days were allocated for the celebration; compared to the average of past years, a reasonable decision, considering the required sanitary measures. All precautions were taken: physical distancing between pilgrims was to be maintained as they were directed through a one-way corridor; sanitizing dispensers and mats were to be placed along the way; free masks were to be distributed; the gifts for the pilgrims were to be pre-packed (small icons, prayer booklets, and a bottle of holy water). However, an unexpected announcement by local authorities radically changed these plans. On the 5th of October 2020, three days before the celebration, the National Committee of Emergency Situations announced that only local residents would be allowed to attend religious feasts (Hotărârea 2020c). The next morning, the Iaşi County Committee of Emergency Situations issued detailed measures for Saint Paraskeva's celebration: the area around the Metropolitan Cathedral was to be enclosed and only pilgrims residing in Iaşi County were to be allowed to enter (identity cards were required). In addition, the pilgrims were not allowed to touch the relics (Hotărârea 2020b). The announcements caused a shock wave. Although free circulation was permitted, and pilgrims could travel to Iaşi, they were not allowed to take part in the celebration. After all the efforts to adapt to the sanitary recommendations since the beginning of the pandemic, the Church felt betrayed.

Disbelief and incomprehension were followed by resentment and anger. The press release of the Iaşi Archbishopric gave expression to the general feelings amongst the clergy (Totorcea 2020c). Reminded of the fact that the pilgrimage had been held since 1641, the text highlighted its role during difficult times, such as the pandemic:

> *The duty of the Church is to take care of the spiritual health of its faithful in all times, but especially in times like these, when more and more forms of inner unrest, despair, fear and confusion are rising. Taking part in Saint Paraskeva's feast is for many an opportunity to strengthen themselves, in times of great difficulties.* (Totorcea 2020c)

The statement continued pointing out that given the experience of the past few months, when all restrictions had been respected, the authorities should have trusted the faithful to demonstrate the same responsible behaviour during the pilgrimage, as they had shown during the recent political elections:[8]

> *It is necessary for everybody to understand that the freedom to manifest one's religious convictions freely and unhindered is one of the fundamental liberties of individuals. ... It is difficult to ignore the grief of those who realize they are free to travel to Iaşi for any other reason but to attend the pilgrimage occasioned by the feast of Saint Paraskeva.* (Totorcea 2020c)

In the end, the Archbishopric asked the forgiveness of the pilgrims who could not be present during the celebration, due to the restrictions.

A few days later, the Romanian Patriarchate released a statement that endorsed the Archbishopric of Iaşi, demanding renegotiation of the new restrictions. The text pointed out that while the previous rules referred to all the faithful, the latest measure, denying access to some pilgrims, is "a disproportionate and discriminatory measure, taken without prior consultation with the Romanian Orthodox Church". The thorough preparations of the two forthcoming pilgrimages (Saint Paraskeva and Saint Demetrius) and the close cooperation with the local authorities were, continued the message, "an exercise of responsible health protection and the manifestation of the religious freedom of an eminently religious nation" (Dumitraşcu 2020f). The call of the Church remained without an answer, at least not an official one.

By the time the new interdictions were announced, and despite the effort of the local prefect to stop the influx of pilgrims to Iaşi (Europa Liberă România 2020), the first pilgrims had already arrived. Since the first days of October, people patiently waited to enter the Metropolitan Cathedral and pray at the saint's relics. The line was considerably shorter (Fig. 1) than in previous years (Fig. 2), when it frequently exceeded three kilometres. Although already enacted, the proof of residency was not enforced until later. As for the interdiction to touch the relics, most pilgrims did not comply (Batcu 2020; Hopulele 2020). Because of the low flow of people, the relics remained inside the cathedral until the 14th of October.

In preparation for the feast and according to the law limiting the number of participants in public events, 500 spaced chairs were positioned on the pedestrian street near the Metropolitan Cathedral for the use of the pilgrims. Two hundred and fifty more chairs were placed in other central areas of the city, where pilgrims could watch and listen to the religious service transmitted live, on large screens (Iancu 2020).

No dignitaries from abroad or from other regions of the country were invited to the religious service, which was entirely served by the local hierarchs.

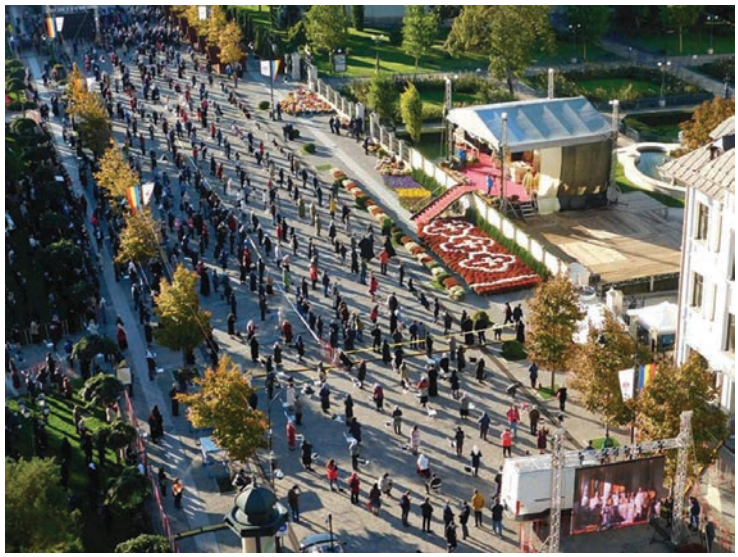

Figure 1. *Saint Paraskeva pilgrimage in Iaşi, Metropolitan Cathedral, 2020. Photograph by Ziarul de Iaşi. Source: https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-cultura-24352933-poza-zilei-cum-arata-distantarea-fizica-slujba-cuvioasei-sfanta-parascheva.htm.*

Figure 2. *Saint Paraskeva pilgrimage in Iaşi, Metropolitan Cathedral, 2019. Photograph by Liviu Chirica (Inquam Photos). Source: https://inquam-photos.com/photos/iasi-sfanta-parascheva-pelerinaj-14-oct-2019-149284.*

Early on the morning of the 14th of October, the relics were carried in a brief procession around the Metropolitan Cathedral, after which they were laid in the outdoor canopy prepared for the occasion (Popa 2020). Protests had started the previous evening, when pilgrims from outside of Iaşi County complained about the local police who were checking their identity cards and stopping them from entering the church to pray at the relics. The protests resumed the next day, when the local metropolitan mentioned the collective Holy Communion would not be administered as usual, due to the pandemic. The turbulences continued throughout the service, to the desolation of the clergy. The media reported the protesters had come prepared. They were not wearing masks, as the law required, and some of them had placards, which read: "You are stealing our saints! You are stealing our liberty!!!" (Pavaluca 2020). Despite some violent acts, no one was arrested; only a few warnings were issued. The protesters were supported by Diana Şoşoacă, a nationalistic politician present at the pilgrimage, known as an anti-mask activist, who later, in December 2020, became a Senator of Iaşi and was involved in many other anti-restrictions protests, including anti-vaccination riots[9] (Cristian 2020). Under the pressure of the masses, the local police finally compromised, allowing free access to the relics, in disregard of existing regulations. On available recordings, many pilgrims were not wearing masks; most touched the relics, some even kissed them (Digi24 2020). The relics were carried inside the Metropolitan Cathedral the same evening (Pacurar 2020).

Saint Demetrius the New, Bucharest, 27th of October

In the second half of October, the number of new COVID-19 cases continued to rise. Worried about public safety, Prime Minister Ludovic Orban advised against the organization of the Saint Demetrius pilgrimage in Bucharest (Peia 2020). His opinion infuriated the Patriarchate, who, through the voice of its spokesman, accused him of "arrogance, decisional autarchy and moral solipsism" (Popescu 2020b), in other words, superiority, authoritarianism, and selfishness. The Church deplored the distrust of the faithful and of the Church, which was evident at the highest political level, as well as the disregard of the importance of religion in the Romanian society. The Patriarchate denounced "the lack of inter-institutional dialogue" (ibid.) in such an important decision affecting a fundamental individual freedom, which is religious freedom. The immediate social reality is complex, warned the spokesman, which cannot be changed without dialogue and regardless of the consequences.

Against the public discontent of the prime minister but with the approval of local authorities (Marina 2020), on the 22nd of October, the Patriarchate announced the programme of events, followed by a detailed set of restrictions and precautionary measures that were to be taken (Dumitraşcu 2020g). After the experience in Iaşi, the local church officials took care to adjust their plans.

The Saint Demetrius pilgrimage lasted three days, from the 25th to the 27th of October, merely half the time allotted in previous years. It began on Sunday and continued with the feast of the other Greek Demetrius, the saint of Thessaloniki,[10] followed by the feast of Saint Demetrius the New. As in Iaşi, the traditional procession, the Path of the Saints, was cancelled. Instead of being carried around the Patriarchal Hill, as in previous years, the relics were only carried out of the Patriarchal Cathedral to the outdoor pavilion, early on Sunday, the 25th of October (Florescu 2020). No foreign relics were invited. However, several local relics were displayed next to Saint Demetrius': the relics of Saints Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena and those of Saint Nektarios (both hosted by the Patriarchal Cathedral, as Saint Demetrius'), as well as the relics of Saint Cyprian, the protector of children, brought over from a local church.[11] The clergy from the local archbishopric covered all the religious services.

During the pilgrimage, new restrictions were announced by the government: starting with the 26th of October, masks, previously only required in closed public spaces or during large public gatherings, were now mandated in all public spaces, opened or closed (Andronie 2020). The clergy, and even Patriarch Daniel, complied with the rules and wore masks.

In order to ensure the required physical distance between people, the number of the faithful allowed to take part in the outdoor religious services was limited to 200. To make sure the number was respected, taking as an example the pilgrimage in Iaşi, 200 chairs were placed in front of the summer altar. The measure was unprecedented, as in general, people stand during the religious service. By consequence, many attendees chose to stand next to the chair, on which they had put their bags.

Already on the 24th of October, the local police blocked access to the two front alleys leading to the cathedral. Further, all nearby access was forbidden, creating discontent, especially amongst people working or residing in the area. The people who wanted to attend the services, during the three days of the pilgrimage, were allowed to pass early in the morning, after their identity card had been checked. Only residents of Bucharest were allowed access. Once the maximum number of people was reached, the barrier was closed and no one was allowed to pass. There were no exceptions; even the employees of the Patriarchate had a difficult time getting through. Access in the afternoons and evenings was denied, which created confusion amongst the faithful, especially

the first day. In fact, during the pilgrimage, not all the faithful can endure the hours-long wait in the line leading to the relics. Many only attend the services, light a candle, leave a written prayer note, get some blessed flowers, or ask someone to touch an object they have with them against the relics. This was almost impossible in 2020, when access was restricted. These measures also affected the author's annual estimation of pilgrims. Unable to get close to the relics in the second part of the day, the estimation methodology had to be adapted. Instead of counting people passing by the relics, the author counted people exiting the back gate of the Patriarchate. However, observing that, despite the one-way circuit regulations, many people preferred to exit through the front instead, an additional counting was made there. Considering the two consecutive counts, to which were added the foggy glasses due to wearing a mask, the imposed distance, the large number of volunteers (which were not to be included in the count), and the constant spotlights of the ambulance and the police cars, the counting conditions in 2020 were particularly difficult.

People attending the religious service (Fig. 3) wore protection masks (more or less correctly) or had their faces covered with scarves. They all received a paper bag with a small icon, a prayer book, two consecrated breads (Rom. *anafură*), and a bottle of holy water. The *pomană,* the charity food, traditionally offered to pilgrims at the end of the service, was not given in 2020.

Figure 3. *People taking part in the religious service during the feast of Saint Demetrius the New, Romanian Patriarchate, Bucharest, 27 October 2020. Photograph by Irina Stahl. Personal archive.*

The line of pilgrims was the only continuous stream of people allowed up the Patriarchate's Hill. At the bottom of the hill, the local police and members of the clergy checked identity cards of the pilgrims waiting in line and provided them with various information. Although the identity check existed, one can wonder how the thorough residence-only rule was enforced, as no pilgrim was sent out of the line during the author's fieldwork observation. In the fenced corridor allocated for them, people waited in small groups or at a distance, one behind the other. The police were present along the entire line, directing, spacing out people and imposing the rhythm of the advancement to the relics.

Due to the distance between people, in 2020 the line was longer than ever.[12] At 14:00, on the 27th of October 2020, it reached 1.55 km in length,[13] three times longer than in the previous year. However, the waiting time was five times shorter than in 2019: only a little over one hour, instead of over six hours. The following table (Table 1) compares the author's fieldwork findings in 2019 and 2020.

Table 1. *Comparative parameters of the line of pilgrims waiting to reach the relics during the Saint Demetrius pilgrimage in 2019 and 2020 (based on the author's fieldwork research)*

Parameters of the line	2019	2020
Max. line length	550 m	1.55 km
Waiting time	370 min average	65 min average
Exposure of the relics	90 h (5 days: 25th to 29th of October)	60 h (3 days: 25th to 27th of October)
People	77,100	60,200
Average per hour	857 people/h	1,003 people/h

As compared to 2019, the exposure time of the relics diminished in 2020. Instead of five days, the celebration was shortened to three days. However, the total number of people in 2019 and 2020 is comparable: a total of 77,100 pilgrims, with an average of 857 pilgrims per hour, passed by the relics in 2019, and a total of 60,200 pilgrims, with an average of 1,003 pilgrims per hour, in 2020. The explanation of these differences relies on the speed at which people were moving in the line. The pace was deliberately increased by the police and volunteers, who did not allow people to remain long at the relics (Fig. 4).

In 2020, more volunteers than usual were active during Saint Demetrius pilgrimage. They were particularly careful with the sanitary measures, offering disinfectant to pilgrims entering the pavilion and disinfecting the glass covering the relics after each person. Others assisted the faithful, carrying

various objects they were given back and forth, touching them to the relics before returning them to their owners.

During pilgrimages, people bring flowers[14] to be touched against the relics and be blessed by the saint. Many pilgrims bring extra flowers for the blessing and take away only what they need, leaving the extras to be given to other pilgrims. Contrary to previous years, in 2020, pilgrims came with fewer flowers, and those they had with them, they kept for themselves. The number of objects brought to be touched against the relics was also diminished.

Figure 4. *Pilgrims touching the relics during the feast of Saint Demetrius the New, Romanian Patriarchate, Bucharest, 27 October 2020. Photograph by Irina Stahl. Personal archive.*

In his public sermon, on the 27th of October, Patriarch Daniel reminded people of several historical occasions in which Saint Demetrius the New had protected his adoptive city and its inhabitants: in 1814, during the plague, in 1827, during a severe drought, and in 1831, during the cholera epidemic. In all these cases, the calamity stopped once the relics were carried in procession around the city. The saint has accomplished many miracles, and people honoured him even during the difficult times of communism – the Patriarch continued – when the Church

endured many persecutions. A particular moment took place in autumn 1989, when, for the first time in history, the communist authorities banned the Saint Demetrius celebration at the Patriarchate, arguing that an important political meeting had to take place in the building of the Great National Assembly, next to the cathedral. The Patriarch at the time had to transfer the relics to a nearby church, where the celebration took place, in more humble conditions. Patriarch Daniel concluded:

> *This humiliation of the Saint Pious Demetrius the New was soon rewarded, in the sense that* [only] *a couple of months later, the communist regime fell ... Through this, we see that God does not allow to be mocked ... He is long-tolerant, but he is also fair.* (Facebook Basilica.ro 2020)

In the end, the Patriarch thanked all pilgrims for their patience and wisdom proven during the pilgrimage, showing great discipline and order. He also expressed his regrets that only inhabitants of Bucharest could be present, but he assured everyone that he would pray for all of those who had the intention to come, and that he would ask God to allow all to celebrate Saint Demetrius the New in the years to come.

The words of the Patriarch were reinterpreted by the media as a warning to politicians, a direct reference to the ongoing elections. Just before the Saint Paraskeva pilgrimage, the local elections had confirmed the leading position of the centre-right National Liberal Party in power. However, the victory was at the limit, with a small difference from the centre-left Socio-Democratic Party in opposition. During the parliamentary elections, which took place on the 6th of December 2020, the liberals were defeated by the socio-democrats, which led to the resignation of Prime Minister Ludovic Orban (who had opposed the Saint Demetrius pilgrimage). Moreover, a new extreme right party, the Alliance for the Unification of Romanians, entered the political scene (Diana Şoşoacă, who had led the protest in Iaşi, was one of its prominent members). In December, the media recalled the speech given by the Patriarch and interpreted it *post-factum* as a curse thrown upon the resigning prime minister (Oprea 2020; Zavastin 2020).

Saint Nektarios, Bucharest, 9th of November

Contrary to the historical saints, such as Saint Demetrius the New and Saint Paraskeva, venerated by locals for centuries, Saint Nektarios is a new addition to the Romanian religious culture. Due to many factors (Stahl 2022), mainly

because he is known as a saint thaumaturge (especially as a healer of cancer), and a miracle-worker, the Greek saint has quickly been adopted by Romanians. This is demonstrated by the progressive increase in the number of pilgrims, present each year, on the 9th of November, at Radu Vodă Monastery[15] in Bucharest, where the saint's relics first arrived. The pilgrimage to Saint Nektarios has recently become the second largest pilgrimage in Bucharest, after the one to Saint Demetrius, the protector of the city.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been connected to Saint Nektarios in the most peculiar way. By a coincidence, which many could call of divine origin, the first year of the pandemic, 2020, concurred with the one hundred-years' anniversary of the saint's death (1920), while the second year, 2021, with the sixty-years' anniversary of the saint's canonization (1961). On the occasion of the centennial, the Greek Orthodox Church declared 2020 the Homage Year of Saint Nektarios from Aegina. The decision was made in February 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the first year of the pandemic was placed under the protection of the healing saint.

The relics of Saint Nektarios, displayed during Saint Demetrius pilgrimage, were, in 2020, again offered for veneration, this time during his own celebration, at Radu Vodă Monastery. As in the case of the first two pilgrimages of the liturgical year, the pilgrimage occasioned by the celebration of Saint Nektarios underwent considerable changes in 2020. Due to the increasing number of new contaminations in the weeks prior to the event, Saint Nektarios' feast coincided with the reintroduction of the lockdown, this time only partial, during nighttime, from 23:00 until 05:00 (Hotărârea 2020d). The measure was to take effect on the 9th of November, in the evening. The announcement urged the monastic leadership to advance the celebration by one day. The exceptional programme was announced on the monastery's internet site,[16] on its Facebook page,[17] and through the official religious news agency (Ioniţe 2020d). Pilgrims were asked to respect the official sanitary measures (wear a mask and keep a safe distance from one another). Although still effective, the restriction granting access to Bucharest residents only was never mentioned.

The celebration began on the 7th of November, instead of the 8th, as in previous years. In the morning, the relics were taken out of the church and carried in a brief procession around the edifice, before being placed in the recently finished brick pavilion (Fig. 5) in the churchyard. Situated behind the altar, the new pavilion replaced the mobile canopy in use in previous years. The relics were taken back into the church on the 9th, in the evening, to allow people time to reach their homes before the lockdown. Although a few hours shorter, the length of the celebration remained relatively the same as in the previous year.

In 2020, the local monastic authorities took early and exceptional measures to ensure compliance with the sanitary measures. Favoured by the monastery's unique geographical location (on top of a small hill, surrounded by stone walls, with two gates, one on each side), a one-way fenced circuit was set up for the pilgrims (Fig. 6). The churchyard as well as the sidewalk leading to the monastery was marked with white paint every 1.5 meters. Announcements reminding the pilgrims to wear a mask and to keep the distance were displayed on the walls surrounding the monastery and on fences. Dispensers with disinfectant were located near the pavilion, for people to sanitize their hands before reaching the relics. A large number of volunteers assisted and directed the pilgrims, imposing a quick pace of the crowd (reducing the waiting time to 51 minutes, from an average of 5 hours and 30 minutes in the previous four years). Volunteers also disinfected the relics after each person.

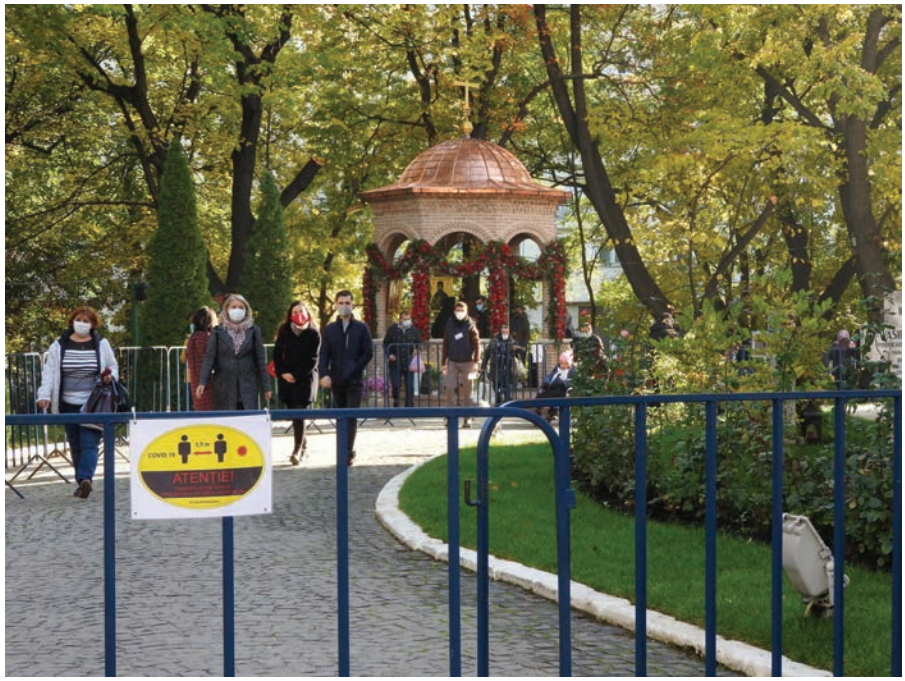

Figure 5. *New pavilion for the relics of Saint Nektarios during the celebration, Radu Vodă Monastery, Bucharest, 9 November 2020. Photograph by Irina Stahl. Personal archive.*

Figure 6. *The line of the pilgrims waiting to reach the relics, keeping required distance during Saint Nektarios feast, Radu Vodă Monastery, Bucharest, 9 November 2020. Photograph by Irina Stahl. Personal archive.*

With the exception of a brief time, in the morning, when the only access way to the church was through the pilgrim line, the local police did not check people's identity cards and did not limit their access. Most of the time the gates were open, and people were allowed in without restriction. The police were, however, diligent in keeping the required physical distance, and they prompted the people who were not wearing a mask or were wearing it improperly. No concessions were made to the one-way flow of pilgrims; people were only allowed to enter through the front gate and exit through the back gate. After passing by the relics, the faithful were allowed to remain on the church ground, to enter the church or take part in the outdoor liturgy. During the celebration, religious services were held outdoors, at the summer altar (built in the same style as the pavilion carrying the relic). The faithful took part, standing on the white marks painted on the cobblestones, at a safe distance from one another.

During the 2020 Saint Nektarios pilgrimage, the author's yearly fieldwork methodology estimating the number of pilgrims suffered a few, although not substantial, changes. Fearing that the pilgrimage time on the 9th would be cut short or even cancelled, the author decided to make the counts on the 8th,

instead of the 9th of November. As the celebration continued without interruptions, an additional count was made on the 9th and added to the data. As in earlier pilgrimages, the foggy eyeglasses were an impediment, as was the fenced area around the pavilion that kept the author from approaching.

Due to the required physical distancing, the line of pilgrims waiting to reach Saint Nektarios' relics in 2020 was longer than ever before: at 10:00 o'clock in the morning, on the 8th of November, it reached 600 meters. Comparing the data on 2020 with the data on 2019, the same tendency previously observed is visible: while the length of the line increased, the waiting time decreased (compared to 2019, up to four times). The number of people attending the celebration diminished here as well. However, it was higher than in 2016, despite the cold weather (+8°C, daily average) and the restrictions. The number of participating children also decreased, which is easily understood given the pandemic. The only unexpected datum is the number of pilgrims per hour in 2020. While the pace of the line was visibly accelerated in 2020 (especially in the last day), compared to the previous year, the number of people per hour did not increase. The fact can only be explained by the additional time necessary to clean the relics after each pilgrim and could be a proof of the thorough job the volunteers did.

Table 2. *Comparative parameters of the line of pilgrims waiting to reach the relics of the saint during the Saint Nektarios pilgrimage in 2019 and 2020 (based on the author's fieldwork research)*

Parameters of the line	2019	2020
Max. line length	250 m	600 m
Waiting time	288 min average	51 min average
Exposure of the relics	56 h 30 min (3 days: 8th to 10th of November)	53 h 45 min (3 days: 7th to 9th of November)
People	25,200	17,390
Average per hour	446 people/h	324 people/h

As in the earlier two pilgrimages, people brought fewer flowers to Saint Nektarios in 2020 as compared to previous years. Consequently, no flowers were offered to pilgrims passing the relics. The quantity of objects brought to be touched against the relics and thus be blessed by the saint also diminished.

CONCLUSIONS

An examination of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on religious celebrations in Romania, particularly the pilgrimages from the beginning of the Orthodox liturgical year in 2020, leads to several conclusions regarding the institution of the Church, as well as the role of religion in contemporary Romanian society.

The Romanian Orthodox Church had a strong voice during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Immediately after the first case of the virus was reported in the country, and before the State intervened, the Church proactively took measures to prepare the clergy and the faithful, both spiritually and physically, and protect them from the new threat. When the first governmental restrictions were introduced, the Church clarified the general regulations, adapting them to religious activity. Its communication was continuous, instructive, advising, and encouraging.

In addition to its engagement in protecting and comforting the faithful through its own specific means (prayers, processions, etc.), the Church intensified its social work, helping people cope with their everyday life by providing food, clothing, and educational materials to those in need. It even went as far as to help state institutions (hospitals, care centres, schools) overwhelmed by the new challenges they faced. In this regard, the Church not only increased its own religious activity but also replaced the State in many of its duties. Nevertheless, it received little appreciation from state officials.

The church authorities anticipated that the dialogue between the Church and the State, engaged in during Easter, would continue during the annual pilgrimages, events of great importance for the faithful. The results were, from the Church's perspective, disappointing. The governmental regulations were not negotiated but announced and enforced, without any regard to the way they would affect people. Even more, the measures were inconsistent and contradictory, leading to discontent and frustration both from the Church and the faithful. While political elections were held nationwide without constraint, pilgrimages organized in the same timeframe were restricted. The general feeling was that politicians treated the faithful and the Church with disregard. The incomprehension resided in the incapacity of the political leaders to understand the importance of religious rituals in people's life. While the hierarchs of the Church continuously stressed the healing and protective properties of faith, the importance of religious practices and customs was completely ignored by politicians. The solution finally came from the bottom-up, in the direct negotiations between the faithful and the local police, who finally relented and decided to bend some of the rules. Beginning with the first confrontations in Iaşi, law forces avoided conflict by turning the other way. During her fieldwork, the author

often witnessed this kind of behaviour, police officers fluctuating between their official duty and their personal feelings, taken over by what has been called "cultural emotions" in cultural theory (Peterson 2006). It is not uncommon, during pilgrimages, to see the police walk young children to the front of the line to touch the relics, hand blessed flowers to elderly women, take their written prayer notes to the relics, or kiss the relics themselves at the end of their work shift. They not only did their duty during pilgrimages; they also became active participants. The same behaviours were observed in paramedics.

In 2020, TV channels broadcasted more religious services than usual, media outlets re-transmitted press releases from the Basilica News Agency, thus spreading the messages of the Church, and made religion more present in the public sphere than ever. This, as well as the way in which the first pilgrimages took place, reminds one of the importance of religion in Romanian society, an idea highlighted by the Patriarch. This became more obvious once many rituals, feasts, and celebrations were banned.

Religion has played a significant role in Romanians' lives for generations. As early as the 1899 census, 99% of the population professed a religious preference (Negruţi 2014: 32). This high degree of religious profession has remained consistent for more than one hundred years, with the 2011 census revealing a 99% religious participation (ibid.: 37). Perhaps more important is the rate of church attendance and frequency rate of prayer. In 2015, 82% stated they prayed weekly, with 69% offering a prayer daily (Stahl 2018: 91). Slightly less than half of the population reported participation in regular religious services three or more times monthly, while 76% attended multiple times per year (ibid.: 89).

Just one week before the lockdown, in March 2020, 76% of the people stated they prayed weekly, with 64% offering a prayer daily; 28% admitted they prayed more often than usual during those times (IRES 2020). When asked how much prayer had helped them during their lifetime, 80% said it had helped them in great measure. As for church attendance, 12% stated they went to church in the past week and 14% had talked with their priest about what was going on in the world.

No doubt, religious customs are still important for a large portion of the Romanian population, and the events of 2020 confirm it. Whether prayer and rituals actually heal is of less importance than the belief that people put in them. Admitting, as in the case of the Communion chalice, that a ritual could transmit the virus, would have shattered the belief. In this resided the dilemma of the Orthodox churches, who chose to deal with the situation in various manners (Creţu 2020). Faith helped many cope with the psychological pressure and daily difficulties encountered during the pandemic. Therefore, keeping it alive was perhaps more important for them than not getting the virus.

The discussions about religion during the pandemic revived the deep rift within Romanian society, in which the cultural roots of religion are often denied in the name of modernity. Many intellectuals and the governmental elite were critical of maintaining the religious rituals, which emotionally sustained the faithful. This failure to recognize the centrality of religion in Romanian society went hand in hand with the lack of dialogue. Nevertheless, facts show that religion is still an important element of contemporary society, as the pilgrimages illustrate.

NOTES

[1] Although, as mentioned in the text, Saint Paraskeva is not originally from Iaşi, in Romania she is known as Saint Paraskeva of Iaşi. Due to the centuries-old pilgrimage tradition, the place hosting the relics has been identified with the place of origin of the saint. The case is not singular (cf., e.g., Saint Philothea of Argeş).

[2] Today this historical region in Southeast Europe is split between Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey.

[3] This was nineteen days before the Romanian political authorities issued the first statement regarding church attendance, on 17th of March 2020.

[4] *Paşti* is special bread, imprinted with the icon of the Resurrection, consecrated through a special prayer, sprinkled with wine and holy water, usually on Saturday before Easter. In 2020, the bread was exceptionally consecrated on Holy Thursday.

[5] In 2012, 79% of Romanians went to church for Easter to receive the consecrated Easter bread (IRES 2012).

[6] The author recorded 23 processions in Romania and the neighbouring Republic of Moldova.

[7] Each year, since the beginning of the new millennium, relics of various saints have been invited to join the celebration of Saint Paraskeva in Iaşi. The feast begins with a procession around town called the Path of the Saints, during which the relics, arriving from different directions, meet before the arrival at the Metropolitan Cathedral. Saint Paraskeva receives her holy guest(s) and walks them through the last part of the way. This tradition was initiated by Patriarch Daniel, at the time he occupied the position of the Metropolitan of Moldova and was brought to Bucharest, for Saint Demetrius feast in 2008, once he became the new patriarch.

[8] Despite the pandemic, local elections were held on the 27th of September 2020.

[9] The COVID-19 vaccination campaign started in Romania on the 27th of December 2020.

[10] Demetrius of Thessaloniki, also known as the Holy Great-Martyr Demetrius the Myroblyte, is a Greek Christian martyr of the early fourth century. His feast is celebrated on the 26th of October.

[11] The decision to bring Saint Cyprian's relics from Saint Stelian–Lucaci Church, in Bucharest, is explained by the fact that 2020 was declared Homage Year of the Pastoral Care for Parents and Children and Commemorative Year of the Romanian Orthodox

Philanthropists. Saint Cyprian is known as the protector of children especially during severe epidemics, such as the plague.

[12] This is the longest line of pilgrims recorded since 2016, when the author started observing the Saint Demetrius pilgrimage.

[13] The length of the line is based on the author's own observations and Google Maps.

[14] Before, people brought medicinal plants to touch against the relics, thus increasing their healing properties. Nowadays people bring ornamental flowers and basil.

[15] In 2011, the monastery received a second relic of Saint Nektarios and offered the initial relic, received in 2002, to the Patriarchate. Today, the latter is kept in the Patriarchal Cathedral in Bucharest. The relic received in 2011 is displayed in a larger and more impressive reliquary and continues to be venerated at Radu Vodă Monastery.

[16] See https://manastirearaduvoda.ro/, last accessed on 9 November 2022. The last post in the Recent Events section is dated the 1st of April 2020. The liturgical programme section is updated weekly and is not saved in the history of the website.

[17] See https://www.facebook.com/ManastireaRaduVodaOficial/posts/1039608146485033, last accessed on 9 November 2022..

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Irina Stahl (MA, MS) is Senior Researcher at the Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy, and Associate Lecturer in European Ethnology at the University of Bucharest. She was elected to the Executive Board of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) in 2021 and has been Secretary of the Ritual Year Working Group (SIEF) since 2014. Among her fields of interest are folk religion, Orthodox Christianity, and the history of Romanian sociology.

irinastahl@yahoo.fr

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LOVE IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS: INNOVATION AND TRADITION IN THE WORLD OF QUARANTINE WEDDINGS

Judit Balatonyi
PhD, Assistant Professor
Department of European Ethnology – Cultural Anthropology
University of Pécs, Hungary
balatonyi.judit@gmail.com

Abstract: International sociological research based on demographic data has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly shaped the way of getting married. According to this research, varying from minimal to dramatic, there was a decrease in marriage rates worldwide. The marriage rate in Hungary showed a different picture. The number of weddings increased by 3%. It can also be seen that the number of marriages per month during the pandemic tended to decrease in periods of severe restrictions and lockdowns and to increase in periods of temporary loosening. While the period of restrictions was characterized by civil ceremonies and micro-weddings, the period of loosening the restrictions saw a mixture of large and tiny weddings, with or without civil marriages. So, people did not postpone or proceed with their weddings but tried to stick to their original plans despite, or rather besides, the changed circumstances; or, abandoning certain expectations and inventing new ones, they rescheduled their wedding. Based on my digital anthropological research, this paper raises questions: why did some people get married during the lockdown periods, or why did others postpone their weddings until after the restrictions were loosened? In the following, I aim to explore the modified wedding practices adapted to newer circumstances and analyze the ways of selecting and constituting the wedding "tradition" ("bricolage of traditions").

Keywords: commitment ceremonies, getting married during COVID-19, marriage rate in Hungary, micro-weddings

INTRODUCTION

According to sociological reports analyzing international demographic trends, the rate of getting married has significantly decreased all over the world during the time of COVID-19. In Japan, the decrease was 37% (Takenaka 2020), while in Italy it was 80% (AFP 2021). The U.S. marriage rate has also been on

a declining trajectory. Analysts primarily blamed the hardships and problems caused by the pandemic for the decreasing marriage rates. Among them, restrictive government measures to curb the pandemic (e.g., curfews and interdictions on public gatherings, the banning of events or the limitations on the number of attendees) were used as an explanation. They also took into consideration the negative psychological effects of COVID-19 on couples and the economic instability that came about in association with the pandemic (job loss, unreliable incomes) as well as actual health problems (Reynolds 2020; Wagner & Choi & Cohen 2020). That is to say, researches so far have highlighted that the majority of people postponed or cancelled their planned weddings due to legal and health restrictions, injunctions, and changed socio-economic circumstances.

The situation was different in Hungary, where the marriage rate showed a different picture. Within the Eastern European context, among the Visegrád countries (V4), it was only in Hungary that the desire to wed did not diminish during the three waves of the pandemic (Szémann 2021). Although the Hungarian government also introduced restrictions, not only did the number of weddings not decrease, but it also even rose. While in 2019, 65,300 couples were married, in 2020 the number was 67,301 (Gyorstájékoztató 2021), showing a 3% increase. What could be the cause of this rise in the number of weddings? My paper seeks to explain the divergence of the Hungarian trends from international processes regarding the willingness to wed during COVID-19 in Hungary. How is it possible that the number of weddings increased in Hungary while it declined elsewhere? I will first discuss macro-contextual factors that influence individual decision-making, replanning, and reinterpretation processes, and will follow up by examining how these processes unfolded. Specifically, I will analyze what pre-existing or new patterns and ideologies couples reinterpreted in their weddings so successfully that throughout the pandemic – with some fluctuation – the rate of contracting marriages remained steadily high.

The research on which this paper is based is the continuation of a research project on marriage I started in 2019, which due to the outbreak of COVID-19 changed course in March 2020. From this point on, I began to focus on the changes taking place during the pandemic, deviating significantly from the research methodology (classic anthropological fieldwork) planned earlier. The new research method was patchwork ethnography. Patchwork here refers to "using fragmentary yet rigorous data" regarding both empirical findings and the knowledge being examined, to the changed platforms of the transmission of knowledge (Günel & Varma & Watanabe 2020). I primarily carried out online ethnographic research (netnography). I was present in Facebook wedding organizing groups; participated in trainings, lectures, and webinars provided by the wedding service providers; distributed online questionnaires; and conducted

in-depth interviews in person. During my research, I archived news and media items, legal and health regulations relating to weddings, and the discourses in Facebook reflections on these among Hungarian-language wedding-organizing and chat-groups. I was present in about 12 groups and was paying the most attention to the four most active groups, monitoring them on a daily basis (the number of members in the groups varied between 2,500 and 29,000). I also paid attention to the debates and conversations related to the organization and reorganization of weddings, as well as to the individual and collective dilemmas the participants presented. I documented several live-streamed civil wedding ceremonies, wedding accounts, as well as the commentary (comprising thousands of supportive statements) accompanying the signatures to an online petition for permitting the holding of wedding receptions in Hungary (Vlasicsné Gajdár 2020).

In April 2020, I posted an online questionnaire with detailed, for the most part open, questions that asked about the strategies and specific practices of reorganizing weddings among those planning weddings after March 2020. I publicized the Google Forms-type *self-administered questionnaires (SAQ)* online on Facebook in the form of a paid advertisement. As several researchers have emphasized, the *Facebook Ads* advertising platforms are very well suited to providing the demographics and interests of the people one wishes to reach (making use of the digital footprint of Facebook users), thereby specifying and honing in on those users who are of interest (Iannelli et al. 2020). In the case of my own research, the members of the possible target groups were defined by age (20–60 years), Hungarian residency, engaged or newly married status, and interest shown in marriage ceremonies and weddings. I used Facebook Ads to promote my survey twice in the course of April and May, for three days at a time in the form of a paid advertisement; the April ad reached 23,900 Facebook users (with 1400 activities) and the May ad reached 12,200 people (448 responses). Altogether, I reached 34,531 Facebook users; this figure does not exclude duplications, but for the two periods I targeted partly different groups in terms of social stratification, educational level, and the counties targeted.

The respondents filled in the questionnaires voluntarily, and a total of 490 people did so. 72.7% of the respondents were aged between 20 and 30 years, and 27.1% ranged from 31 to 50. The overwhelming majority declared themselves to be of Hungarian nationality (3 Swabian or German, one Romanian). 60.2% had graduated from university/college, 2% had obtained a PhD, 30.6% had a high school diploma, 7.7% had graduated from vocational or technical high school, 1% had received a post-secondary certificate, and 1% had associate degrees. 25.5% lived in the capital; 29.4% in a county capital or a large town; 25.5% in a small town; 19% in villages; and 3% on a farm. Beyond the questionnaires,

I received numerous responses, reflections, and thanks (in e-mails or Facebook comments). In addition, I recorded 40 in-depth interviews with brides planning weddings at the time of COVID-19. After answering the online questionnaire, the brides volunteered to be interviewed. The call for interviews was included as the last point of the questionnaire. The majority of the brides interviewed lived in the capital or in large towns and county capitals (Somogy, Csongrád, and Baranya counties) and were college graduates aged between 20 and 35 years. Two of them worked abroad.

MACRO-CONTEXTUAL CONSTRAINTS, PRECEDENTS, CONTEXTS

The direct influence of regulations concerning the family and population policy

In my opinion, the number of weddings increased during the time of the pandemic because there had already been a trend in place in recent years. Between January and December 2019, 65,300 couples got married, 28% (14,472) more than in the previous year (what is more, 2019 saw the largest number of weddings take place since 1990). In addition to a variety of personal motivations, including romantic love or the pressures arising from family or societal expectations, the recently introduced demographic policy measures played an increasingly important part – especially such as the Childbirth Incentive Loan (Babaváró hitel) and Family Housing Allowance (CSOK, Családi Otthonteremtési Kedvezmény) offering favorable terms for loans and subsidies. Being married and planning to have a child are necessary conditions for accessing these. It is clear from all the available information that the need to access credit plays a significant and explicit role in planning, timing, reorganizing, and replanning weddings. According to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO, Hungarian acronym KSH), the striking rise in the number of marriages contracted in 2019 coincided precisely with the introduction of the Childbirth Incentive Loan. Thus, the high wedding rate is a direct consequence of earlier social policy interventions aimed to stimulate, in an economic sense, the will to get married. People also got married during the pandemic because they had strong economic, social, and cultural, as well as emotional reasons for it. From my 2019, pre-COVID-19 research, it transpired that people wishing to get married justified their decision with their personal, individualized economic, legal,

and social decisions and/or with their strong emotional motivation, religious ideas, their own biography, or the specificities of their particular relationship.

At the level of motivation, emotions and self-interest may intermingle. Why is this important? The social scientific literature does not reflect much on the multiple motivations for getting married; we do not know much about how these are related. Until recently, social scientists posited that differences between marriages contracted on an emotional basis, citing romantic sentiments and marriages dictated by various practical and economic interests, signaled differences in modernity (Goode 1963; Giddens 1992; Illouz 2012; Fáber 2019). Most recently, Paul Valentine, Stephen Beckerman and Catherine Alès demonstrated for South American marriages that personal desires and various socio-economic and political necessities – trying to attain exogamy or endogamy, or the exchange of women – can be equally found among the motivations (Valentine & Beckerman & Alès 2017). It seems to me that not only is this evident to social scientists, but those involved also interpret it in a similarly complex way.

Beyond the multiplicity of motivations, one must recognize that their relevance may vary situationally over the course of wedding planning. Often, they may be important to members of the couple, their family, or broader or narrower circles to a greater or lesser degree and in different ways. Acceptance, internalization, or rejection of the various, plural motivations of different people (be they supportive or negative) is a constant accompaniment to the organization of weddings. During the wedding process, they can be internalized and be enforced in varying ways: they may define certain ceremonies and events (partly or wholly) and may also influence their interpretation. For example, only one of the members of the couple attaches importance to the civil ceremony for legal or economic reasons (i.e., being married is necessary for some reason); or the bride's or the groom's religious motivations call for the Big Day and within that the church ceremony; or they want to get married in a civil ceremony because of their joint emotional attachment (e.g., romantic love); or they organize the Big Day because of family/parental pressure. At yet other times, they marry because of love and for economic reasons; they organize the Big Day driven by the childhood dreams of the bride; fulfilling the wishes of the grandmother, they also perform the religious ceremony, but they wish to celebrate their own relationship and happiness with the wedding reception. The variations are endless. It also follows from this that a civil ceremony conducted with two witnesses on a weekday may only serve to obtain a 'piece of paper', to qualify for the favorable credit opportunities, but it may also genuinely represent the strengthening of their sense of security, trust, and the relationship itself, or raise the level of the commitment of the couple to new heights. Along with the civil ceremony, church ceremonies, and wedding receptions are often interpreted

as the 'real' rituals of the act of getting married (for religious, spiritual, or individual reasons that are specific to the relationship, and for normative reasons as well). They, too, may strengthen, deepen, or raise the given relationship to a new level. Couples who had already married legally, but because they had not had a wedding reception, considered themselves only engaged to be married, chose to ritualize the routine[1] by bearing witness to their existing relationship and common identity or by trying to bring forth something new from their life together until then: the next level, the next steps to be taken together.

Thus, I am arguing that getting married is primarily constructed from personal, socially contextualized experiences from the given relationship of the couple and can primarily be interpreted from their point of view. On the level of narrative strategies, they always attributed secondary importance to credit and economic factors and always ranked 'love' first – however, when talking about other people's weddings, they often stressed that they knew people who only got married because of favorable credit opportunities. In terms of organizing weddings, these various interests and emotions are manifested differently. While weddings are primarily organized for the sake of entertainment and the sharing of joy and happiness, the celebration of a new level of the relationship – besides conducting the civil and religious ceremony with the expectation of and desire to take vows in front of the state, God, themselves, friends, and family – justified the spectacular celebration with both love and actual legal and economic consequences. Although some of the motivations necessitate a spectacular feast with many participants, others do not at all. It needs to be noted that the increase in the number of marriages contracted during COVID-19 cannot be explained solely by the effect of favorable terms of credit. Among the V4 countries, in 2019, Slovakia also introduced similarly favorable terms of credit (couples under 35 have access to favorable credit from the State Housing Development Fund (ŠFRB) for the purpose of buying and renovating real estate). Nonetheless, during the pandemic there was a significant decrease in the number of marriages.

The reinterpretation of marriage and the rites of getting married

It is important to stress that favorable terms of credit also influenced contemporary marriage trends both before and after COVID-19 in other, indirect, implicit ways. Weddings, popularized and motivated by the availability of favorable credits, functioned as catalysts in themselves: they became increasingly common through the example of family and friends, while the media continually kept alive the idea that there was a wedding boom and that marriage had once

again become fashionable. Thus, for example, the infographics based on the data of KSH (HCSO) published on Facebook in February 2020 highlighted that "there has not been such a boom in marriage in nearly 30 years" (KSH 2020).

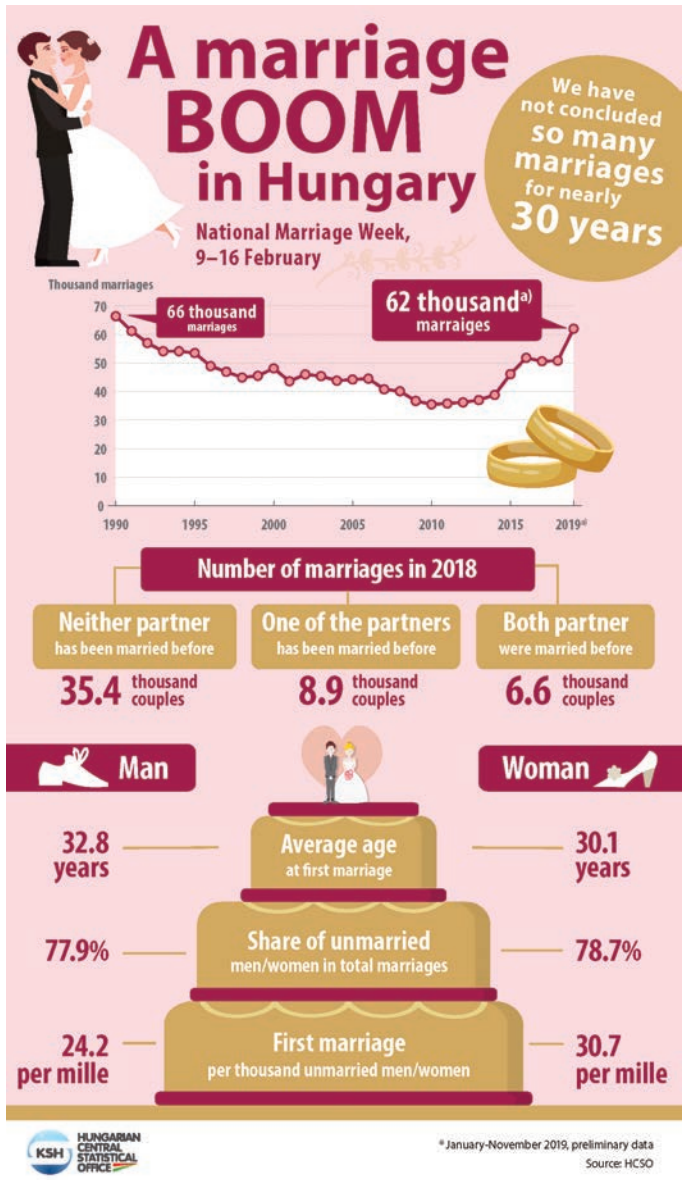

Figure 1. *A marriage boom in Hungary. Infographics by Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2020. Source: https://www.ksh.hu/infografika/2020/hazassag_eng.pdf.*

This popularity not only generated a positive attitude but also set in motion a critical discourse in connection with the phenomenon, which led to a serious societal debate. Numerous critical voices could be heard or read about the dangers of love and marriage dictated by economic self-interest, the worsening divorce statistics, and the crisis of marriage, and the instant weddings lacking festive rites, undertaken for the sake of 'getting the papers'.

> *ZG (male): Money is pouring in.*
> *XY (woman): I guess it* [the number of marriages contracted] *rose at such a rate because of Family Housing Allowance, Childbirth Incentive Loan and the like. …*
> *XX (woman): It is rather positive. …*
> *XZ (woman): What is positive, dear XX? That, let's go Mary, I'll marry you, we'll make 3 kids in exchange for 10 million forints? For me what is good is that my husband married me out of love, and we'll make as many children as we can raise without the help of the state. But each has her own preference, of course.* (12 February 2020, KSH 2020)

> *YY (woman): The many CSOK-marriages...* [Family Housing Allowance] *In 5 years the divorce statistics will rise, and the lawyers will have a field day.* (12 February 2020, KSH 2020)

The debaters are looking at the significant rise in contemporary marriage rates from the outside and based on the structural connections they recognize and in the public discourses they participate in, they primarily connect the increase to the appearance of various forms of credit tied to getting married. These discourses in turn qualify and, on the level of hegemonic representations, create the crisis of contemporary marriage, highlighting the paradoxical relationship between the act of getting married and the institution of marriage (see also the problematic of the wedding paradox, Carter & Duncan 2018; Willoughby & James 2017).

Looking at the paradox from within, from the point of view of brides and wedding providers, the picture is different. In the case of one's own wedding and marriage, the 'wedding paradox' seems almost irrelevant, or both brides and wedding providers attempt to consciously push aside this meaning and association. The institution of marriage that from the outside (because of divorce or cohabitation without marriage) seems to be in crisis, from the inside, from the point of view of those planning to get married or those newly married, does not seem to be in that much of a crisis since they are looking at it through the prism of their own marriage and wedding. This, to start out from one's own

relationship rather than from contemporary societal or genealogical (e.g., family) knowledge and experience, is what brides advise each other and this is what wedding providers call attention to, too:

> *I agree that there are positive examples. I think it is unnecessary to generalize and approach our own wedding with the idea that we'll get divorced because that is what is typical for this society. You should look at what is typical of you and your partner, not what is typical for millions of others*. (Bride, April 2019)

Although brides are well aware of the public discourses related to the decline and crisis of marriage (of crises related to divorce, infidelity, mistrust, or resulting from the juxtaposition of economic interests and sentiments, etc.), they rarely thematize them in connection with their own wedding. Primarily, they mention them in connection with actual crises, setbacks, or problems (infidelity, divorce).

These criticisms elicited various reflections from the couples to be married. Thinking about their weddings, they partly gave clichéd (hegemonic) responses and partly began to formulate their individual, personal responses about what exactly marriage and getting married meant, as opposed to the criticisms. For example, those concerned interpreted their planned marriage individually and situationally in light of their own relationship, also reflecting on their wedding. Marriage itself was often defined through the relationship of the given couple. Through undergoing the ceremonies entailed in getting married (at a city hall or at church); getting through the Big Day (commitment ceremony and/or church wedding); signing the (official) papers; but much more so through the promises, wows made to each other, the exchange of rings, the ceremonies and the feast shared with others, the relationship of the couple can reach a(n individually) new level. What precisely this new level means also depends on the individual conditions and biography of the relationship: moving in together (if earlier they lived apart); having a child (if they did not already have a child); buying real estate (if they did not already own their own real estate); a closer, stronger connection (if they consider their relationship to be strengthened by getting married); legal unity (if earlier they were not declaring their taxes jointly). Thus, much depends on the prehistory of the relationship prior to the marriage. Marriage is interpreted in individual, particular ways in close connection with the relationship and the wedding but also in adjustment to communal, family, and other public discourses – in concert with or in opposition to them.

Thus, this novel popularity and the accompanying critical discourses, as well as the reflections and answers would-be married couples formulated in response to these, made them rethink the new-old functions and meaning of

getting married and marriage, which, according to some views, had become an unpopular, outmoded, individualized, destabilized institution (in light of various modernization processes, this has long been the general trend in the social sciences; see, e.g., Cherlin 2004; Treas & Lui & Gubernskaya 2014).

Looking for further social scientific explanations for the drastically different trajectory of Hungarian wedding trends as compared to international practices, one can see (and from the point of view of the current paper this is going to be the most important factor) that – in connection with the strong economic, social and emotional motivations and taking into consideration the partially related fact of the novel popularity of getting married and the relevant critical discourses, factors and processes – during the period of the pandemic some innovative experimentation with rituals and the construction of traditions in the realm of weddings was taking place.

Those getting married, their families, friends, as well as the actors of the wedding industry, paying attention to the new rules of the restrictive regulations and their own needs and those of their social circles, attempted to adapt the traditional-modern practices of getting married to the new possibilities. Not only did they decide to postpone or go ahead with their weddings, but despite or rather in tandem with the changed circumstances, they attempted to hold on to their original ideas; or giving up on certain expectations, they formulated new ones and replanned their weddings. Those concerned began to choose from among elements of old and new, traditional and modern, Hungarian and international wedding practices and rites. The would-be married couples tried to realize their own ideas through invention and bricolage. Or, under the influence of the changed judicial-economic structures and contexts, they reinvented them using identifiable, recognized elements, rituals, norms, ideologies, and events, constituent parts of weddings, seeing them emically either as models or as anti-models, counterpoints. In the course of bricolage, the parties concerned, reflecting the critical discourses on contemporary marriages and also the marriage boom, primarily recognized both individually and communally the plurality of rituals and practices and the related ideologies. They realized that there was not one but many local, regional, denominational, ethnic, national, urban, or rural wedding traditions, and that adhering to these traditions was not mandatory. Thus, in connection with getting married, there is no stable moral consensus. Besides this recognition of pluralism as well as the active use of relativist narrative strategies and ideologies, we also find various hegemonic tendencies. For example, when in connection with a certain question, the discussants or debaters were interested in the validity of tradition and its central, 'true' meaning, they were arguing in favor of a definitive meaning that overwrote any other meaning.

In this respect, the question of social control often crops up. That is to say, who the wedding belongs to, who can interfere in its organization, who defines who gets invited, who can pick the venue and the rituals: the couple, the parents, the wedding providers, or possibly, friends? There is no universal moral consensus in this respect. While many emphasized the couple's own expectations, others stressed the importance of joint family decisions. It can be stated that in connection with decisions concerning weddings, an increasing role is allocated to the personal experiences, ideas, and online discussions of contemporaries and fellow brides, as well as to the normative ideologies of wedding providers. The latter are also voiced in online spaces for the most part. Among relatives-friends, the ideas of female relatives (mother-in-law, mother, grandmother) and, less often, male relatives (primarily father and father-in-law) were incorporated into the planning process. They mostly stuck to the elements, rituals, and rules interpreted to be traditional, such as the more general wedding traditions, reception of guests, opening dance, church ceremony, the presence of the parents at the civil ceremony, bridesman and groomsman (*vőfély*), guest list, a traditional sequence of dishes, the order of rituals performed, wedding script, etc.

I consider these reinterpretations and revision of the functions, modes and meanings of marriage and getting married a distinctive contemporary Hungarian practice, a cultural factor that played a decisive role in determining the number of weddings during COVID-19. Although I would not say that there are no international parallels to these processes of reinterpretation, this is, for example, what is happening with the newly popular Central Asian bride abductions (Werner 2009; Nedoluzhko & Agadjanian 2015: 861–882). Sociological studies examining the pre-COVID situation primarily emphasized that although it was true that the systems, structures, and relations that earlier directly regulated marriages and weddings and the 'regulative traditions' that flowed through these had in the course of time receded into the background, weddings have never been as free and devoid of restrictions (Carter & Duncan 2017: 4); there are, however, "other", "not declining" traditions (Gross 2005) that have been inherited from previous generations and are still active today. Referring to the ideas of Neil Gross (ibid.), the researchers state the following:

> *The regulative traditions of systems and institutions, with transgressions punished by communities or state authorities, are everywhere in decline. In contrast, 'meaning constitutive traditions' around cultural meanings and personal identities, which operate internally to the agent, continue to be passed down between generations*. (Carter & Duncan 2018: 58)

These play an important implicit role in the structuring and directing the decision-making of individuals regarding personal relationships and in providing information in connection with this. For example, traditional weddings or the ideal of a life-long marriage are fixed as hegemonic ideals of such meaning-constructive traditions. In connection with British marriages, which are at a historical low, never have there been so few people getting married. Authors argue that weddings essentially reproduce traditional gender roles, the oppression of women, and traditional meanings (Carter & Duncan 2018; Carter 2022). The status competition, the conspicuous consumption manifested in lavish weddings, serves to represent the prestige and social status of the couple and especially of the family. A beautiful, large-scale wedding is a kind of prize for the woman who contracts to serve her husband and his family in her married life – she devotes her life to them. That is to say, she reinforces male dominance and the subservient position of women. In their opinion, then, large-scale weddings serve to strengthen the institution of marriage and support its stability, even if the divorce rate continues to grow. In essence, they reinvent the traditional white, middle-class weddings and thereby the traditional, old meanings of contemporary marriages (Carter & Duncan 2017, 2018). This is related to the fact that according to those studying the question, although British weddings strive to be unique and personal, due to the social embeddedness of the couple, they are remarkably the same (Carter & Duncan 2018: 4, 16).

> *[T]he bricolage process will tend to re-serve tradition, hence emphasizing habitual adaption more than reflexive, intensive and active creation of relationships and weddings. This project of the couple is not limited to the couple; it is linked to, and cannot be separated from, relations with others … this display demands something special, but the process of creating something special inevitably draws on tradition.* (Carter & Duncan 2017: 16–17)

Julia Carter and Simon Duncan refer to this as individualized conformity (ibid.). The situation is significantly different in the case of Hungarian weddings.

INNOVATION AND TRADITION IN THE WORLD OF QUARANTINE WEDDINGS

In my view, it follows from the above that during COVID-19 couples were more or less willing to enter into new situations, dared to swim against the tide, dared to innovate and transform – since the normative possibility for this was

already available in social discourses. Paying attention to the new rules of the restrictive regulations, social expectations, and their own needs, the couples attempted to adapt the new-old practices of getting married to the new possibilities. In keeping with the new rules, at times transgressing them, they reinterpreted and replanned their weddings.

The question of who had the right to participate in organizing the wedding and the individual-communal interpretations of the new-old traditions is frequently on the agenda during the bricolage and improvisation processes accompanying the replanning activities during COVID-19. What was the valid tradition? Were there multiple, legitimate traditions? Did they have to be followed and invoked? Was it possible to stray from the paths marked out by them? On online surfaces during COVID-19, brides often asked each other about the various modes (rural, urban, traditional, modern) and meanings of marriage, of getting married, of civil weddings and wedding receptions. In the meantime, questions about both general and special norms, rules, traditions, customs, fashions, and expectations related to getting married were raised several times, and about how these could be met and validated during COVID-19. Brides were especially keen to find out about the available regulations and guidelines.

I observed two kinds of strategies in the course of the replanning of weddings during COVID-19: the rejection of traditions and, interrelated with this, the acceptance of innovations; and also that reorganization was justified by references to norms and traditions. The reinterpreted and modified traditions thus evoked were seen in a positive light; they functioned more as preferred patterns, norms, or models to be adapted (Shanklin 1981; Handler & Linnekin 1984: 281). The two strategies were not mutually exclusive, even in the case of a single wedding. The wedding practices most characteristic of the pandemic period came into being as a result of the distinctive intermingling of the two strategies: evocations of both innovation and tradition. Simple, puritanical weddings with few or only the strictly necessary number of participants at civil ceremonies, or so-called mini, micro-weddings, minimonies, elopements (lacking viable options, wedding providers advertised and proposed these too) – all have numerous international parallels. During the relaxation of the rules (primarily in late spring, summer, and early fall), large wedding receptions returned temporarily, but at the same time, smaller weddings remained popular. Weddings bringing together characteristics of small (personal) and big weddings have also become common – different features of the wedding are separated in time and functions, resulting in the holding of civil weddings early and putting off the (large) wedding reception until later.

During COVID-19, both large and small, simple weddings were interpreted variously as either traditional or modern, and wedding providers, brides and

their families rethought their normative significance in getting married. Several argued for the intimacy and simplicity of small weddings based on personal experiences, family legends, and other knowledge and personal convictions. One bride wrote a few inspiring lines and accompanied them with a faded picture in support of small weddings about the modest, but all the more intimate wedding of her grandmother.

> *It was not a big wedding, there weren't many guests, but there were 3 children, 9 grandchildren, and a life-long marriage. Unfortunately, neither of them is with us anymore. I would be happy if others could gain strength from this story in these hard times! Hang in there everyone!*

A young woman who had already been married for three years wrote this on April 29, 2020. "She is right; we should remember that marriage is what is important and not the wedding or the circumstances surrounding it," agreed several others. These can be seen as personalization, intimacy, or at times, metaphors of modernity and personal freedom.

Tradition during the time of COVID-19 did not only mean small, simple weddings; more often, it meant large, luxurious weddings with many participants. The petitioners often recalled that in the pre-COVID period, large-scale weddings were the norm and used this to challenge the government's restrictions. Thus, it also became a tool of collective resistance. The signatories of the above-mentioned online petition for holding wedding receptions referred to Hungarian 'custom' in connection with weddings in thousands of comments. Namely, that the wedding reception was an essential, traditional part of getting married, which was needed for moral, customary, and emotional reasons. There were dozens of references to tradition, customs, and traditional weddings among the contributions. That is to say, they argued that by holding wedding receptions they were merely trying to keep tradition and customs alive: "I am signing because it is fitting to keep traditions alive"; "We would like to hold our wedding reception along with the civil ceremony according to tradition"; "I intend this to be a one-time event in my life and want to experience it with the family and friends in accordance with tradition" (May 5, 2020); "I am signing because our Big Day will be on July 18; we would also like to hold a reception with 30 people as it has always been the custom"; "I would like to be able to hold the wedding ceremony and the reception in keeping with the Hungarian custom" (May 3, 2020).

Let us look at the strategies of those who postponed and only held their wedding and reception after the lifting of the restrictions or organized a small wedding during the restrictions or shortly thereafter. We will also see examples

of the coming together of the two strategies; how and why, after a small and puritanical wedding ceremony, the couple also held their big reception.

Mini-weddings, micro-weddings, and civil wedding ceremonies

The results of my questionnaire examining the decisions of those planning or replanning their wedding at the time of COVID-19 showed that about 41.1% of the respondents looked upon mini-weddings, held with just a few guests in keeping with the anti-virus restrictions, as the new normal. Primarily, people who held their COVID-wedding separately from the wedding reception were those who needed the 'papers' as soon as possible, and thus scheduling the wedding was important to them. 19.8% (also) wished to get married because they wanted to obtain credit (more precisely, the Childbirth Incentive Loan). 2% of them were expecting a child, and 41.8% were planning to have a child; 18.6% were preparing to buy a house, build or expand a house, partly from loans and/or monetary wedding gifts. 3.1% were also motivated by various tax breaks. 27.5% of them simply did not want to wait any longer and postpone the long-planned wedding. For 8.8%, a puritanical wedding was just fine as it was all about them and this was what was important to them. In other cases, a small, personal wedding was the couple's preference, and they took advantage of the regulations to organize such a ceremony.

It often happened that in such cases, the couple used the restrictions imposed by the pandemic to justify their own ideas that differed from the expectations of the community or the family. The restrictions came in handy for those couples who did not want to have much hoopla at their wedding, who did not want to be the center of attention, who did not want to partake in various wedding games representing sexuality and patriarchal gender roles expected by society, wedding guests, and family. Rather, they had always wished for a small, intimate, and personalized wedding, and because of the restrictions they could easily achieve this. Because during COVID-19, this is what normal, fashionable, and normative weddings became. These weddings also acquired their own denomination, such as minimony, micro/mini/COVID/quarantine wedding. Couples tried to replace 'real', traditional weddings with these miniaturized versions that evoked big weddings in their details.

In such cases, couples got married at the city hall or in a church ceremony in front of two witnesses or the immediate family, without a wedding reception, without wedding providers and services. The wedding day then continued with just the couple or with an intimate family circle, or friends and/or neighbors, accompanied by friendly conversation and a reduced feast. It was not uncommon

for couples to visit a fast-food restaurant or to order pizza following the wedding ceremony. At the same time, the newly married couple tried to carry out some of the ritualistic elements of traditional wedding receptions. For example, dancing the first dance on the balcony, the slicing of the cake and partaking of it.

This phenomenon has attracted plenty of lively media attention from the very beginning. Most often, the newlyweds documented the civil or church ceremony audio-visually (photographed or filmed themselves or streamed live in some form or another (Zoom, closed Facebook group, YouTube, Vimeo, etc.)). The only provider whose services the organizers of mini-weddings tried to insist on was the photographer. During those periods when the number and identity of the participants in civil wedding ceremonies were determined by two people besides the couple (or according to official rules, wedding providers were not allowed to participate in the ceremony), they often substituted the photographer for (one of) the originally designated witnesses. Although a legally valid marriage requires the presence of an officiant, the couple to be married, and two witnesses, couples felt strongly that their wedding memories needed to be recorded visually. Based on family recollections, the experiences of others, and personal convictions, they tried to assure themselves that small weddings could also be 'real', or that in the recent past, for example, during the two world wars or during the period of early socialism, this was precisely what wedding traditions had to be like. According to a 1967 article by the weekly *Magyar ifjúság* (Hungarian Youth): "Earlier, the urban wedding used to be a family celebration; nowadays [in the 1960s], it belongs to the wider community, or at least this is how young people feel, even if the family does not always understand this" (Kovács 1967: 18).

Postponing or separating/detaching wedding receptions from the official wedding

Those who postponed, that is to say, tried to reorganize their wedding for some time after the lifting of the restrictions, basically voted for large 'traditional' weddings with many participants – in keeping with their own original plans and because of parental expectations. From my 2020 questionnaire examining the decisions of those planning and replanning weddings, filled in by 500 brides, it can be stated that 47.4% of the respondents did this. For example, many of the wedding planners and redesigners insisted on big weddings, big family celebrations, spectacular rites and ceremonies, and at the same time rejected puritanical, guestless, simplified civil ceremonies because they thought the

former to be traditional and normative. They considered it to be a legitimate model that they tried to conform to because it "has always been like that". Decisions concerning the postponement or redesigning of weddings, and especially the cancellation and postponement of wedding services, were legally justified by the situation of force majeure due to COVID-19. The most popular and economically viable strategies proved to be restructuring, deferral, searching for new dates, and waiting. The biggest structural barrier to postponements and reorganizations, primarily from the point of view of the service industry, was the well-founded fear of the piling up of fall-winter and future weddings and receptions. That is to say, together with the weddings that were being postponed and those originally planned for the following year, as well as the newly scheduled weddings, it would hardly be possible to find free dates, because couples still preferred weekends for their Big Day. Not surprisingly, wedding service providers began to argue for – still neglected – weekdays as wedding days. The interests of wedding service providers were best served by postponements, renegotiations of dates with the customers, holding on to reservations and advances, and planning of the following year's expenses and revenues (possible increase in service fees). They primarily supported cooperation, finding mutually satisfactory solutions and compromises, as well as decision-making that pointed in this direction. In the case of cancellation, customers were hoping to get their deposit back, and in the case of postponement, to find and hold on to 'good' dates and venues. Decisions to cancel were primarily motivated by the necessity of reducing costs. Because their financial situation had become precarious, couples decided to cancel certain services, reduce the overall budget for the wedding (4.7% of respondents) and limit the number of guests (8.4%).

Simple mini-weddings with few participants were complemented by large-scale 'real' wedding receptions after the lifting of the restrictions. In these cases, one can speak of wedding rites separated from each other in space, time, and function. Those who were not thinking of an official mini-wedding alone but also of a large wedding reception at a later time, wanted to experience a truly festive, communal event with friends and family, thereby also meeting various family and social expectations on the second occasion. An important consideration was to ensure that this second wedding had a rite of passage aspect: for example, by making the first wedding ordinary, not wearing the wedding ring after the ceremony; or by introducing other wedding rites on the day of the second wedding ceremony. They either celebrated with a church ceremony (15.9%) or with a new ritual, that of a confirmation ceremony (18.1%) officiated by a ceremony leader. The smaller, two-witness civil ceremonies held earlier and the Big Days (wedding receptions and confirmation ceremonies) complementing them at later

dates are not the product of innovations during COVID-19 but have been part of Hungarian marriage practices for several years.

However, during COVID-19, their popularity increased significantly, and their earlier sporadic occurrence became a trend. Hungarian confirmation ceremonies are a distinctive subtype of commitment ceremonies practiced internationally in cases of unregistered, unofficial wedding ceremonies. We have relatively little ethnographic data about these. Contemporary anthropological research has primarily written about the phenomenon in connection with certain minority groups, such as European (e.g., British Muslims), as cases of unregistered, unofficial marriages (Akhtar 2018), and LGBTQ weddings as alternatives to Western ones (Marzullo & Herdt 2011: 535–536; Reczek & Elliott & Umberson 2009). Although unregistered, unofficial unions are very frequent not only among the minority groups but among the majority, ordinary cases (they occur from the United States through Great Britain in many places), lacking social scientific analysis, we can only get information about these from wedding portals on the internet. Based on this, it seems that worldwide, the most important argument in favor of separating the confirmation ceremony and the Big Day, thus liberated from the burdens of the formal wedding ceremony, is to allow the couple to pay attention only to themselves, their families, friends, and acquaintances. On the one hand, in the Hungarian case, couples choose 'piecemeal' weddings with a confirmation ceremony on the Big Day primarily because of the 'congestion' of marriage rites and events or because of the extravagance and extraordinary nature of the wedding venue and date, as well as some other family-related or economic circumstances (e.g., illness, pregnancy, the wish to take out a loan). On the other hand, it also seems that by planning their wedding, brides seek to take control of it by making a conscious choice between a formal wedding and a confirmation ceremony. I also suppose that these narratives of wedding providers and brides that put the couple's and the bride's personal ideas, individuality, and their relationship on the central stage also constitute a reflection on the crisis of the institution of marriage in contemporary discourses (i.e., that there are many divorces, while at the same time numerous marriages are contracted primarily for economic reasons), therefore all this could be interpreted as a kind of cultural response.

CONCLUSION

What transpires from the above? People not only postponed or held their weddings, but they rather thought tactically. Despite the changed circumstances, or perhaps along with them, they either tried to stick to their original ideas – and

thus tried to postpone their wedding to such a time when they thought holding large wedding receptions with many guests would again be allowed (this strategy at times could have meant multiple postponements, even as many as four); or letting go of some of their expectations, and formulating new ones, they downscaled their wedding, or postponed or held the official wedding and postponed the wedding reception. It is my contention that the differences that can be observed in Hungarian wedding practices are the result of the context created by pre-pandemic social policies that encouraged getting married and the not unrelated individual decisions of couples. The high number of marriages contracted during COVID-19 is connected to the contemporary general trend of a rise in getting married in Hungary and to the successful and active experimentation and reinterpretation at the level of rituals and the institution. Worldwide, the restrictions during COVID-19 made impossible the holding of large weddings, considered to be the norm. In other countries, this led couples to cancel weddings, although several innovations, such as minimony, the popularity of mini- and micro-weddings, could also be observed elsewhere. In Hungary, despite restrictions due to the strong motivation to get married and social discourses that reinterpreted getting married and marriage itself, people tended to reorganize, replan, or hold small weddings and to schedule large celebrations for later.

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NOTE

[1] The sociologists Joseph C. Hermanowicz and Harriet P. Morgan use this term to refer to rituals that create and preserve collective identities. They argue that "patterns of affirmation indicate which customary activities a group considers sacred since affirmation occurs when a customary practice invested with the sacred is celebrated" (Hermanowicz & Morgan 1999: 211).

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Judit Balatonyi, PhD, is a Research Fellow supported by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) Premium Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. She has also been a lecturer at the Department of European Ethnology – Cultural Anthropology and at the Institute of Education Department of Romani Studies (University of Pécs). She has authored a book titled *A gyimesi lakodalmak: Közös kultúra és különböző identitások?* (Weddings in Gyimes: Common Culture and Particular Identities? Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2017). The title of her current research project is "Marriage and Marriage Rituals in Hungary in the 21st Century: Tradition and Change – Global and Local Connections". The purpose of this project is the study of the changing meanings, patterns, roles, and functions of marriage and weddings at multiple sites and in several social milieus in 21st-century Hungary.

balatonyi.judit@gmail.com

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VINDICATIONS AND CUSTOMS: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL FESTIVE RITUALS IN SPAIN

Lidia Montesinos Llinares
Department of Philosophy of Values and Social Anthropology
University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU, Spain
lidiamontesinos@gmail.com

Margaret Bullen
Department of Philosophy of Values and Social Anthropology
University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU, Spain
maggie.bullen@ehu.eus

Begoña Pecharromán Ferrer
Farapi Koop. / Ankulegi Basque Anthropological Association, Spain
bego@farapi.com

Abstract: This article presents an overview of studies on women's participation in festive rituals and cultural customs in Spain. Demands by women to participate in manifestations of what is today termed intangible cultural heritage began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, feminist anthropology has followed these processes of protest and demands for change. Events on the ground have prompted a revision of theoretical frameworks for understanding these phenomena, placing greater emphasis on the interrelationship between the social and symbolic order within the sex/gender system. In this sense, in Spain, and especially in the Basque Country, there has been an intersection between academic research, the actions of self-organised women and the public administration, bringing into dialogue the theoretical, political-activist, and institutional spheres. In this article, we focus on the strategies and practical ways in which equality is sought, materialised, and performed in festive rituals, plotting their evolution to more democratic, participatory, and egalitarian events. We conclude that the study of the *fiesta* from a gender perspective is crucial to rethinking the way we analyse rituals, processes of change and continuity in festive customs in relation to feminist demands. At the same time, it is a source of inspiration when plotting processes of social and symbolic transformation that question or reverse the patriarchal and hierarchical order of our societies.

Keywords: equality, feminism, festive ritual, *fiesta*, intangible cultural heritage, local institutions, strategies for change, symbolic efficacy, women's participation

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we present an overview of the processes of change in festive annual rituals in Spain,[1] in relation to the incorporation of women in the *fiesta*, the questioning of gender roles and the binary system of social and symbolic gender classifications.[2] We focus on initiatives undertaken by women, local governments and other social agents to adapt the androcentric organisation of local festivals to a contemporary agenda of equal rights between men and women, based on the principle of equality, modifying gender stereotypes, sexism and its violences and the hierarchies of masculine prestige (Ortner & Whitehead 1981).

The attempt to adapt festive rituals in this way is in keeping with the transformation of Spanish society in the past fifty years. It is from the 1970s onwards, with the end of Franco's dictatorship and the beginning of democracy marked by the proclamation of the Spanish Constitution in 1978, that women were able to take a more visible part in social, economic, and political life. As women joined the workforce of Spanish society, they also sought to take a more active part in leisure activities (Bullen 2003; Del Valle 1996). At that time, the feminist movement, local governments, and society as a whole influenced a change in the festive model in reference to the way festivals were organised and celebrated (Boissevain 1992) and in relation to who could participate. Some authors speak of a process of democratisation of the *fiesta* (Gilmore 1993; Villarroya & García Pilán 2006), until then controlled and manipulated as propaganda for Franco's fascist regime (Antuna Gancedo 2016; Hernández Burgos & Rina Simón 2022). As women accessed areas of social life denied them by the dictatorship in general and the gender politics of National Catholicism in particular (Morcillo 2010), they ceased to play a merely supportive role of a woman / wife-mother and entered social life in their own right (Bullen & Egido 2003). Where previously they assumed invisible domestic tasks, such as sewing costumes, cooking, and taking care of children, or took up their places on the pavements or in the squares to praise and applaud the parading, processing, or dancing men, they now began to take the lead as participants in the festive rituals.

However, as we will see, the incorporation of women did not occur homogeneously throughout Spain nor across the whole spectrum of festivities, dances and rites that constitute the ritual year and the rich festive heritage of this country (Homobono Martìnez 2004). As at the end of the nineteenth century and during Franco's dictatorship, a limited number of women took part in certain *fiestas* through the creation of stereotypical female roles related to beauty, femininity, and youth: queens and ladies in waiting, majorettes, *cantineras* (canteen girls), and *abanderadas* (standard-bearers) (Antuña Gancedo 2019; Martínez Pozo 2015).[3] In some places and in certain types of rituals, women have not been in-

corporated at all and men continue to be the protagonists; in other places, there is resistance to their incursion in a predominantly male space and, in some cases, major conflicts have arisen over the issue of how women should be included, sometimes to the point of violence both during the *fiesta* itself and throughout the year, causing disruption and turmoil in everyday local life (Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Montesinos Llinares 2019).

For this reason, there has been a growth of social anthropological research in Spain on the evolution of festivals from a gender perspective and latterly in relation to the concept of intangible cultural heritage. Over the past 25 years, we have accrued an increasingly wide range of case studies, permitting a comparative analysis (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021; Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Gisbert & Rius-Ulldemolins 2019; Gisbert Gracia & Rius-Ulldemolins & Hernández i Martí 2019; Montesinos Llinares 2019) that has enhanced our understanding of the tension between the maintenance of folkloric or festive customs and traditions eminently carried out by men, and the demand and vindication of women to participate in them (Gisbert Gracia 2015; Montesinos & Bullen 2021). We will pay particular attention to the strategies employed by the different agents implicated in the process of boosting women's participation in local *fiestas*, underlining the interrelation between feminist demands, academic research, and institutional and legislative action.

ETHNOGRAPHIC EMERGENCES: THE RISE OF A FIELD OF STUDY

It was the eruption in 1996 of a controversy over the participation of women in the *Alardes*[4] of Irun and Hondarribia – two neighbouring towns on the border of France and Spain – that first brought to our attention that equal rights for women were far from being achieved in the festive field and that, in fact, ritual constituted a stronghold for androcentric privilege, constructed as a sacred space beyond the reach of the Spanish Constitution and the principle of legal equality between women and men (Bullen & Egido 2003; Bullen & Pérez Galán 2019; Montesinos Llinares 2019; Montesinos & Bullen 2021). Following James Fernandez (1986), we considered the polemic to be an 'ethnographic emergence': an action or occurrence that brings to the surface an underlying reality that has been glossed over or ignored until something occurs to awaken our interest in or awareness of the situation (Díez Mintegi & Bullen 2012). The outright refusal received by the women who requested access to the *Alardes*

on equal terms with men and the violent reaction to their attempt to join the parade made visible the symbolic and structural violence reproduced in these festive rituals. This violence had been covered up by the defence of tradition and respect for historical veracity, arguing that if women had not participated in the battle that was being commemorated, they should likewise not participate in the *fiesta* that supposedly reproduced that historical event. This argument ignores the fact that the festival is more than a mere historical performance; it is the most representative and participatory cultural and festive expression of the municipality.

The case of the Bidasoa *Alardes* has received the most attention both because of the violence exercised in the two towns and because of its duration, still unresolved 25 years after its emergence.[5] Moreover, its study over time has developed in parallel to the process of consolidation of feminist anthropology in the University of the Basque Country, permitting a more theoretical reflection on violence, androcentric culture, and the myth of the Basque matriarchy (Bullen 2003; Díez Mintegui & Bullen 2010).[6] As well as prompting further research, this case has become referential for other localities that have acted precisely to avoid such a scandalous situation in terms of equality in their *fiestas*, as we shall see later in the article.

Many changes have taken place since the 1970s and especially in the eighties and nineties and have been recorded both in the Basque Country and in other localities in Spain: the *Maskarada* in Zuberoa (Fernández de Larrinoa 1997),[7] the festivities of Moors and Christians in the province of Alicante (Heuzé 1999)[8] or the *cofradías* (brotherhoods) of the Holy Week processions in Málaga (Sánchez Domínguez 2003).[9] These studies show some reticence or stronger resistance to the inclusion of women, but also evidence of how women have devised strategies to achieve acceptance,[10] effecting changes that have gradually been normalised (Domene Verdú 2015; 2018; Montesinos Llinares 2019). Ethnographies are enhanced by folklore studies[11] and from a local historical perspective (Pascual Gisbert 2004; Rico Navarro 2005), providing depth and dynamism to the study of the presence of women in different eras.

In the twenty-first century, there has been an increase in anthropological studies from a feminist perspective, revealing the persistence of a sex/gender system that discriminates against women and is deeply rooted in expressions of popular and festival culture in Spain. Among the festivities analysed we find: the Parade of the Three Kings of Igualada in Catalonia (Lafita Solé 2013); the *Tamborrada* (drum festival) of Donostia / San Sebastián in the Basque Country (Moral 2014); the *Fallas* of Valencia (Gisbert Gracia & Rius Ulldemolins 2018); the Carnival of Cadiz in Andalusia (Sergidou 2020); the creation of the *Dimònies* (Female Demons) of Manacor and the *Mucada* of Sineu, both in Mal-

lorca (Alemany Sureda 2016; 2022); different dances in the Basque Country (Araolaza Arrieta 2020); or *La Patum* of Berga, also in Catalonia (Gisbert Gracia & Rius-Ulldemolins & Hernández i Martì 2019). To this long list, we can add the cases analysed by Farapi S.L. (2009), Montesinos Llinares (2019) and Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro (2019).[12]

This ethnographic material, moreover, allows us to reflect on the practical application of the principle of equality and, especially, on methods of social transformation advocated by activists implicated in the struggle for gender equality from different strands of feminism (Montesinos & Bullen 2021). The symbolic sphere emerges as a fertile field for feminists' demand for equality, in which we discover strategies devised by women wishing to participate and observe their performances. We see how they break rules and change customs, how they meet with resistance from traditional groups and adverse authorities but also elicit a political response and influence legislation.

STUDYING FESTIVE RITUALS FROM A GENDERED AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Although the study of festive phenomena, community rituals, folklore and popular culture has been a constant in social and cultural anthropology, we believe that the more recent gendered or feminist perspective can make an important contribution to the development of new theories for the analysis of the growing corpus of empirical material. Above all, it is the concept of sex/gender system that we wish to bring to bear on the analysis of festive rituals, in order to explain the difficulties and the resistances to proposals for more egalitarian festivals in general and women's participation in particular.

Following Raewyn W. Connell (1987) and Teresa Del Valle (2002), we apply the notion first proposed by Gayle Rubin (1975: 159): "a sex/gender system is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" – a conceptual tool that helps us to describe how the oppression of women, sexual minorities, and certain stereotyped aspects of gender roles are built and sustained. The concept of sex/gender system describes the social as a network of daily relationships and institutions that naturalise inequalities between women and men; inequalities established by a system of power that assigns differentiated roles and functions based on the sex-gender of people, roles and meanings that are internalised and perceived as normal (Bourdieu 1998). These relationships and institutional machinery are transversal, that is, they affect all areas of people's daily and social life, including symbolic aspects and cultural phenomena as festive rituals.

Margaret Bullen and Beatriz Pérez Galán (2019) have argued that the notion of system (power system, cultural system, sex/gender system) complexifies the analytical dichotomy that divides the world between the 'social order' of everyday reality and the 'symbolic order' which would include festivals (Bakhtin 1968 [1965]), and also the separation between profane time and sacred time (Durkheim 1912; Eliade 1959 [1957]). The understanding of the *fiesta* as sacred, as an almost mystical emotional experience, coincides with the arguments of those who defend tradition on the grounds of inexplicable emotions and often religious sentiment. Although these dichotomies help explain how a festival is perceived as something separate from everyday reality and outside the realm of equal rights – and so provides a clue to the resistance to women's equal participation in *fiestas* – the aforementioned studies show that in festive rituals both spheres are linked, interconnected, and in constant communication. This is why we have proposed that the vindication of women to participate in festive rituals has symbolic efficacy (Montesinos & Bullen 2021). Women's demands have proved to be endowed with a transformative power: transformative of imaginaries, bodily practices, social and political relations, legislation, family organisation, etc. For this reason, we consider it more appropriate to analyse festive models in terms of multiple systems (gender, cultural, social, etc.) traversed by a plethora of meanings that are constructed and perceived through the senses, emotions, and cognitive processes that are inextricably linked to bodily experiences.

Accepting that *fiestas* constitute a space for the reproduction of sex/gender systems, imbricated in the social structure and cultural context, we can appreciate how the traditional model of the festive rituals reflects the systems in which the festivals are inserted. Firstly, in aspects related to the social structure: in the political realm (systems of government, legal bodies); in economic management (systems of production-reproduction and distribution), and in social organisation (kinship systems, family formation). Secondly, in areas that are often linked to 'culture', such as: representational systems (languages, symbolic systems); material and immaterial culture (art objects, theatrical or musical performances, traditions, rituals, and festivals); value and belief systems (Bullen & Pérez Galán 2019: 25).

The idea of the difference between women and men is an idea that permeates all areas of social, symbolic, political, economic, and legal life (Connell 1987). The meaning of being a woman or a man, and the logic and practice associated with it, cuts across these axes and is embedded in the cultural system that shapes and informs the social thinking that governs public and personal life (MacKinnon 1989).

In this article then, we propose a theoretical framework that allows the intersection of gender, cultural, and social systems, in order to analyse the significance of the exclusion of women from the festive space and the importance of the actions taken to reinvent customs and traditions from a feminist and inclusive perspective. In this sense, we acknowledge the way *fiestas* function to make – or break – communities. They not only interrupt the daily routine, the rhythm of work and rest, but also have a communicative and exhibitionary function, to represent identities and histories, bring social actors into play, evoke multiple feelings and emotions, and call up a world of cyclically transmitted information and values that are linked to the family and the local community (Roma 1996). Their social, economic, and political importance should not be underestimated, as they tend to reproduce relations of status and privilege within the community and have been analysed as an instrument for the maintenance of social stratification and power relations (Rius-Ulldemolins & Gisbert & Vera 2021, among others).

Moreover, we wish to stress the ambiguous nature of ritual, focusing on the different social groups that reproduce or question the legitimacy of the system in the ritual, complying with or resisting institutionalised or informal mandates. We are particularly interested in the social and feminist movements that call for a change in the model of society in general and of the *fiesta* in particular. Feminist practice and theory have identified and analysed the established model of the *fiesta* as outdated, traditionalist and sexist, in urgent need of renovation in favour of a feminist model that guarantees women's freedom, autonomy, and pleasure (Bullen & Pérez Galán 2019; Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Guilló Arakistain 2016; Montesinos Llinares 2019). Along the lines proposed by Turner (1966; 1975), the *procedural symbolic analysis* of ritual implies understanding ritual as a metaphor of social life, as a drama (in its sequential scheme), but also as a game (attending to the liminal phase). Feminist scholarship has emphasised the question of desire, enjoyment, and creativity in the ritual and festive spheres (Muelas de Ayala 2018), understanding it as a place open to a Butlerian performativity of bodies (Butler 1990), highlighting the liberating aspect of ritual in the face of a constraining structure that perpetrates inequality and exploitation.

In our work, we have tracked the changes taking place in festive ritual practice and argued for a dynamic concept of culture and customs that allows for Hobsbawm & Ranger's (1983) reinvention of tradition, in opposition to a popular discourse of defence of cultural heritage and the preservation of tradition in the face of attack from the ravages of time, loss of values or sacrality, or disinterest in history.[13] We defend that these festive rituals, cyclical and representative of local communities, can be a space for the reparation of the

age-old exclusion of women in the festive realm, of their discrimination and historical undervaluation; a place of reconciliation in the face of symbolic and physical violence that has not yet found reparation (Montesinos & Bullen 2021). From this perspective, the *fiesta* – as a total social fact in the Maussian sense (Mauss 1924) – emerges as a privileged place for feminist and institutional intervention and for the performance of social transformation and composition.

IMPLICATED ANTHROPOLOGY FOR EQUALITY IN THE *FIESTA*

The awareness of the symbolic violence constituted by the exclusion of women from festivities has grown in proportion to social, academic, political, and institutional interest. Current gender equality legislation obliges public administrations to work to remove obstacles to effective equality, and the feminist movement is influencing social awareness in this sense. In the Basque Country, public institutions have valued the contribution of anthropology in advising on public policies for equal rights and in relation to *fiestas*. A first report commissioned by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (Farapi S.L. 2009) confirmed that what happened in the Bidasoa *Alardes* was not an isolated case and that festive rituals were not the only object of analysis; rather the whole organisational structure of the *fiesta* was subject to review.[14] Throughout the province of Gipuzkoa, women's participation in festivities – in terms of quantity, quality, significance, and value – was found to be inferior to men's, not only in the most emblematic or cultural activities but at all levels of festival organisation. As a result, as women were barely represented or totally absent from the organisational bodies, they had no decision-making power to influence their participation in any way.

In this sense, one of the principal elements of organisation was found to be the gastronomic societies, predominantly male eating clubs that restrict the membership of women, and so also their participation in the *fiestas* themselves (Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Hernando Collazos & Erro Jauregi & Sanz de Pablo 2010). In Tolosa, for example, mediation work was necessary to get some of these societies to open up to women and share the responsibility in organisation (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021). Since then, work in this town council has been constant and referential: in 2010 it was the first town to create a permanent 'festival observatory', and in 2015 the *Guide to Promote More Egalitarian Festivities* was published (Farapi Koop. 2015), based on a participatory process carried out in the town. Another exemplary case is that of Antzuola (in the province of Gipuzkoa), which between 2006 and 2009 carried out a participatory process to revitalise

its Moor's Alarde festival.[15] Through participatory democracy, the figure of the Moor was dignified, his speeches were adapted, the scenery was enriched, and the participation of women and young people increased (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021).

The symbiosis between ethnographic practice, feminist activism, and public politics is worthy of note, as is the interdisciplinary nature of research in the fields of anthropology, journalism, literature, and law (Moreno Marquez & Kerexeta Erro 2006), a combination of researchers from feminist and social collectives and academia (Guilló Arakistain 2016), and the types of material produced for popular and educational purposes (Ballester 2011; Gràcia i Pérez 2018), as well as for use by local authorities and festival committees (Farapi Koop. 2015). Over the past decades, much of this research has been showcased at numerous conferences and seminars.[16] We call this triangulation of the academic, political (women's movements and protest), and institutional spheres 'implicated anthropology': an anthropology for equality, with citizens, and with the support of public workers and institutions, and the political representatives.[17] Finally, the recent incorporation of a gendered perspective in intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO 2014, 2015) has brought with it a growing interest in women's performance, production, and participation (in the framework of the Spanish National Plan for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage), as well as an interest in rethinking the patriarchal nature of heritage and the need for a paradigm shift in understanding it (Arrieta Urtizberea 2017; Jiménez-Esquinas 2016; 2020; Rostagnol 2015).

ADDRESSING THE TENSION BETWEEN VINDICATIONS AND CUSTOMS: STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

The progress made in effecting change throughout the Spanish territories, yet the persistence of the conflict in relation to the Bidaosa *Alardes*, led to a request from the Basque Parliament in 2018, channelled through the Basque Institute for Women (Emakunde) for a study on successful processes of change in order to identify strategies to promote women's participation (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021). Our report focuses on inspiring cases, examples of the positive transformation of festivals, covering a variety of processes with an impact on different types of festive rituals, as well as changes in the organisational structures and festive programmes.[18]

We distinguished different types of processes aimed at achieving greater equality between women and men in the festive sphere. The processes vary, depending, on the one hand, on the main elements or agents that set them in

motion and, on the other, on the social climate (more or less receptive to change, more or less conflictive). In relation to the agents of change, we found processes promoted by women, feminist collectives, festival committees or local people in general, as well as processes led by public institutions such as local councils (especially the technical staff of equality), often in collaboration or with the support of institutes for women or the ombuds-person. In almost all cases, we note the constant and courageous work of specific individuals (generally women) prepared to take the first steps.

Indeed, one of the conclusions in this regard is that the involvement of public institutions is crucial to ensure that processes do not stall or conflicts escalate. In this sense, the commitment of institutions to equality is fundamental: processes can be amiable and more or less consensual, smooth, and gradual, or more vindictive and controversial, depending on how the institutions position themselves (Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019). The creation of spaces for dialogue and the search for consensus is the key to progress in any process of change.

Another result of our study (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021) is the comparison and classification of strategies that we will summarily present here (we refer to the report for details and concrete examples):

Progressive changes and consensus strategies: when citizens gradually introduce changes in their *fiestas*, which then evolve in step with changing social circumstances and values of society. These processes include more democratic planning, organisation and participation in the *fiestas*, generational changes, and changes in the perception of gender roles. Change often happens in this case because women demand to participate, learn to dance, sing, parade or play an instrument and join festive organisations.

Vindicatory or demand-making strategies: where women, women's groups, collectives or associations created ad hoc undertake forms of protest or creative activities to draw attention to the problem and demand a solution. These protest or political strategies can take the form of campaigns to raise awareness (stickers, posters, banners, leaflets, badges, etc.), surveys, press conferences, the use of media and social networks, demonstrations, and all kinds of actions in the public space (rallies, performances, party disruptions, etc.). Also, conferences and meetings on the subject of equality in the *fiesta* and the creation of networks of solidarity and mutual support between women and feminist groups from different towns and cities.

Dialogue and mediation strategies: possibly as a follow-up to the previous two, where an entity (specialising in conflict resolution or equality), the town council or an expert (in folklore, history, or anthropology) intercedes to mediate between the conflicting parties.

The *legal and judicial strategies* have been analysed in detail in any article by Montesinos Llinares (2019), where we see processes that have contributed to the development of legislation in terms of cultural equality. Although important legal exceptions and limits in the practical application of the sentences persist (Montesinos & Bullen 2021), the judicial route usually supports the demands for equality.

Creative strategies stand out as an area of effervescence in the transformation of the *fiesta*, particularly in relation to the conception and representations of gender roles and the construction of gender itself. Among the most recurrent are, firstly, the creation of new female figures or costumes (that can lead the way but also cause segregation) or the suppression of sexist figures. Secondly, the creation of new activities to feature women, or when there is a refusal to incorporate them, the creation of an alternative or parallel festival (a controversial issue). In recent years, these creative strategies tend to focus directly on creating mixed spaces or challenging the binary roles assigned to women and men, in a kind of transgressive 'play'.

Strategies that seek parity, equity or equality in the entities organising the festivals, in decision-making spaces and in all types of activities in the festive programme (sports, cultural, gastronomic, main events, etc.). These include the family and work balance, distribution of tasks and making housework more visible and valued.

We have also highlighted *strategies for intervention in the communication, discourses, and images of festivals*, to avoid the reproduction of sexist stereotypes in texts, songs, and images and to promote the appearance of women in the images and coverage of festivals.

Although beyond the scope of the report, we also mention *strategies for eradicating violence against women*: awareness-raising of the need to take urgent measures so that women can enjoy the festivities in freedom and without fear of being assaulted, a fundamental step to achieve real equality in *fiestas*. There are countless initiatives in this sense in the festivals of the Basque Country and other territories of the State (Gisbert & Rius-Ulldemolins 2019).

Finally, we highlight the *institutional strategies* to value the role of public institutions and authorities to promote equality in the *fiesta*. Here we identified different kinds of actions; many of them come from popular motions mentioned above, which are later recognised and institutionalised: measures for the prevention of violence against women; staff training in equality; the promotion and funding of research (gender diagnoses); the awarding of prizes in recognition of actions in favour of equality, and all the work that has to do with local ordinances, equality plans, and legislative development.[19]

If we contemplate the strategies as a whole, we can identify different areas of intervention: 1) the principal characters or participants who take part in

the most visible and significant rituals of the festivities: dances, processions, parades, etc.; 2) the festive programme: sports, musical performances, competitions, dinners and lunches, open-air dances, etc.; 3) the associations or other entities that organise the festival and have decision-making power: *comparsas* (troupes), *cuadrillas* (groups of friends), societies, dance groups, etc.; 4) the images, figures, and graphic or textual representations of the festival: famous or symbolic characters, festive programmes, posters, videos, song lyrics, etc.; 5) aggression and male violence during local festivals.

The key to change in most of the cases studied has been feminist awareness among citizens (both women and men), technical and political staff and the entities organising the festivals; the mobilisation of groups of feminists or specific people in favour of equality in the festival; institutional resources and the legislative framework for equality; the collaboration of all the agents and the accompaniment of experts or people who lead participatory processes. These factors, in coordination, dialogue or discussion (without ignoring moments of conflict) have allowed progress to be made continually towards democratisation and equality in the *fiestas*. These processes of change that involve different agents and entities are ongoing; advances are made, resistance is met with, sometimes conflicts arise, but there is always a lesson to be learned.

CONCLUSIONS

We hope that this overview of studies of local festivities in Spain from a gender perspective, and the comparative analysis of the processes in place throughout the country, will contribute to making visible a relatively recent field of study of increasing interest and relevance in both theory and practice. The issue of women's participation in festive rituals and the questioning of gender roles represented and reproduced in a large part of the Spanish festive cycle is a topical issue that has re-emerged after the hiatus caused by the coronavirus pandemic (2020–2021).

In historical terms, we have observed the change in women's role in Spanish society from mother, wife, object, fetish or totem, to worker, student, professional and active participant in social life and festive activity. In the *fiesta*, we have plotted the diversification of roles from mere spectator, costume maker, and cook or beauty queen and cheerleader, to an active figure in different guises. These changes have not always been smooth, and there are many cases of resistance and even conflict, such as in the case of the *Alardes* of the Bidasoa area. The persistence of exclusion and violence against women raises the need to recognise and repair this historical discrimination, a reparation that can

be obtained at the symbolic and social level through full integration on equal terms in the organisation and celebration of *fiestas*.

As we have shown, events on the ground have prompted an increase in ethnographic studies and anthropological research. Feminist protest has instigated local authorities to take measures to guarantee equal participation for all and eradicate sexist practices. Again, the reluctance to do so, in some cases, reveals the persistence of a gender system that reproduces binary roles and perpetuates power and privilege for certain men and the women who support them. Adopting the sex/gender system as our theoretical framework permits a complex analysis of the interrelated elements that function to maintain a gendered social stratification both in everyday life and in the extraordinary experience of the *fiesta*: it challenges the classical division of the social and symbolic realms, revealing festive ritual to be connected to political and economic concerns and the constraints of the social structure.

Finally, festive organisations with a feminist perspective have shown, at least in the cases studied, that they are permeable to other types of social claims related to different forms of discrimination (such as LGBTI+ issues or racism, to name but two) and that also contribute to achieving equality and the democratisation of festivities, customs, and traditions. In addition, the initiative of feminist groups – with more or less support from local authorities – has proven to be both crucial and creative in the development of multiple strategies for the reworking of the outdated and sexist models of the *fiesta* in Spain and the Basque Country. We are convinced that their vindications will continue to bring about change.

NOTES

[1] Spain refers to the Spanish State, a geopolitical entity with a centralised government in Madrid and devolved governments in 17 autonomous communities, some of which demand greater – or total – independence from the state. Our research focuses mainly on the Basque Country, but we have incorporated other case studies and ongoing processes in other territories into the comparative analysis.

[2] We will use the term *fiesta* synonymously with 'festival' or 'festivities': local *fiestas* celebrated annually in every town, village, and neighbourhood, often in honour of a patron saint or a virgin. It is usual to find a central event, which we call 'festive ritual', of a ceremonial or ritualistic – and possibly Catholic – nature (parades, processions, dances, theatrical performances) with music, specific dress, and the participation of the public (Douglass 1991; Homobono Martínez 2004). Furthermore, these cultural programmes receive public funding and the logistical support of the local and regional governments. In addition to their cultural and symbolic significance, particularly in terms of the projection of local and even national identities, the economic importance of *fiestas* should not be underestimated, especially in those that have become a tourist attraction.

[3] Called 'woman-as-object' or 'woman-fetish' by Bullen & Egido (2003) in the case of the *cantineras* of the Bidasoa *Alardes*; this concept is also used by Verónica Gisbert i Gracia (2010a, 2015) to qualify the 'favourites' (companions) of the captains in the parades of Moors and Christians of Alcoi. Verònica Gisbert i Gracia & Joaquim Rius-Ulldemolins (2020) qualify as 'festive totem' the figure of the *fallera* in the *Fallas* de Valencia. This festival, celebrated in mid-March, revolves around the creation, exhibition and burning of floats called *fallas.* A young woman is chosen to represent each float, and one is elected to be 'queen of the *Fallas*': she is the *fallera mayor*.

[4] The *Alardes* are military-style parades that commemorate the militia bound by oath to defend the border area against attack. In the cases in hand, they celebrate the military victories won over the armies of French and Navarrese troops in the 16th and 17th centuries. These annual rituals also appear as a religious act of thanksgiving to Saint Martial (Irun) or the Virgin of Guadalupe (Hondarribia) for their help in battle.

[5] This and other of the most conflictive and entrenched cases – which we will not go into here for reasons of space – have been recently analysed by Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro (2019) and Montesinos Llinares (2019). This latest report expounds the judicial processes and the jurisprudence that has been generated around them and delves into the legal debate around equality at *fiestas*, also treated in Alcaraz Ramos 2015; Burzaco Samper 2006; Lekuona 2006; Marín López 2000; Montesinos & Bullen 2021; Rey Martínez 2000; and Saborido Sánchez 2011.

[6] To learn more about the development of feminist anthropology in the Basque Country see Sergidou 2019.

[7] The *Maskarada* is a ritual performance and dance of the winter festive cycle, each year organised and enacted in the neighbouring villages by the youth of one of the villages of the French Basque region of Zuberoa. The troupe is divided between a raucous bunch of male players (labelled *beltzak* 'the blacks' for their gypsy origins and clothes) who lend comic relief to a more serious mixed group of male and female skilled, agile dancers (*gorriak* 'the reds'). The reaction to an all-female *Maskarada*, organised in the 1990s, revealed the symbolically codified male domain of the *beltzak* as the anathema of the model of femininity prevalent in the valley.

[8] The plethora of festivals of *Moros y Cristianos* has been studied both in Spain and other parts of the world (Albert-Llorca & González Alcantud 2003) and from a gendered perspective specifically in Alcoi, province of Alicante, where the longest-standing and most prestigious version of this *fiesta* has met with the greatest resistance to the inclusion of women (Gisbert i Gracia 2010a; 2010b; Gisbert i Gràcia 2011).

[9] Despite its interest, there is no anthropological research from a gendered point of view about the *cofradías* and Holy Week processions in Spain, although there are gender studies of a historical and juridical nature (Saborido Sánchez 2011; Sánchez Domínguez 2003) and an account of the women members involved in the struggle for equality (Botí Espinosa 2018). Several cases have been recorded in recent reports (Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Montesinos Llinares 2019), though a more in-depth analysis is required.

[10] In the festivals of Moors and Christians in Petrer, a group of women presented themselves for the parade in the outfits of one of the units or *esquadra* of *negros* ('black people', characterised as wild), hiding their female identity (Heuzé 2003); in the *Tamborrada* of Donostia / San Sebastián, the women of the cultural society Kresala invented the figure of the *aguadora* ('water carrier') in order to gain access to the festival (Moral 2014).

[11] Although the tradition of folklore studies in Spain has remained separate from the institutionalisation of social and cultural anthropology, in practice, both approaches are complementary and the dialogue between them could be as fruitful as in other countries and traditions (see Díaz Viana 2022; Velasco Maillo 1990).

[12] Farapi (2009) tackles different cases in Gipuzkoa (Basque Country): *tamborradas* ('drum festivals') and *comparsas* ('troupes') of *Caldereros* in different towns, dances, and gastronomic activities. Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro (2019) analyse the gender dimension in 30 intangible cultural manifestations declared Assets of Cultural Interest and a little more in depth nine processes of incorporation of women in different festivities around the state. Among those not yet mentioned, the following stand out: the *Festa de la Mare de Déu de la Salut* of Algemesí (Valencia), the Dances of Belinchón (Cuenca), the *Fiesta del voto* in Santa Ana la Real (Huelva), the Leonese wrestling (León), the *Misteri d'Elx* (Alicante) and the *Volantes* of Valcarlos (Navarra).

[13] UNESCO itself has taken a slight conceptual turn in this regard, speaking more and more of a living and evolving intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO 2003, 2014), although it is necessary to insist more on this idea after decades of a rather static view that has overvalued whatever is old and 'unaltered' (Cagide Torres & Querol Fernández & González Cambeiro 2019; Montesinos Llinares 2019).

[14] With this research, the applied anthropology consultancy Farapi Koop. opened a path of work and collaboration with public institutions on gender policies in which countless entities throughout the State currently participate.

[15] It is a mix between an *Alarde* (military-style parade) and a representation of the festival of Moors and Christians. In Antzuola the supposed defeat of the Caliph Abd al-Rahman III in the year 920 is staged.

[16] For example, Fonèvol – an association for the promotion of the participation of women in the Moors and Christians *fiestas* of Alcoi – has held a one-day conference every two years since 2004; other conferences have been held at the universities of Alicante (2005), Seville (2010) and the Basque Country (2018) or by the *Women Cofrades* and *Women Costaleras* and *Portapasos* (who carry the *pasos* with the images on their shoulders) in different cities of Spain, also since 2004 (Bullen & Montesinos & Pecharromán 2021: 147). Recently, the Department of Culture of the Government of Catalonia has begun to organise training sessions for the staff of municipalities and other public institutions, to promote change, avoid conflicts and also recognise the contribution of women to cultural heritage (Jiménez-Esquinas 2021).

[17] Another piece of evidence of this is the creation in March 2019 of the Observatory for Gender Equality in Culture by the Spanish Ministry for Culture and Sport.

[18] The nine cases analysed are: the festivities around the *Virgen Blanca* in Vitoria-Gasteiz, the *fiesta* of San Juan in Amurrio, the Carnival of Llodio, the 'Great Week' of Bilbao, the *Dantzari-dantza* of Berriz, the *Marijesiak* of Gernika, the *Tamborrada* of Donostia / San Sebastián, the Moor's *Alarde* of Antzuola and the Carnival and the *fiesta* of San Juan in Tolosa.

[19] Noteworthy, for example, are the articles included in the Basque Equality Law, which expressly prohibit the subsidising of *fiestas* in which women are excluded or discriminated against; or that political representatives participate in them.

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Lidia Montesinos Llinares graduated in social anthropology (University of Barcelona, 2006) and philosophy (University of Valencia, 2015) and obtained her PhD in social anthropology in 2013 (University of Barcelona). She is currently a lecturer at the Department of Philosophy of Values and Social Anthropology at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) and has coordinated and developed academic and applied research within and outside the Basque Country. Her research, in the field of legal and political anthropology, has focused especially on the study of communal rights and institutions, peasant societies and ecology, as well as popular culture from a gender and intersectional perspective. She has also worked in cultural management in collaboration with public institutions and social entities and has taught courses on research methodology and academic writing at the Doctorate School of the University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU.

lidiamontesinos@gmail.com

Margaret Bullen (Nedging, Suffolk, UK, 1964) is a feminist anthropologist living in the Basque Country since 1991 and senior lecturer at the Department of Philosophy of Values and Social Anthropology at the University of the Basque Country since 2005. She graduated in modern languages (Bristol, 1987) and obtained her PhD (Liverpool, 1991) on cultural and socio-economic change amongst Andean migrants in Arequipa's shanty towns, Peru. She is a member of AFIT (Feminist Anthropology Research Group) and maintains research interests in migration, identity, language, as well as a gendered perspective on gender and symbolic systems and focus on women's participation in festive rituals in the Basque Country and Spain.

maggie.bullen@ehu.eus

Begoña Pecharromán Ferrer (Donostia / San Sebastián, Gipuzkoa, Spain, 1966) is a feminist anthropologist living in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, since 2021 and co-founder and member of Farapi Koop. at Gipuzkoa, Basque Country, since 2002. She graduated in psychology (Donostia / San Sebastián, 1993) and obtained her master's degree on culture and society (Donostia / San Sebastián, 2002). She has been a member of Ankulegi (Basque Anthropological Association) since 1994. She maintains research interests in migration and applied anthropology with a gendered perspective and focus on social entrepreneurship based on anthropological data to promote social changes.

bego@farapi.com

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DISCUSSION

THE LIFE OF RITUALS DURING THE PANDEMIC: THE RITUAL YEAR SIEF WG ROUNDTABLE AT THE SIEF 2021 CONGRESS

Irina Stahl
MA, MS, Senior Researcher
Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy
Associate Lecturer in European Ethnology
University of Bucharest, Romania
irinastahl@yahoo.fr

Nina Vlaskina
PhD, Senior Researcher
Federal Research Centre The Southern Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
nvlaskina@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper is an unconventional review of the online roundtable meeting under the heading "Perf 03c: Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules III", which took place on 23 June 2021, during the 15th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF), titled "Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression". It includes an analytic introduction and the edited transcript of the roundtable discussion. This roundtable concluded the work of two previous panels organised by the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group, narrowing the discussions to the impact the recent COVID-19 pandemic had on the ritual year. Scholars from nine countries discussed issues related to the changes in the lifecycle and calendric rituals brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through various case studies and auto-ethnographic observations, participants considered the changes in social and individual experiences; the increased interest of the society in the essence of rituals; rethinking of the emotional component of daily routine and festive events; the way ritual participants and researchers adapted to the restrictions imposed by local authorities; changes and negotiations of the ritual space; new business proposals related to the ritual sphere, as a response to the restrictions; and the use of new technologies in the ritual contexts.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, religion, research strategies, ritual year, rituals, SIEF 2021 congress

INTRODUCTION

The 15th SIEF Congress, titled "Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression", was hosted by the University of Helsinki on 19–24 June 2021.[1] Due to the extraordinary circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the very format of the congress served as an illustration of the chosen theme. For the first time in the history of SIEF, the congress was held exclusively in the online realm, in complete transgression with the traditional, live meetings organised in the past. But this was not the only challenge the organising committee faced, as it broke loose from the traditional formats of scientific gatherings. Virtual sessions and panel presentations required a completely new approach and new formats, which involved numerous, innovative technical solutions. New workshop sessions, film demonstrations, roundtables, as well as combined meetings were introduced in order to stimulate interactions and enhance the feeling of togetherness. Despite the inherent difficulties of adapting to the new format, the congress experience highlighted several advantages, the most remarkable being that of accessibility, which allowed more academics from outside of Europe, or with lower income, to attend the reunion. Another advantage was the combination of audio and written speech, which allowed the questions, notes, and bibliographical references to be written down in the chat-box section.

The SIEF Ritual Year Working Group was represented during the congress by two panels: "Perf 01: Calendric Rituals: A Time to Break the Rules", convened by **Irina Sedakova** (Russia) and **Laurent S. Fournier** (France), and "Perf03c: Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules", convened by **Irina Stahl** (Romania) and **Nina Vlaskina** (Russia). The convenors of both panels sought for an opportunity to organise a joint discussion and, in the new proposed circumstances, a roundtable appeared to be the most suitable choice, allowing a large number of attendees to take part in the discussions. The roundtable was organised as the third session to the panel Perf03, and addressed the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disturbances it engendered to the ritual year, more exactly, the changes imposed to the calendric year and life cycle rituals.

The roundtable took place on 23 June 2021[2] and lasted for one hour and 45 minutes. It brought together 20 scientists from nine countries: Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Russia. The meeting was structured around three main topics, for each of which a keynote speaker was invited: **Mare Kõiva** talked about COVID-19 and emotions, **Joanna Lipińska** about (re)negotiations of space, and **Daria Radchenko** about the adaptation of research strategies. They set the tone for the discussions which were continued freely by the rest of the participants.

The discussions engendered during the roundtable covered a large variety of topics: new rules and violation of preexisting rules in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (interdictions, exceptions, compromises, dialogue, and negotiation or imposition); general emotional assessment of the new situation and the 'new normal' by the respondents (participants, organisers, and observers); transformation of festive symbols (new perception of space, time, and ritual, its actors and objects); metamorphosis of the involvement; and new pandemic-related research methods and strategies. The case studies presented complemented each other and offered a multifaceted view of the issues under discussion. The dialogue between scholars turned out to be stimulating and instructive.

As a traditional review would not have been able to cover all the topics and relevant problems disclosed during the discussions, the authors decided, following this brief introduction, to present the readers with an edited transcript[3] of the roundtable instead. By providing the full content of the meeting, it is hoped that the readers will gain a better understanding of the issues discussed and that they will find the dialogues as inspiring and motivating as the participants did at the time they took place. References to studies mentioned during discussions were added to the transcript.

ROUNDTABLE PERF 03C: OLD RITUALS, CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS, NEW RULES (TRANSCRIPT)

Nina Vlaskina:
We are glad to see you here, and we thank you all [for joining us]. We hope that our discussion today will be productive, fruitful, and insightful. We are at the [last session of the] panel "Perf03c: Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules III", which will be held in the form of a roundtable. We have organised the discussion in such a way that everybody can speak whenever he or she finds it appropriate: you may either speak out or write your message in the chat box. If you like, you can also raise your hand, like several participants did yesterday, and one of the moderators of this roundtable (Nina Vlaskina or Irina Stahl) will give you the floor. If you have any technical questions, you can address them to our volunteer Ana Daniela da Silva Guerreiro.

So let us begin. I will say a few introductive remarks, and then we will continue our discussion.

The COVID-19 pandemic was officially announced in March 2020, and it drastically changed the lives of people across the entire planet. In many countries, governments introduced restrictions. They imposed new rules, and these

rules initially dealt with physical and social distancing and hygiene compliance. In fact, new norms of social contact were established, and these changes directly affected the ritual sphere because all kinds of rituals (lifecycle and calendric cycle rituals) have always presupposed communication and contact. In any period [of time], people have gathered during rituals and festivals. They did so and continue to do so in order to establish new norms and reaffirm the old ones. Our colleague **Laurent Sébastien Fournier** recently mentioned that only when we lose the opportunity to hold our rituals as we are accustomed to doing, we perceive and understand how meaningful the ritual is and how we need it in different kinds of situations (Fournier 2021).

Under these circumstances, each of us, be it a professional ethnographer or not, may ask the following questions: What is a ritual? What is the essence of a ritual? What are the substantial parts of a ritual that make up its core? What are we longing for the most? Yesterday[4] we had some beautiful examples of these elements from different spheres, which people think are of the greatest importance during a ritual. For example, in her presentation about weddings, **Judit Balatonyi** said that all of one's friends should be present at the wedding, and if they were not, it would not be a real wedding. In the presentation of **Žilvytis Šaknys**, [the most meaningful part of the ritual] was the presence of one's relatives. If you spend Easter without relatives, it would not be a good feast, and so on. I think that we will continue to analyse this today. In this situation [during the pandemic], people try to find new ways to cope with the new reality. They establish new rules, they break the[preexisting] rules, or they introduce new elements that help them cope with the situation. In these circumstances, we as researchers have [to develop] new ways of analysing and recording the situation, because the very situation has changed. Hopefully, today we will continue to talk about it.

Irina Stahl:
I would like to stress Laurent's idea: the fact that we could not perform our rituals as usual [during the COVID-19 pandemic] made us realise how important they are and how they are actually rhythm-making. They impose a rhythm on our lives, and we just cannot do without them. The entire situation of preventing us from performing our rituals made us reflect on the core and essence of rituals. What is the core of rituals? What do we miss the most [when we cannot perform the usual rituals]?

Yesterday, we had some sort of idea of what we missed the most. It stemmed from our discussion that it was actually the togetherness [that was missed]. Separation is a problem, the fact that togetherness is no longer there. It is not just the separation from people, but also the separation from objects and every-

thing that makes us feel like *being in* the ritual, *being part* of it. And here come all those elements from the environment, like the smell, the touch, the feeling of the others, all those things that come and trigger our senses and make us get involved with all our senses, with everything that we are, *in* the ritual. This [the total experience of a ritual] is what people miss the most. Then, moving forward from that, there is the idea that people started inventing new ways of staying together and being involved in their rituals; new ways of performing the rituals and also new ways of being in the rituals, or being part of them. And this is the interesting part because [it brings up the question about] these new solutions: What do we do with them once the pandemic is over? Are we going to keep them? Are we just going to go back to our old ways? Usually, from history, we know that we can never go back in time, so it is to be assumed that we will keep some of this experience from during the pandemic. These are the directions in which we want our discussion to continue today, because we find this very interesting and challenging.

Daria Radchenko:
What I would suggest doing is discriminating between the two types of alienation that you have spoken about, without uniting them. Alienation type one is the problem of lack of communication with other people, of togetherness, exactly what you said. The alienation from the senses, from feelings, from being involved in the ritual as a person and as a physical body is something different to me, it is something more individualistic. In my research, I have noticed that people speak about those things differently. The Russian Orthodox Church now (in Russia at least) is, I would not say, really suffering, but experiencing more and more an individualistic approach. The parishes are very much clergy-centred, and there are not so many parishes with real communities in them. Therefore, many of my research participants (Radchenko 2022) spoke more about their individual experiences and lack thereof rather than about communication with other people. For them, it was a real surprise that they missed other people who could be irritating in the church, during the church service, who made noise, the crowd, etc. Still, it was not about other people as such. It was rather about the lack of "my own" experience; a feeling that "I'm not involved" [emphasis on I] rather than "I miss communication with other people". Therefore, I would rather distinguish between these two deficits. Of course, they are in some way connected, but they are about different things: group dynamics, group belonging, group participation versus physical participation, and the quality of individual experience in the ritual.

Žilvytis Šaknys:
My research[5] showed that in the contemporary Lithuanian community, it was more important to communicate with close people [family and friends]. For many, live communication with them was more important than a religious ritual. A large part of respondents perceive the holiday as a continuation of tradition. When they are unable to observe the traditional ritual, they compensate it not only by online meetings with beloved ones or with God, but also by maintaining the culinary tradition. One respondent even compared the situation in 2020 to the Soviet era situation when, for example, teachers in Lithuania could not attend church; they celebrated [religious feasts] alone, secretly, and the continuity of tradition was supported by festive dishes. A few years ago, I experienced a similar situation when analysing the customs of Lithuanian Karaites (a very small ethnic group [of Turkic-speaking adherents to Karaite Judaism]). Many of them do not speak the Karaite language. During the Soviet period, they were unable to perform religious practices. They maintained their ethnic identity during the holiday meetings [by the means of] culinary tradition. For example, currently in Lithuania, young people are less and less religious. During my fieldwork, 20 years ago, when I spoke with Russians, they would say, "I'm Orthodox" or "I'm an Old Believer (Starover)", while now, in our time, some of the young people are not able to distinguish between religions. They would say, "I'm a Christian, but I don't know if I'm a Catholic or an Orthodox". There are extensive changes in relation to religion in Lithuania, and the festive traditions are stronger than [commitment to the] church. In my case, when I did my fieldwork, it was two weeks after Easter, and Orthodox Easter was one week after Catholic Easter. I found that not only the religious ritual was important, but also communication and the preservation of tradition.

Irina Stahl:
I think that these are the two main things that Daria highlighted. One is the group dynamics that was disturbed during the new regulations – the social aspect of the ritual – and secondly there is the individual experience within the rituals – the religious experience. This is what you meant, Daria, isn't it? So, the difference lies between social and religious – is it a religious ritual, a religious individual experience, I mean.

Daria Radchenko:
Exactly, and the question is what people are trying to actually recreate or cannot adapt to, which side of it.

Irina Stahl:
Exactly. Do they attend church more for the social interaction or for religious personal experiences? That is what they miss the most. Yes, that makes sense. OK, things are starting to become clearer now, they are getting more organised.

Emese Ilyefalvi:
Thank you, Daria; it was a good distinction, but I have an example that relates to both. Because in one of the Calvinist congregations where I did my fieldwork,[6] the day started very early in the morning with a prayer online, a Zoom-meeting, which is not very traditional in the Calvinist communities. They got together online (via Zoom) every Tuesday at 6 o'clock in the morning, and it was a twenty-minute prayer together with a Calvinist minister. I mean, it was within this circle of five or six congregation members, not a lot of people. But that was new to them, and they wanted to continue this on Zoom, online, after the pandemic, because, they said, it is only possible in the online universe, because nobody wants to go to the church at 6 o'clock in the morning every Tuesday or every Wednesday. And for them, it was also [a matter of] social connections and social dynamics, but they said [at the same time] it was a very intimate religious experience for them – those five or six people – a very new and intimate one.

Irina Stahl:
This is exactly what we were talking about. Which elements of the ritual that worked during the pandemic would be kept after the pandemic, because they enhanced the core of the ritual? And in your case, it is both the social and the religious aspect.

Emese Ilyefalvi:
Yes, but there is just one more tradition that I think is really interesting in this Calvinist congregation. [The manifestation of] this individualistic aspect was that many believers started to make small holy corners in their homes. That is really not Calvinist and against the Puritan Calvinist tradition, but somehow they tried to accommodate [and to make their own] little church in the house, [to be] in a room with a songbook, with the Bible, and just tidy up everything and make it a clean and nice space.

Anamaria Iuga:
I would like to turn the discussion to another example that I have because two days ago I was at fieldwork and followed a custom that was not held during the pandemic. It is a custom that we have on Pentecost, the custom of *Căluş* (Iuga

& Vlahbei 2022), which implies dancing. A group of men dance ritual dances around some plants which are considered to be healing plants, like garlic or [wormwood] *pelin* in Romanian, and they also cure people who have the mythical disease of being touched by fairies, and they have these symptoms that *Căluş* recognises. During the pandemic in the villages where I was, it was no longer possible to follow the custom. Last year there was no *Căluş* ritual in the villages. And in some villages, I met other *Căluşari* [dancers] from other villages. They had to pay a fee because the police stopped them and forbade the ritual. But this year they could perform the ritual because we have a very good situation with the pandemic in Romania at the moment. It was really interesting to see how people reacted. The custom is that they go from house to house, they enter, perform the dances, and some comic play; it has a character that has a mask... Before the pandemic, not all the houses received them; only people who could afford it (because at the end they had to pay the *Căluşari*) or people who were really fond of traditions.

But this year it was interesting to see that more houses opened, and villagers were also talking about this. People were longing to see the ritual that they had not been able to see at all the previous year. More people were participating in the ritual. It was really interesting to see how the pandemic caused [people's] reactions [and their decision] to return to the ritual and not to forget it. Because we were thinking: OK, one year the custom was not observed, maybe the next year it would be followed even less, and in two or five years it would disappear in some villages, but this was not the case. I have talked to the groups of *Căluşari* that I have been following for the past few years. Two years ago (prior to the pandemic) in one of the villages in Bârla, the group did not meet, because they were not the right number [they did not have the right number of men necessary for the ritual]. Last year [they did not perform because] there was the pandemic, and this year they called me to ask me if I was going to come to the village to see them, because there were already nine *Căluşari* who had met, and they were going to perform the ritual. So, it is also interesting how the pandemic helps not with the revival, because the custom is alive, but with giving more force, more authenticity, and more importance to the ritual.

Joanna Lipińska:
I am focusing my research on Neo-Paganism in Poland and the UK.[7] Previously, it was said that alienation of people and alienation of the senses are separate. In the case of Neo-Pagans, [the question is] where they meet to conduct rituals. These are rituals of handfasting, pagan marriage, and so on and so forth. When I talked to Neo-Pagans, they said that because of restrictions and because they did not want to pass COVID around, they had to cancel the rituals in person.

But they lacked both of those things [meeting with others and the experience of the senses]. They could not meet anymore, as during their rituals they do not only take part in it, they are passing around food, for example, and touching, and dancing, and hugging each other. They said that they missed all of those things; the way in which they were all connected. It all depends on the kind of rituals people attend.

Mare Kõiva:
I will speak a bit about emotions. Actually, online cemeteries and online commemoration places came into existence at the very beginning of the Internet. I think the first message [I received with photos attached] was like, "Please look at our newborn baby", and I received it from my friend in the United States, at the very beginning of the 1990s. The Internet provided the first possibilities to demonstrate photos and so on [to family and friends at a great distance]. The distance between families is nothing new, especially in Eastern Europe. You know, we have a kind of pendulum or chain migration. It is very typical in India and in Nepal. But just now, during this pandemic situation, it is very obvious that people need the emotional side more and more to feel that they are connected.

For example, I would like to speak about a paper by a Swedish researcher of belief narratives and ethnology of religion (Svensson 2013). He wrote some ten years ago that in everyday life Swedish people must somehow follow the basic rules: you cannot demonstrate a very close relationship in the street or in public spaces. He said that actually people are more emotional via Internet: they speak about emotional things, they demonstrate how dear their relatives are and so on. I think this was also typical of our pandemic case. On the one hand, when I arrived on [Saaremaa] Island a year ago, I understood that nobody wanted to meet me because I came from the city [of Tartu] and maybe I was bringing a disease. But another thing was that somehow the pandemic connected my family. We started with very old jobs, with very old traditions, and so on, to keep all the children and all the family together, although a part of our family had never come to the island with us before.

I also noticed (and I think that I am not the only one who made remarks during the fieldwork) that in huge, big cities, during the pandemic, the city people, the people who belong to the same block of flats, were demonstrating feelings that were very important. People can exchange material things but can also exchange feelings. In doing so, they demonstrate that "we are the same gang, we are the same crew of people". I think during these times [of the pandemic], we all experienced loneliness more often. You have many opportunities to write, but you cannot communicate as much or as frequently [with your loved ones].

I think there were very different sides of the pandemic, and especially the side of emotions, which are actually important for people.

[The next aspect is] the soundscapes. It is very strange to go through Tartu, which is actually a small city, and realise that there are only birds singing. I soon discovered that hedgehogs and other animals lived in the vicinity of my block of flats. However, you cannot hear a human voice. When you are walking down the street, there is someone at every window, standing and watching you. So, you are thinking that they might be so lonely. Of course, all these family events and distances were very widely discussed. But also I saw how people reacted to the discussion on church matters. Congregants expected their ministers, their church teachers, their popes, and others to act like ordinary people. Some old discussions [were revived], for example, [the issue] of asking for money and so on, and were somehow overreacted to, I think, by the public.

Finally, I would like to recall something which I never thought I would actually feel. On 20 May me and Andres Kuperjanov reached Sofia [capital of Bulgaria], and we realised that all the shops were open, including the bookshops. And I cannot forget the deep happiness and shock that I felt when I arrived in Sofia and [entered] the first bookstore. You were able to touch the books! You were able to open them! There were academic books, science fiction, children's books, and photo albums. I was brought to tears and experienced a very touching feeling [when I realised] that bookstores [still] existed, that they were [still] open and a variety of [physical] books were still available. I think I have never experienced this before and I will probably never experience it in the future. I really hope I will not experience it in the future. The feeling that the world exists, and there is a very colourful variety, and it is not a fabrication. And that the world is not only full of non-humans, birds [and animals], but also of humans and everything that we have: festivals, connections, and all other things. [This was my personal experience during the pandemic.]

Nina Vlaskina:
Thank you very much! And I see a comment in the chat box from Žilvytis Šaknys, about St. John's festival.

Žilvytis Šaknys:
In Lithuania, the situation was not similar to Russia, for example. On Easter [Sunday] in 2020 and even in 2021, all the churches were closed. We could not go to another city, or join the community, or visit other people, or even see our relatives. The situation was different in other countries, and there were people who tried to go to the closed church, to leave a coloured egg for the bishop, but the situation was very difficult in Lithuania. By Saint John's Day – celebrated this

evening – the quarantine in our country has not finished yet. However, I believe that something about the holidays will change after the quarantine. Maybe the first thing to change will be communication with close people. But I do not know if the situation will change with video, online masses, and online communications, because part of my respondents, from older generations, had no opportunities to connect online. They could only speak on the phone and without video.

Irina Sedakova:
I would like to add several points. First of all, we speak of death and life, while there is not just one unified opinion on the situation the entire planet is facing. People's attitudes are different. As we know, some people are [COVID-] dissidents, and some people are afraid [of being infected]. And we know that people do die of COVID. In almost every family, there are victims of this illness, which does not stop other people from thinking that it does not exists, and there are many conspiracy theories about vaccination, etc. Even the attitude towards rituals is very different. Several monasteries and churches were not closed down at all, and the believers went there and took Communion without any fear [and any hygiene preventive measures]. The picture is diverse. It was Žilvytis's very pertinent point that the situation [around the world] was different, and it was not simultaneous, so to speak. For example, in Lithuania and Estonia, some activities were forbidden, but in Russia they were not, and vice versa. At the moment, we are witnessing the same: some big [and relevant calendric, family, and religious] holidays in some countries follow very severe restrictions while in other countries the bans are not that strict. It changes the very idea of globalisation, and the idea of the global rituals [acquires its local objectivation].

Another thing, it is Mare's good point that we are reopening our emotions now. When being in a hurry and following all our tasks and deadlines, we did not pay attention to many emotions. It is very providential, I would say, that the COVID pandemic began at a time when it became very fashionable and transcendent to express the ideas of mindfulness, or thoughtfulness [of 'slow activities'] not only about ecology but about everything. You have to stop and think, and it is one interesting coincidence [which COVID brought around].

Another coincidence is that technological development is so rapid at the moment; it is developing in front of our eyes. Who could have imagined that we could have such a huge congress without any technical problems? I was wondering how SIEF would function with so many parallel sessions. In parallel, there is a big ethnolinguistic congress [in Lublin, Poland] now; I am participating in two congresses simultaneously. Again, this is the case of COVID timing in the era of technical progress. The ethnolinguistic congress was also postponed,

like the SIEF one, and then the dates coincided. [Before, I had to choose where to go – to Poland or to Finland, but] now I can combine the two congresses. Both congresses have perfect organisation; there are no problems with visiting multiple sessions. [Even more, they are all videotaped, which will allow the use of the recordings for teaching and research purposes.]

In conclusion, I would remind you of the words of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh about crisis (Anthony 1994), and we are definitely in a situation of crisis: when a crisis comes, it means that new doors and new possibilities will open. After each crisis a bunch of new ideas start flourishing. This is my thought, a bit optimistic, about the development of the rituals. Of course, we can talk lots and lots about the new rituals, new etiquette, 'new normal'. This is a huge theme that we can discuss. But we have to be more structural, and my idea is, I repeat, that the situation is very different [from one country to another]; people's attitudes are very different; and countries' attitudes are very different. We are reopening our senses and emotions, I think everybody would agree, and then, the technical possibilities are fabulous, and we have to be grateful for them.

Nina Vlaskina:
We are moving forward to the next part in which we would like to speak about the transformation of festive symbols. We would like to give the floor to Joanna Lipińska.

Joanna Lipińska:
My part is about space, which is actually a central element of social life. And before the pandemic, most rituals had fixed spaces of some kind, like churches, homes, meeting places in the woods (in the case of Neo-Pagans), or standing stones like Stonehenge, for example. We had Midsummer two days ago, and usually in Stonehenge there are loads of people: druids, wiccans, witches, and so on. And it is one of the few days when English Heritage[8] allows people to stand between the stones because of the sacred value of the place. But because of the pandemic and of the situation in England, the event was cancelled, and the only way you could attend it was by watching Stonehenge on the Internet, through Facebook, during the sunrise and sunset. And they were closed,[9] so we could not even see the sunrise properly.

I would say that in the time of the pandemic, access to the ritual space has changed a lot. It is completely impossible to visit some places. To the others, access is limited because of the restrictions. For example, in Poland churches were open all the time. Some people attended [the service], even in greater numbers than what was allowed. Either COVID is not a problem, or their faith

is bigger than the problem of COVID. But in most cases, those restrictions made people find new places. And I would say that it was a time of negotiating ritual spaces. So, instead of the fixed traditional spaces, people looked for new places to conduct their rituals. And these were mostly [private] homes, open spaces like parks and gardens, the Internet or TV, and (which was quite a surprise for me), in Neo-Pagan cases, there were also astro-meetings, during which they discussed over the Internet the time and the place, for instance a place they all knew. They can imagine it. And the whole meeting takes place there, I am not sure if I should say [in their] imagination or where their astral being is in this imagined place. So, it changed a lot. But mostly, I would say, many rituals have simply moved to the Internet, to virtual space (Zoom, Skype, Facebook live). A conference is also a kind of ritual, and we all just moved to Zoom, so we followed this way of thinking as well.

And of course, such a way of attending rituals lacks some of the important aspects, such as personal meetings, the possibilities of small talk, and so on, but on the other hand, they can still be performed, which means a lot. And when it comes to some examples, in my field, the Neo-Pagans had a few ways of solving this problem. For example, the high priests or priestesses organised virtual rituals, where one person created the sacred space, prepared everything, like an altar, and so on, either at [their] home or when it was possible to leave the home, they went to the woods and prepared everything and used the Internet to send [the video] to all the contacts, so that everybody else could connect and take part in it. So, people were alienated, everybody was on their own, but at the same time, they were together through the means of the Internet. I would say it is quite similar to traditional holidays like Christmas or Easter which we either put on hold or also negotiated. [In 2020 and 2021] people sent food and presents and so on to their families, although they did not spend the ritual time together. But they also used Skype phone calls or video calls to be together.

Nina Vlaskina:
Thank you very much, Joanna, for sharing your experience. It is a little bit different paradigm from the cases we discussed before, and that's why it is meaningful to see things from another side. In the chat box, I see that Mare talked about St. John's Day, and I think that it is also the case of new negotiations about space because the common space, the shared space for celebrating St. John's Feast is one thing, and another case when people meet in a family circle.

Mare Kõiva:
I think that St. John's Day is of the same importance as Christmas, so of course, the city officials say that you cannot celebrate it, because the vaccination has

reached nearly 40 percent of the population. People are actually worried about the decisions the city mayors take and so on. But it is [only] one case. Another case is that I do not know how [the situation is] in your countries, but in Estonia it is very obvious that since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, there were plenty of suggestions: please look around [you]; please support your local tourism and travelling to places closer to home [in Estonia]. Things like this never happened in previous years, but people travelled the way they knew. There was a kind of folk concert or some concerts as part of an opera event on the island [of Saaremaa[10]], and everybody went to the island to listen to the opera or to participate in a small village event (village folklore days), and so on. People travelled around [the country] a lot, and there were many young families who travelled from one place to another. And I think for the first time people actually realised what nature is like or what kind of events take place in Estonia. They also realised how long it takes to travel through Estonia. So maybe it is also about focusing on your own surroundings. Maybe it is one of the 'new styles' or 'new rules'.

Nina Vlaskina:
I should say that in Russia the situation was the same. We experienced an explosion of inward tourism. It was very interesting to observe how information on the windows of tourist agencies changed just in a couple of days. Yesterday Turkey, Bali, and Europe [were offered as tourist destinations], and the next day it would be the Northern Caucasus, the Black Sea, Adygea, and so on.

At this point in our discussion, we would like to highlight cases concerning different kinds of symbols, and I have an example of an object symbol. At different points of our discussion, we said that several parts of our daily lives would be with us after the pandemic ended. I think that there are some object symbols that will continue to be in our tradition. For example, in my city, in Rostov-on-Don, we have the case of Easter bread, or holy bread (*kulich*, *paska*). Last year, we were not able to consecrate this holy bread in churches because churches were closed. And people and church authorities thought about how to normalise this situation, in which people did not have their bread consecrated. It was decided that the clergy or priests would go to the bakeries and consecrate the bread there. Some of us baked it on our own, while others chose to buy it in stores. And so, some people had already pre-consecrated bread. And it was a surprise for me, in 2021, to go to the store and to find consecrated bread there. There was an inscription mentioning that the bread was already consecrated. Today people do have the permission to go to the church and get their bread consecrated, but nevertheless, they also have the option to buy this already consecrated bread and not go to the church.

Irina Stahl:
That is amazing, and is related to our next year's Riga conference on commerce and traditions.[11] Because I have been taking pictures of all kinds of traditional foods that I have been able to find in the supermarket lately, like painted eggs, which were unimaginable a few years ago. Everybody used to paint their own eggs for Easter. Why should you buy already painted eggs [when the idea was to paint them yourself]? But these products were recently introduced [to the market], and now, this year, we had them till Pentecost, so they were available for several weeks after Easter, which is again a new thing; we did not have them before. We do not have any blessed [food] articles. I do not believe I have seen any. But we do have pre-blessed icons. That is the case of the small paper icons that people carry with them in their wallets or in their bags. They have an inscription saying they were [previously] blessed. So, it is similar.

Daria Radchenko:
Actually, [in Russia] there were consecrated holy breads available in stores even before COVID. What is also interesting to me is that it is not only this kind of industrial consecration, which was done, of course, on a larger scale during and after COVID, but also the increase in the agency of laypeople, because when the lockdown started, the clergy distributed instructions on how to bless ritual food, the Easter ritual food, on one's own. And people used this opportunity. It was said that basically any adult Christian, preferably a male, could consecrate or bless the family's Easter food without going to the church. There was a huge discussion on social media and among my research participants: is this an actual blessing or just a substitution? But many people were very happy about this, happy that they did not have to go to the church to do this, that they could do this by themselves. I also had one interesting case where a priest distributed information among his parish that he would bless the food online via Zoom. He said one should place his or her food in front of the screen, holy water and some supplies to sprinkle the food while the priest reads the prayers online. This is a question for me of how agency is distributed between the circles of the process: laypeople, the clergy, and the industries around rituals.

Emese Ilyefalvi:
Was this water holy, in this case?

Daria Radchenko:
Normally, a lot of people who go to church frequently have some supply of holy water at home from January, when we celebrate the Baptism of Christ, so a lot of people go to the church with huge bottles to have some holy water at home,

because some people use it on a daily basis, and some people cook with it, as a beneficial spiritual practice, or at the least sprinkle their foods. So, many people who are frequent churchgoers have some holy water at home. I think that the priest relied on this supply.

Dzheni Madzharov:
I want to make a summary of what has been said up to this moment, because everybody has shared his or her personal experience or the experience of research that they conducted. For me, the idea of the future is interesting. Yesterday, I started to ask the question: what will the situation be like when the pandemic is over? Will it change our everyday lives? Will anything remain of it in the pattern of our culture, or in the model of our culture? At the moment, I see some changes happening in the spheres like [the nature of] workplaces, [mass emergence of] home offices, etc., and [a new mass trend that] more people prefer to work in home offices. Or, maybe [the practice applied] in education [will change completely]. You see, in education changes started very rapidly, and the result is very interesting. Maybe there will be some changes in the future. So, we have to think about the consequences of this COVID-19 disease. How will it evolve in the future? How will it influence our future? Will it change or will it be the same? Because in some spheres, I suppose it will be just the same situation because we will forget the disease and our personal connections will be restored. We will go to festivals just the same way because everything will be open for us. There will be no regrets, and nothing will prevent us from doing the same things again in the future. So, we will have to think a little bit differently. What will the [permanent, not temporary] result be after everything that we have seen up to this moment?

Nina Vlaskina:
I think there are also differences, as Irina Sedakova said. We have different opinions and cases, and the situation may be different. I think this is the time when our previous experience does not always lead us to the scenarios that we expected. As in Anamaria Iuga's example, who thought that the [*Căluş*] ritual would be abandoned, but, on the contrary, [observed that] the ritual was still performed. I would like to ask Ana: What about other holidays? Were the venues of other holidays during the pandemic in your country the same [as previously]? A couple of days ago, your colleague told us that in Romania some official celebrations were forbidden, but at local places they remained to be held.

Anamaria Iuga:
Yes, it is true. For example, at the beginning of Lent, we have a custom that entails masks, a carnival. I had been to the villages near Bucharest, and I knew that, officially, the carnival was forbidden, and the festival that is connected to the ritual was not held, but at the same time people celebrated it. They masked themselves, went out, and had little fires the night before. So, on an official level, let us say, it could be that it is forbidden, but in private it is held. Just as you described. Another example is Christmas. We have this Christmas carolling tradition that is very vivid, and I know that it was forbidden officially, but people [participated in it] up to some hours. They went and visited some families, but you had to be at home by ten o'clock, so people visited each other and sang these Christmas carols. Not in such a manner as it used to be before, but they still followed the tradition. So, yes, there are many examples. For Pentecost, for this custom that we have now for the *Căluş*, there were no restrictions, because we have a very good situation with COVID at the moment, but I do not know if it will happen with the new Delta variant of COVID; the public restrictions will probably be activated again by the officials. So, there are always these two levels. Also, officials mainly think about organising festivals, so what is not allowed is organising festivals, the kinds of festivals that we have here in Romania, which are somehow a legacy of the communist times, where they involve a lot of folkloric groups that are invited, and the public. So, a festival involves a lot of people, but if we think only of the custom, how it is held outside the context of the festival, people kind of avoided these restrictions or were allowed to avoid them.

Irina Sedakova:
Just a very small comment: one strategy to avoid restrictions. I gave a paper in Tartu, and I showed the Epiphany bathing in icy waters (Sedakova & Stahl 2022: 206). This winter, such baths were strictly prohibited in Moscow, but people went to the Moscow region, where they were not prohibited. Can you find anybody in the Moscow region in Russia? It is so big. So people did not follow the restrictions.

Irina Stahl:
So, they are just switching the spaces, changing the space, finding a new one.

Irina Sedakova:
Exactly, yes. It is a strategy to go to another place, another church, et cetera.

Nina Vlaskina:
I think that even the church has to change many things. If I may say something on behalf of my colleague Irina Kuznetsova, who has not had an opportunity to be here; she told me that there was a huge discussion among the [Russian Orthodox] clergy about objects and the symbolic meaning of objects. For example, there is a tradition to share the spoon and to use the same spoon and the same part of the tissue during Holy Communion. For most people, it was not a matter of which spoon to use, but for the clergy it was really a question of faith. Because if you do not believe that you cannot get ill from [having the communion from the same] spoon, then you do not believe in God, because God could not allow people to become ill from sharing one spoon. So, it was not a matter of objects, but a greater matter of one's faith. And in different parishes, the problem was solved in various ways. For example, in Irina's parish [of St. Elijah's Church in Krasnodar, Russia], there were disposable spoons; in other parishes, they used sanitisers or somehow cleaned the spoons.

Irina Stahl:
We had a huge discussion in Romania about the Eucharist. And the decision of the church was that they did not absolutely want to change it for fear that it might remain changed later on. The general idea is that the Orthodox clergy never change [the established] rituals, so they did not even want to discuss it. They said discussions with the other sister churches were ongoing, but the decision was never made public. Priests continued to give people the Eucharist in private, though they were avoiding doing it in a group, after the liturgy; however, in private, after parishioners had confessed, they were giving it to them. And I think they tried as much as possible to keep the spoons clean. But there was also the idea that a healing gesture by definition could not make you ill. They did not want to change this paradigm. It was supposed to heal you. God cannot allow a holy object or a holy ritual to make you sick. So yes, it was a question of belief, and I addressed that on several occasions, and I have not gotten any answers, so the answer was kind of avoided. It was just a taboo subject. Nobody wanted to discuss it because it is a matter of faith. But then we cannot just pretend that we do not know any scientific results, and there are quite a few studies on this topic. I read some studies about Hindu [and other religious] customs that were meant to be holy (Pellerin & Edmond 2013), but instead infected people with various diseases, so the disease was transmitted through the rituals. We cannot pretend we, as scientists, do not know about them. So, yes, there was a huge discussion on this matter.

Irina Sedakova:
I think it is a huge *theological* question because it is discussed not only by parishioners, but also by scholars and by the priests on a very high level. I wonder what God thinks about it, but you know, priests act differently. In the Russian Christian Orthodox churches, there are many priests who do give communion with disposable plastic spoons. And every receiver [of the Sacrament] has his or her own tissue to wipe the mouth.

Irina Stahl:
I found out that the Finnish Orthodox church is using disposable wooden spoons too, and they recycle them afterwards, so I thought that was interesting. It is really up to each parish or each church to make the decision. And this is not a singular case in history. We experienced a similar situation in Romania, in Bucharest, in the nineteenth century, during the plague, when communion was banned. The priests were kept from giving communion to people. So, this is not the first interdiction of its kind. It is strange that we have had so many tragedies and so many pandemics up to this point and we have still not found a solution. Or more precisely, the church should [think of] find[ing] a solution for this kind of situation in the future.

Nina Vlaskina:
We have some comments in the chat. One comment is from Joanna Lipińska. She says that in some churches in Poland, the priests insisted that there was no COVID or that the holy water would heal it, and they were against not allowing the use of holy water when entering the church. Yes, it is also a matter of sharing things. Tania Matanova says that [in Bulgaria] there were also discussions about the Eucharist. So, it is a kind of international issue.

Anamaria Iuga:
I know that one Orthodox priest [in Romania] said that it is allowed to give the Eucharist with the same spoon because it is a silver spoon and cannot contain any viruses.

Irina Stahl:
Silver destroys most bacteria, [that is true] but not viruses. It is science versus religion at this point. We are moving on and will discuss the methodological question. I believe everybody here has something to say. We all had our problems in our fieldwork during this period, and we wanted to discuss with you the way in which you adapted your methodology.

Maybe I can start by sharing a few of my problems with the counting of people attending pilgrimages (Stahl 2022). I had to change my methodology several times and tried to cope with the unexpected news of no access [to people who did not stay in the line of pilgrims who were waiting to touch the relics and pray at them]. First of all, the thing that I had problems with was the mask and my glasses getting fogged. It was a huge thing because I could not take the mask off, and I could not see through my glasses, so counting people from a distance was quite difficult. And also, the fact that I could not keep my usual spot because for several years already I had had my own rituals of studying rituals. I used to go to the same place and do the same things. And this year it was impossible: not [being allowed to] approach or getting close to the relics was a major issue for me. So, I had to adapt and invent. For instance, in the case of Saint Demetrius [celebrations last year], the police initially announced that the flow of pilgrims will only run one way: you entered one way [the access alley to the Patriarchal Palace at the bottom of the hill] and you exited the other way [the other side of the hill, through the back gate]. I thought, "Oh, that's going to be easy. I'll just go to the back gate and count". But it was not that easy because I soon realised that many people [were breaking the rule because they] wanted to go back the same way they came. So, I had to do it in two sequences: I counted people exiting the back gate, and then I went and counted people exiting through the front alley. These are the kinds of examples in which you have to be inventive and find new ways on the spot because you cannot do what you would have done normally.

Joanna Lipińska:
One of my main problems was that the UK was closed for quite a long time, and I conducted my research both in Poland and in the UK. I got a scholarship that I could not use. The other thing is that the open rituals were usually held in London, and all those rituals were cancelled, so they had to move online. On the one hand, it is easier because I can stay at home and watch it. But on the other hand, I cannot approach people to just ask them to talk to me about something, so I cannot make new contacts easily. So, yes, that is a huge problem.

Daria Radchenko:
I would like to talk about the specifics of conducting interviews via various technical devices, such as Zoom or Skype, and being distant. What I noticed during this work was, of course, not only that the process was so much quicker and [more] convenient, because I could talk to people living in different cities and conduct the interviews in a very short time, but [I could] also [notice] the effect of this type of work on the results of the interviews. In my experience, the

majority of my research participants were unknown to me beforehand. I just recruited them on Facebook. I made a post on Facebook and asked everyone who wanted to talk about this experience of online Easter to write me a note, and then we could arrange an interview. So, [there indeed] was the problem of establishing mutual confidence in a very short time, online, without any kind of physical contact, without being there in the same space and having to deal with the technical ruptures. The latter problem was particularly important because the connection might be different, the quality of connection, and if the connection is lost and we have to re-establish it somehow, to repair the connection, the kind of psychological connection also fails, and we have to repair that as well. We return to what we have been talking about, the emotional state we have been in, because again, this topic is really sensitive. And it is no secret that people are very emotionally involved. I had situations of great emotional involvement from both sides: from my side as the researcher and a believer, and from my research participants.

But on the other hand, what was interesting was the addition [degree] of confidence [established between me and the participant] due to the fact that we both, unplanned, chose to interact from our private spaces. One thing is that private space ensures a feeling of safety for the research participant. He or she is at home and can stop the interview at any time, which is not possible during physical contact. One does not have to go somewhere in some public space and can talk openly because no one would hear him except the researcher. And another thing is that we have the opportunity to observe the inside of each other's private space. So, for me, it was important because my research participants could show me the space where they celebrated Easter: where the icons were, where they put the gadget, and what the specifics of the space were. But for them, it was equally important to look inside my private space. I conducted the interviews from the very same room I am in now. And I had the bookshelves in the background. And they looked at my bookshelves, and actually commented on them. They somehow enhanced my status as a researcher because they saw professional books [in the background]. They asserted that my experience and my knowledge were confirmed: "Yes, this is a researcher!" I could not confirm it myself in any other way; no one recommended me; it was just Facebook; you can deal with anybody on Facebook. Or some people would comment on items on my shelves: statues or pictures, asking me to show them closer to the screen, et cetera. So, we could establish a kind of unofficial, informal relationship between us. And I even had a very nice experience when, again, not being physically present in the private space of the research participant, I was still there in some sense, because her cat came up to look at the digital screen and my research participant commented that the cat would not normally do that.

"Probably," she said, "she likes you." The cat confirmed my good intentions as well. This sounds a bit anecdotal, but I really think that it is methodologically important how this brief change from the formal to informal situation, a mutual intervention from the private space, enhances this confidence between the researcher and the research participant.

Emese Ilyefalvi:
I really experienced the same [thing] during my interviews. However, I met everybody once, in real life, before I did the Zoom interviews. But it was my experience that they were much more intimate than my other interviews in real life. So, that was a great experience for me. What I would like to add, [an issue] which was problematic for me during this research, is how to avoid being continuously involved in participant observation on Facebook. Because sometimes it was really hard to draw a line [and say to myself] that I am not a researcher, I am just hanging on Facebook, but I [still] followed all the Christian congregations and ministers and priests from Hungary and all the other people. And it was sometimes hard because I said [to myself] that I was always sitting at the computer, hanging on Facebook, and I did not know if there was any qualitative difference [between] when I was a participant observing online, or now [when] I am just using the Internet.

Daria Radchenko:
There are quite a few papers and books on digital ethnography and multisite ethnography which focus on this. As for me, I am accustomed to this because, generally, the sphere I am working in is digital anthropology. So, spending time online and on Facebook while being paid for it is a familiar situation for me. But still, there are huge discussions on how this difference in involvement works in this situation. Here, I think that it is important that we are all in the same situation. It is not that we artificially stick to Facebook or whatever while all the rest of people's activities are actually undertaken offline. This is different. The activity is online.

The problem for me is how to find the fields in which to conduct participant observation. Because, for example, in my experience, what I started with this research was the celebration of Easter online. Because I am a Russian Orthodox, a believer, I was naturally involved in the process. My first motivation was to participate in the service as much as I could via live stream. But of course, the "anthropologist mode" switched on immediately, and I started to keep my field diary, making screenshots, thinking of what was going on not only as a service but also as a field I am in. The problem is that we cannot be everywhere at the same time. For example, I have investigated lots of videos which were actually

live streams on Easter night. But I did this (the live streams, the accompanying chats, all sorts of materials) later on, a few weeks after Easter. And this makes us think about the difference between experience in the moment, which is actually participant observation, and working with the digital archive, which is exactly what I did later. I am trying to investigate what was going on in other churches, in other cities, and probably in some other countries. The digital archive allows us this illusion that we are still there, in this moment. But, of course, I think it is methodologically important to reflect on the differences in our experience (the key instrument of anthropologists), to think about the emotions, and the differences in involvement that we have during this kind of work with archived material online.

Irina Stahl:
I have to say that during the lockdown, the main feeling that I had was that of frustration that I could not go and take pictures. I was really frustrated because you could see a few pictures in the media [so obviously some people were granted access]. I thought: How did they do it? Of course, journalists usually have a tag with "Media" on them [which provides them unlimited access during pilgrimages]. But we, researchers, we do not carry any tag, and we are not granted unlimited access. So, it was very frustrating, because I really wanted to take pictures during the pandemic [in order to document my studies]. At that point, I did not really think of the virus as much as I thought of the fact that I needed to be there [and document], but I could not. Later on, when access was granted, my main concern during fieldwork was how not to be arrested, how not to be noticed by the police agents, because it was forbidden to remain stationary. And if they saw you, they started asking questions. What could I have told them? That I am a researcher, that I work at the [Romanian] Academy? They would certainly not have made any exceptions for me. So, yes, you have to find ways for being there or not being there and dealing with your emotions.

Judit Balatonyi:
At the beginning of my research (Balatonyi 2022), I planned a big classic ethnographic fieldwork in open areas, but then COVID reached Hungary as well as other European countries. So, I was happy because, from the very beginning of my research, I began my digital ethnographic fieldwork in a lot of Facebook groups, so I changed my focus and I tried to be more focused on this digital sphere. I wrote a lot of letters to admins and wedding planning groups, telling them I was an anthropologist and I wanted to be there as a researcher [online]. That was my situation in this field, so I began to do ethnographic research, of course, mainly on Facebook, and I tried to attend a lot of webinars and seminars.

There was a boom in these seminars in the sphere of wedding planning. A lot of wedding service providers tried to make money, spend money, and so on. They tried to do a lot of webinars, so I participated on these occasions. And of course, I tried to conduct a lot of in-depth interviews with wedding service providers and with brides. It was very interesting. Emese Ilyefalvi and I also conducted online surveys. It was a very new situation for me, and also I think that all ethnographies and anthropologies are very interesting. [While I was working with questionnaires], it was a question for me how the results could be ethnographically relevant and deep. What were they for? So, for the methodological aspect, I think a lot about the possible ways of using these kinds of results in ethnography. I have a question: who among us has dealt with the online questionnaire before, in this COVID situation, or is using it now?

Mare Kõiva:
I am.

Emese Ilyefalvi:
It was the first time for me to do the online questionnaire.

Nina Vlaskina:
Was it as effective as the questionnaire for the interview offline? Was it as effective as you thought it could be?

Judit Balatonyi:
Yes.

Irina Stahl:
Did they have to fill it in by themselves or was it an online interview?

Emese Ilyefalvi:
They could fill in my questionnaire themselves.

Irina Stahl:
Did they fill in all of it? Because that is the problem with the [online] questionnaires. Many questions are left unanswered.

Emese Ilyefalvi:
Almost all questions were converse, and I was shocked that research participants filled it all in, but they did. I do not know why, because it was very long. But they did, and we got a lot of mini-essays about their feelings and opinions.

The questionnaire had 70 questions. I know that it was a really unorthodox questionnaire. I mean, this is a very good example of what happens when a folklorist or anthropologist starts to use online questionnaires. I do not want just one word, answers, or just clicking options. So now, this is why we are still analysing the material.

Daria Radchenko:
I also have a question, Emese. How did you recruit the research participants for this questionnaire? Did you know them prior to that or did you just spread the word?

Emese Ilyefalvi:
The online questionnaire was spread out everywhere in Hungary, so it had a very good media impact, which is why we had a lot of data. But for the interviews, yes, I did my fieldwork in my own congregation and another one in the same county. Actually, for the interviews, I chose people close to my age, plus or minus ten years. So, it was easy because I knew, or a friend of a friend knew, her or him. But I tried to choose ministers and leaders of the congregation as well as just average members of the congregation.

Judit Balatonyi:
I published Google forms online with a self-completion questionnaire as a paid aid on Facebook. As Laura Iannelli and her colleagues wrote, "survey-based studies are increasingly experimenting with strategies that employ digital footprints left by users on social media as entry points for recruiting participants and complementary data sources" (Iannelli et al. 2020: 462). In my case, the target group was defined as being between the ages of 20 and 60, residents of Hungary, engaged or newly married, and interested in marriage and weddings. So, I tried to use this strategy to catch people on Facebook as a paid aid. And it was successful.

Nina Vlaskina:
Dear colleagues, thank you very much for your contributions. In fact, our time is almost up, and we need to draw some conclusions and say our final words. Firstly, I would like to thank all the participants in all the parts of our panel. Because it was a really fruitful discussion, many new thoughts were generated.

Irina Stahl:
I found the discussions very motivating and interesting yesterday and today as well. It was an unusual situation, and we were fortunate, as researchers,

to experience this pandemic. We need to draw some conclusions. This was a great opportunity for us to face our fieldwork and our studies and to see them in a different way. It is an awakening moment for the entire society and also for us as researchers. And it should force us to go to the core of our research and our activities and question everything. Usually, a crisis situation leads to a lot of reflection. And this is what we tried to do here today with this roundtable, which was an unusual format that we have never had before, but I find it very stimulating, this kind of brainstorming. And I think we all have to think about what was said today, quietly in our own private spaces, reflect and try to summarise the whole thing.

Irina Sedakova:
I am trying to be a realist, not a pessimist; even more, I am trying to put forward some optimistic things. When we are speaking about the future, as Dzheni Madzharov asked us, I think that this time is giving us some opportunities which will last as an option. They will last as a new methodology, not brand new but improved. Like Daria Radchenko put it, having a mass at home and looking at the details of her 'religious' interior, meanwhile discussing the anthropology of things besides other issues [she receives a wider scientific picture of the topic studied].

[The pandemic changed the activity of scholars to a certain extent.] This lockdown time of the pandemic was additionally given to us, the scholars who have already had some time to think over the material that we have already gained. This extra time allowed many people to finalise and publish books, which is wonderful. There are many scholars who stopped doing field research and finally had the time to sum up the studies [and to develop new ideas, following the new circumstances].

With the very best wishes and many thanks to the organisers, I say bye-bye and good luck with the new methodology and the old one [in researching traditional and innovative topics].

NOTES

[1] A detailed review of the congress by Alexander Novik, Irina Sedakova and Anastasia Kharlamova (2022) as well as several papers of the SIEF participants are published in this issue.

[2] The video recording of the roundtable is available online at https://youtu.be/_hOmDR1_3Po, last accessed on 20 September 2022.

[3] The subsequent text is, for the most part, a literal transcript of the roundtable meeting. Minor changes were made to correct errors natural to the flow of oral speech and to

exclude transitional words when the conveners turn the floor over to the next person. Words that were omitted from the direct speech but important for understanding the general meaning of the statement are put in square brackets.

[4] The first two sessions of the panel "Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules" of the 15th SIEF Congress "Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression" were held on 22 June 2021. Video recordings are available online at https://youtu.be/4isH8EWira4 and https://youtu.be/Fmei6WPcuOc, last accessed on 20 September 2022.

[5] Žilvytis Šaknys delivered a paper on this topic, titled "Real Holiday? Pandemic Easter – Lithuanian Case" to the Panel "Perf03b Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules II" of the 15th SIEF Congress titled "Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression".

[6] Emese Ilyefalvi delivered a paper on this topic under the heading "Online Rituals of Practicing Religion: The Effects of COVID-19 on Hungarian Religious Communities" at the panel "Perf03b Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules II" of the 15th SIEF Congress titled "Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression".

[7] Joanna Lipińska delivered a paper "Wiccan Rituals in the Time of Pandemics: How Witches Decided to Move on the Web" at the panel "Rel03 New Agents, New Agency: How to Study 'Post-Secular' Religious Ontologies" of the 15th SIEF Congress "Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression". The video recording of this panel is available online at https://youtu.be/P58xFcPzlWM, last accessed on 20 September 2022.

[8] English Heritage is a company that cares for over 400 historic buildings, monuments and sites in England, including Stonehenge.

[9] Stonehenge visiting hours are 9:30–19:00.

[10] Saaremaa Opera Festival is organised by Eesti Konsert annually since 2008 in July in Castle Yard (Lossihoov), Kuressaare city, Saaremaa parish, Saare County, Estonia.

[11] The 14th Conference of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group, "Commerce and Traditions" was held in Riga, Latvia, on 1–4 June 2022, and was hosted by the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia, the Archives of Latvian Folklore, and the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group. The information on the event is available at http://en.lfk.lv/RY2022-commerce-and-traditions, last accessed on 20 September 2022.

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Irina Stahl (MA, MS) is Senior Researcher at the Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy of Sciences, and Associate Lecturer of European Ethnology at the University of Bucharest. She was elected to the Executive Board of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) in 2021, and has been secretary of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group since 2014. Among her fields of interest are folk religion, Orthodox Christianity, and the history of Romanian sociology.

irinastahl@yahoo.fr

Nina Vlaskina (PhD) is Senior Researcher at the Federal Research Centre The Southern Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Her research interests primarily concern traditional culture of the Don Cossacks and Old Believers of southern Russia.

nvlaskina@gmail.com

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REVIEW ARTICLE

RULES AND NORMS, FREEDOM, AND REGULATION: THE 15TH CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE (SIEF)

Alexander Novik
PhD, Head of the Department of European Studies
Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera)
Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
njual@mail.ru, novik.petersburg@gmail.com

Irina Sedakova
D.Sc., Head of the Department of Typology and Comparative Linguistics
Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
ised@mail.ru

Anastasia Kharlamova
MA, Postgraduate Student
Institute for Linguistic Studies
Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
anastasia_kharlamova@icloud.com

Abstract: The review of the 15th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF), one of the first virtual events of such a scale, highlights modern tendencies in anthropology, ethnology, and folklore. The authors of the review observe the growing interdisciplinarity, the use of adjacent disciplines, and the politization and socialization of the traditional academic research. The Congress's eighteen streams included topics customary for the SIEF congresses ("Archives & Sources", "Narratives", "Food", "Material Culture and Museums", etc.) as well as new ones ("Posthumanism", "Intersectionality"), with over 1000 presentations in total. There is a detailed overview of several panels and streams, including those dedicated to the new folklore and changes in rituals due to the pandemic. The authors note the broadening geography of the participants and, as a result, the increasing number of academic traditions covered at the Congress, which was possible partly thanks to the virtual format.

Keywords: humanities and social sciences, innovations in academic life, interdisciplinarity, LGBT topics, migrations

The venue for the 15th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore, SIEF) was initially supposed to be Helsinki, Finland. The forum was indeed organized by Finnish academics and took place on June 19–24, 2021, as planned; however, due to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic it was fully moved online.

In the past decade, the SIEF congresses were organized once every two years, and there has unfailingly been a growing interest in them in the academic society. The participants showed new approaches to topics, a variety of possibilities of exchanging research ideas and projects. Attention was paid both to the young and the established researchers, and an innovative approach to presentations (for details, see Vlaskina et al. 2015; Novik & Sedakova 2020).

The 15th Congress under the general name **"Breaking the Rules? Power, Participation, Transgression"** took place on the online platform Whova. This platform provides excellent facilities for large-scale events: easy ways of moving from one room to another, comfortable chat formats, etc. Most of the presentations were recorded and posted to be freely accessed at the SIEF site. It allowed one to get a more in-depth acquaintance with the Congress's program, though, naturally, one cannot participate in the discussion while viewing a video recording, which narrows the possibilities for further interpretation of the papers.

In accordance with tradition, there were five plenary presentations, one for each day of the Congress. Two lectures demonstrated a further strengthening of interdisciplinary studies and the tendency of researchers from different fields to team up with civil activists. In her lecture "Slow Activism: Lessons from Citizen Scientists"[1] **Kathrine Borland** (Ohio State University, USA) shared the results of her project on the collaborative work of ethnologists and ecologists in her region. **Sanna Valkonen** (University of Lapland, Finland) gave the lecture "The Multiple Worlds of Sámi Research",[2] in which she described several projects on the research of Sámi identity and traditions. These studies were done in collaboration by ethnologists, folklorists, artists, musicians, activists, and members of various societies.

The presentation by **Susan Keitumetse**[3] (University of Botswana) belonged to the same field. Researchers from Africa and Asia have often taken part in international symposiums and academic forums in recent years, and their papers are increasingly frequently published by high-ranked journals. As UNESCO Chairholder (African Heritage Studies and Sustainable Development), Susan Keitumetse has been doing her research in the countries of Southern Africa for many years. Her presentation "Exploring Environment-Community Connections in Africa's Nature Reserves: Overlaying Community Cultural Values to Enhance Conservation" was dedicated not only to the difficulties of studying the local traditions and culture, but to the gender-related problems as well, including

those encountered by women who decide to devote their life to academia. For example, in many African countries, it is forbidden for women to work in the field of archeology, since it involves digging up the earth, which is against the local beliefs. It takes considerable effort to destroy the established stereotypes. At the end of the lecture, there was a question from a researcher from Chile: "How do the university programs, on which so much time and money is spent, help in preserving the cultural heritage?" The answer was the following: "The programs that help to develop marketing for the local people, for example, those who weave baskets or ply traditional handicrafts, are valuable in that respect". In the ensuing discussions, examples were brought up not only from African countries but also from other continents.

In her lecture "Rules: Pros and Cons"[4] **Ellen Hertz** (University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland) addressed the Congress's theme directly and discussed the correlation of rights and freedoms, the role of regulation in building human society, and the dangers of going beyond the constraints of regulation.

Molly Andrews (University of East London, UK) dedicated her lecture "'We've Been Talking Almost Half My Life': Scholarship and Long Conversations in East Germany"[5] to the analysis of her nearly thirty-year-long project of studying East German dissidents. She noted the productive nature of such lengthy studies and the resulting wide possibilities for the analysis of the values system and personal changes, which are revealed in the communication between well-acquainted people in the surroundings they are used to.

There are fifteen working groups within the SIEF, and new ones are founded at almost every congress, which is usually a testament to the actualization of some topics (the SIEF Working Group on Digital Ethnology and Folklore, for example, was founded this way), the determined organizational efforts of the SIEF's leaders (attracting beginner researchers led to the creation of the youth group), or to the initiative of the researchers working in similar fields (the SIEF Working Group on Body, Affects, Senses, and Emotions, BASE).

The Francophone Working Group[6] is united by language. Its members support pluralism of opinions and multilingualism, and are against the domination of the English language. The question of presentation and discussion language is likewise raised at other congresses (the International Congress of Slavists, the International Congress for South-East European Studies, etc.) where researchers assert their right to present their papers in German, Russian, and other languages, especially on topics that involve specific national terminology.

Traditionally, the congresses are structured into panels, sorted thematically into several large blocs, which are called streams.[7] More than 1000 presentations had been accepted. The streams' topics reflect the main tendencies in the development of ethnological and folklore studies, showing the considerable

expansion in these fields and their takeover of adjacent subjects in the fields of humanities, history, economy, and sociology. As an example, we shall list a few of the eighteen streams of the Congress, to demonstrate the lines of research which are currently of immediate interest to ethnologists and folklorists: "Digital Lives"; "Environment"; "Bodies, Affects, Senses, Emotions"; "Health and Medicine"; "Intersectionality" (research on how social and political identities intersect and overlap to create various modes of discrimination); "Knowledge Production"; "Posthumanism"; and "Resistance". Other streams – "Archives and Sources"; "Material Culture and Museums"; "Food"; "Narratives"; and "Heritage" – addressed the traditional ethnological, folklore and (in a wider sense) anthropological knowledge, the well-proven methods and topics of these fields; however, they also included quite innovative approaches to problems as well as the appeal to politics and economy, which has become widespread in recent years. Within the stream "Material Culture and Museums" there was a panel "Museums as Spaces for Anti-racism"; many political and economic topics were touched upon in plenary lectures. Ecology was not only the topic of the stream "Environment", but also one of the topics of the stream "Posthumanism" (panel "Contested and Re-imagined Forests of the North"). The interdisciplinary interest in nature and the elements, the union of academia and the arts were demonstrated by the panel "Toward an Elemental Anthropology: Working Through Sand".

The gender problems are still relevant, though the presentations concerning them were not allocated to a separate stream. They fit in very well in other streams – such was, for example, the panel "Gendered Food(ways), Gendered Heritage: Power, Participation, Transgression" in the stream "Food". The panel "Political Bodies Can Break the Rules: Gender, (Anti)feminism and Affects"[8] (the SIEF Working Group on Body, Affects, Senses, and Emotions) was dedicated to the topics of feminism and the discussion of a wide range of questions concerning the woman's right to the freedom of choice, including the choice to give birth or have an abortion. **Agnieszka Balcerzak** (LMU Munich, Germany) gave a presentation concerning the public response to the law banning abortion, which was passed in Poland on October 22, 2020. That decision caused many protests in Poland as well as in other parts of Europe. The author discussed the history of the problem and the opinions of it in modern Polish society. In 1989, after the end of the socialist regime in Poland, abortion was transferred from state-owned clinics to the private ones. The passing of the new law, forbidding abortion even in the case of a threat of the birth of a sick child, made it entirely illegal. Polish women who want to have an abortion go abroad for that purpose, to the nearest European Union countries, where it costs about a thousand dollars. The number of illegal abortions in Poland is estimated to

be about 200,000. The conclusion was that the new law has not cancelled out abortions, instead pushing them into the gray area and making them financially taxing, without solving the problems of the women and the society, which led to numerous meetings and protest movements in Warsaw and other Polish cities. After the presentations, there were many comments and examples from other countries' experience, often beyond the topic at hand. **Chiara Musu** (Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, Italy) was another presenter of the panel. She talked about the preservation of traditional values of the Apennine region: traditional family, raising of children, and family hierarchy. **Chenyang Song** (Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany), who is from China, talked of the important role of women in society and their participation in decision-making. The discussion was led by **Begonya Enquix Grau** (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, UOC), who advocated for women's rights in various fields and guided the panel's participants in their comments.

The COVID-19 pandemic became a new topic (and a new reality and field) for ethnologists, folklorists, linguists, and other researchers, which was reflected in the program of the Congress. Many presentations were dedicated to memes, neologisms, jokes, and conspiracy theories surrounding the coronavirus and vaccination. There were discussions of the new and repeated narratives, the change of ritual practices, the media's role during the pandemic, etc. In the stream "Narratives" there was a presentation by **Kristinn Schram** (University of Iceland), "A Pandemic of Puns? Humour in Times of Calamity"; in the stream "Mobilities", a panel managed by **Pihla Maria Siim** (University of Tartu, Estonia), **Markus Idvall** (Stockholm University, Sweden), and **Fredrik Nilsson** (Åbo Akademi University, Finland), "Crossing the Borders in Times of the Pandemic: Changing Experiences of Transnational Everyday Life from European Border Regions and Beyond". The SIEF Ritual Year Working Group organized a round table "Old Rituals, Changing Environments, New Rules", which involved a detailed discussion of new virtual (contactless, long-distance) forms of rituals and religious practices (Stahl & Vlaskina 2022).

The special thematic panel "Internet Memes as Cultural Agents During the Outbreak of the Coronavirus Crisis"[9] (SIEF Working Group on Digital Ethnology and Folklore, DEF) gathered many presenters and a large audience. **Saša Babič** (Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts) in her paper "The Picture of Life Through Memes: Responds on COVID-19 and Life Changes in Slovenia" used semiotic analysis of popular memes and the considered role of humor in the pandemic that encompassed the entire world. The researcher's main idea was that memes function as an iconic sign. The presentation was accompanied by a PowerPoint slideshow on numerous memes from the Balkan region and the neighboring countries. For example, many jokes were inspired

by the shortage of toilet paper at the start of the pandemic, by the idea of curing and preventing infection with alcohol, the similar names of the Corona beer and the coronavirus, etc. **Alexander Novik** asked whether any memes were religion-based, and the author replied that in her data, only one meme was related to religion. There was another important question in the discussion, which concerned the theory: are memes a separate genre of folklore? Most of the panel's participants decided on considering it a boundary genre.

Ana Banić Grubišić and **Dragana Antonijević** (University of Belgrade, Serbia) continued the discussion of alcoholic drinks in COVID-era memes in Slavic countries in their joint presentation "'Slavs Preparing for Coronavirus' – Intragroup Humor, Stereotypes and Nostalgia in COVID-19 Memes". The research held a lot of self-irony, which undoubtedly appealed to the panel's participants. Residents of the countries of the former SFR Yugoslavia actively used the topic of rakia as a means to fight the virus. There were also Russian examples brought up in the discussion, with vodka portrayed as the Russian "vaccine". The memes involved play on words and terms – *coronavirus* / *the crown* (*корона*, *korona)* of the Russian Empire" (compare the above pun on Corona beer). Since the Congress was conducted online, chat was used extensively. There were many joking examples brought up about how different Balkan and Baltic countries lived through the pandemic. It was brought up that the Earth is getting less anthropocentric, and that people had become a virus: "We are the virus ourselves". The main conclusion in the panel's chat was the following: humor is always serious and is an important object of academic research.

The panel "Symbiotic Living: Human-Microbial Relations in Everyday Life"[10] (stream "Posthumanism"), managed by **Valdimar Hafstein** (University of Iceland), an active member of the SIEF and its president in 2013–2017, **Salla Sariola** (University of Helsinki, Finland), **Jón Þór Pétursson** (University of Iceland), and **Matthäus Rest (**Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Germany), assembled many participants. The presentations were based on the analysis of data on food anthropology, including food production and regional characteristics of revitalization of traditional ways of preparing and consuming dairy, fruit and other dishes. A heated discussion followed the presentation of **Jón Þór Pétursson** and **Valdimar Hafstein**, who gave a detailed description of the strategy of targeted marketing of the traditional yogurt (*skyr*), which is prepared via fermenting with the use of a specific kind of microorganisms. In Iceland, there is a practically state-level policy of supplying the market with local products, and among them the yogurt with northern berries, made using "Grandma's recipe", plays a particularly important part. This product is marketed as typically Icelandic, and there are even plans for founding a museum dedicated to it in Reykjavik.

The following discussion touched upon a wide variety of questions: for example, a participant from Greece said that her field experience shows that "women and dairy" is a highly difficult topic for studying. The entire Balkan region is a wide field for studies on food anthropology: almost every district has its own traditions of dairy production with the use of various lactic acid bacteria; some of the products are patented and some are not; it can be interesting to analyze their preparation's influence on society. The discussion of the generally harmless topic of food grew into an exchange of opinions on global questions of masculinity and femininity in dairy production. Participant **Veera Kinnunen** (University of Oulu, Finland) called the Icelanders' fervent wish to market *skyr* as their exclusive invention an "elegant provocation".

"Mobilities" is the traditional topic of the Congress, and that stream became one of the most impressive ones. At the panels, the participants discussed the problems of families' migration and restaurants as places for migrants' socializing, while the SIEF Working Group on Migration and Mobility organized the panel "Making Mobility Rules". The topics of relocation and emigration increasingly attract attention, especially in recent years, due to the large-scale migrations in Europe. At the panel "Highly Skilled Migrants: Challenging Integration Categories"[11] there were five presentations, attended by a large audience. The panel's co-chairs were **Tytti Steel** (University of Helsinki, Finland) and **Maja Povrzanović Frykman** (Malmö University, Sweden).

Jasna Čapo (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Croatia), who got her BA at the University of Zagreb and her MA and PhD at the University of California (Berkeley), had presided over the 2015 Congress (Vlaskina et al. 2015). A well-known researcher of the problems of migration (Čapo 2019), urbanism, and other ethnological topics, she focused her paper on the challenges of migration for high-qualified people who leave their country.

The problem of migrants is highly relevant in North America and other regions of the world as well as in Europe. Usually this topic attracts the attention of researchers whose interest is focused on the hardships of integration into a new society for those who escaped war, poverty, or instability in their native country. However, people with brilliant education comprise a large percentage of the new migrants. They have good jobs in their own country and are successfully integrated into society. The questions of what motivates such people to move, settle in a new place, frequently change their lifestyle completely, and what difficulties await migrants were in the center of the discussion. Jasna Čapo provided many opportunities for various participants to engage in the discussions. One of the authors of this review, Alexander Novik, asked whether the author considered wealthy people who move to other countries, buy property there and try to integrate in the society to be highly qualified migrants. Jasna

Čapo's home country – Croatia – provides a multitude of examples of residents of the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, and other countries, who, attracted by the Croatian climate, beautiful landscapes, seacoast almost a thousand kilometers long, good ecological situation, and delicious cuisine, buy villas and apartments and stay there for a considerable part of the year. Most of these people are not the infamous oligarchs but rather those who spend almost all their savings and time to settle in properly; they try to integrate into the local society, attending Croatian language courses or hiring tutors, and strive to find new friends locally and keep up good relationships with their neighbors. Jasna replied in the negative: she does not view them as highly qualified migrants. Alexander Novik's question and Jasna Čapo's answer that followed it caused some discussion. Indeed, many highly qualified migrants, moving, for example, to Croatia, do not plan to learn their new country's language at all; they are satisfied with the wages and the quality of life and do not bother with integration attempts, while it is their children who end up facing the demands of society. The next questions to the author concerned precisely the socialization of migrants' children, for whom any form of integration comes together with the difficulties of both translation and reformatting of cultural codes.

Asia Zaitceva's (Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia) presentation "'It Is Not About the Money...': Highly-Skilled Migration from Post-Soviet Russia to Vienna" was criticized extensively in the chat. There was no quantitative or qualitative data shown in the study, and nor were there any quotes from interviews, which are necessary in such kinds of research for both social and cultural anthropologists. If the author had presented the open data of sociological surveys among the youth concerning their desire to emigrate, which had been conducted by various institutions in Russia in recent years, the paper would have been more convincing (see, e.g., Emigratsiia 2021). For comparison, one could have made an analysis of the number of young people who wish to permanently move to the West from the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (such surveys are conducted regularly, and their results are published even by mass media) (Gëdeshi & King 2018; World Bank Group 2018).

Sara Bonfanti (University of Trento, Italy), one of the authors of the book on migration and migrants (Nieto & Massa & Bonfanti 2020), which is well-known among anthropologists, spoke of the expats' life, illustrating her presentation with numerous life-story examples, including from the field of communication. For example, the Italians, who are used to close interactions in family and society, are absolutely appalled by a parting suggestion which is quite common for the British: "We can meet in five weeks." The author exclaimed: "Can a friend say something like that?"

Of particular interest are joint studies of researchers from different countries, with different approaches, theoretical base and field experience. The presentation by **Elisabetta Zontini** and **Elena Genova** (University of Nottingham, UK), for example, raised the question of Italian and Bulgarian migrants' integration into the United Kingdom. The authors' interest was focused on the opinions on Brexit – a highly relevant topic for European social discourse. According to the conclusions drawn by Elisabetta Zontini and Elena Genova, the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union does not concern young Italians who have recently arrived on the British Isles. As for Bulgarian migrants, they are generally disillusioned and view Brexit as a betrayal. As noted by the participants of the discussion, led by chair **Maja Povrzanović Frykman** (Malmö University, Sweden), this state of things can probably be explained by the fact that Italy has long been a member of the EU, while Bulgaria has joined it fairly recently. For the Bulgarians, European institutions are almost sacred, in spite of the disappointment that many "new Europeans" feel in the day-to-day practices and realities of the united Europe.

The traditional questions of modern anthropology were discussed at the panel "The Rules and Ruptures of Postindustrial Cities"[12] of the stream "Urban Studies". The panel's co-chair **Nevena Škrbić Alempijević**[13] and her coauthor **Sanja Potkonjak** (University of Zagreb, Croatia), in their presentation "Rethinking City in the Industrial Aftermath: Industrial Nostalgia and Environmental Fallouts", compared the experience of the development of two Croatian towns – Sisak (population – 50,000) and Bakar (population – 35,000) – in the past few years. In Sisak, the available productive capacity has been undergoing modernization since the 1990s: the town, with its potential for oil processing and metallurgy, is trying to change the industrial paradigm. In Bakar, the town's coke-chemical plant was closed down completely in 1994. However, the beginning of the twenty-first century saw the start of industrial nostalgy; the local residents started protests under slogans such as "Privatization is robbery", "Organized workers against organized greed", "Future of industry (for) the future of Croatia", "Give us work and the chance to earn wages", etc. While the transformation of Sisak (located in the central part of the country) is possible, Bakar, situated on the coast of the Kvarner Gulf of the Adriatic, will not be able to become a tourist paradise due to the impact the formerly active industrialized construction had on the ecology. The presentation stressed the concepts of the opposition of economic growth and environment pollution, and of public interest and personal acceptance/rejection of innovations.

In the discussion, the following opinions and arguments were brought up. It is well known that in the era of the united Yugoslavia high-ranked party officials preserved the coastal regions at the Adriatic from any construction of

factories that could pollute the environment and make the future development of resorts in the region impossible. At the same time, for the country striving to build socialism, developing its industry was vitally important, henceforth in some towns with less potential for the growth of tourism factories were built, which became, to use the Russian terminology, town-making businesses. The disintegration of the former SFR Yugoslavia led to a nearly total liquidation of such factories, and the entry into the European Union (Croatia is currently its most recent member, being the 28th country to join it in 2013) finished the processes that began over 20 years ago. A part of the population could accept the new reality and integrate into it, while the other part could not or did not want to (compare Kolstø 2016 [2014]). The mass migration to the EU countries has not solved the unemployment problem, and in recent years the popular opinion has become particularly influenced by the longing for the Yugoslavian past, when, as people said, everyone had a job, a comfortable life, free healthcare and education and other achievements of socialism (in fact, there had been a very high level of unemployment throughout the entire period of Yugoslavia's existence, and it was one of the major factors that provoked the disintegration processes in the 1990s) (Woodward 1995). According to the presenter, "people at their own places" continue to live "the life they are used to". The urbanistic studies of anthropologists still ponder their leading question – whether society has the right to radically change the principles of economy, which automatically leads to social tensions and breaking of cultural stereotypes.

The joint presentation of **Ana Pastor Pérez** (University of Barcelona, Spain), **Kalliopi Fouseki** (University College London, UK), **Torgrim Sneve Guttormsen** (Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research), and **Margarita Díaz-Andreu** (University of Barcelona, Spain) led to an intensive discussion as well. The authors presented their paper "Preserving the Value of the Urban Transformations in Barcelona, London and Oslo", in which they compared the changes in major European cities that are in the progress of "utopic development in accordance with a preplanned design". For comparison they had chosen three new quarters in each city. While in the Scandinavian capital the projectors who restored the Tukthus Prison Quarter tried to primarily think of the residents' comfort, in Barcelona, during the development of its northern industrial district Sant Andreu de Palomar, the residents' needs were not considered at all, which led to a strike for the laborers' rights. In London, the innovativeness led to the building of luxurious multistory buildings for wealthy residents in the area of the Royal Arsenal quarter in Woolwich.

The ensuing questions concerned the concept of city transformations: which cities can be considered "smart cities" and which can be viewed as "green cities"? Is it justified to sort cities into such categories? Can it be said that frequently

the flashy marketing of new concepts and their embodiments hides nothing but commercial expediency?

The panel's co-chair **Johannes Moser** asked the panel's participants how nostalgy for the past corresponded with the future and what role melancholy played in the process of comprehending the transformations. **Sanja Potkonjak**'s reply was the following: "For those who work at the plants, their attitude towards the industrial past is melancholy. Different generations have different approaches. But young people adopt their parents' melancholy, which is to be expected from the point of view of social anthropology." This answer echoed the topic of **Victoria Huszka**'s (University of Bonn, Germany) presentation: she analyzed the situation in the Ruhr district. What used to be the country's main industrial center became mostly destructive due to the changes in the economic conjecture, and its residents strive to find a way out of the situation, trying to transform the region and transforming themselves too.

The online format of the Congress allowed for a wider involvement of the participants in different panel meetings, compared to the previous SIEF forums, as well as a high level of participation from a large number of countries, often those who did not have their own presentations at the panels (however, the time zone difference sometimes hindered the virtual attendance). For example, the now traditional minority-themed panel "Queer Intersectionalities in Folklore Studies" in the stream "Intersectionality" had 10 presenting participants in its program but gathered a large audience. At the beginning of the meeting, the panel's chairs **Cory W. Thorne** (Memorial University of Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada) and **Guillermo De Los Reyes** (University of Houston, USA) asked everybody who had joined to introduce themselves and say what had attracted them at the panel. Such an informal preface ensured a friendly atmosphere throughout the entire session, built bridges, and allowed the researchers to feel connected. For example, **Malay Bera**, a postgraduate from India, studies linguistics and folklore, and for him the panel was a place to learn new information relevant to his research. At the session, there was an active discussion of the life of LGBT people in Cuba (the same problem, only from a different aspect, was covered by one of the panel's chairs, Cory W. Thorne, at the SIEF 2019 Congress in Santiago de Compostela, Spain) (Novik & Sedakova 2020: 25–26). The local color of Latin America and the relevance and popularity of the topic allowed for a very lively discussion, where various methods of study and analysis were suggested.

Due to the online format of the 2021 Congress, the discussion was not limited to direct questions to the author and their replies: it also enabled the participants to go on in the chat, where opinions were frequently spoken out rather fiercely.

As we can see, the main topic of rules, norms, chaos, and anomalies has inspired the researchers to look for new approaches and review traditional ones in their analysis of sociological, political and scientific facts as well as the ethnological and folkloristic data. Life itself prompts it, since with the new topics and challenges – viruses, conflicts, social movements, etc. – it will never leave folklorists, ethnologists, and anthropologists without a subject for research.

The 16th SIEF Congress is scheduled for 2023 and will take place in Brno, Czech Republic; it is planned to be an on-site event. Meanwhile, the working groups of the Society continue to hold academic meetings and exchange of ideas. For example, the seminars of the SIEF Working Groups on Archives and on the Ritual Year (for details see Sedakova & Stahl 2022) are held online, and there are also scheduled offline meetings, information on which can be found at the official website of the SIEF.[14]

NOTES

[1] Recording of Kathrine Borland's lecture is available at https://youtu.be/mp1FDXL1t0Q, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[2] Recording of Sanna Valkonen's lecture is available at https://youtu.be/DrAG-t2aez4g, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[3] Recording of Susan Keitumetse's lecture is available at https://youtu.be/mejy-3hUAnBQ, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[4] Recording of Ellen Hertz's lecture is available at https://youtu.be/qnLMquWt7mE, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[5] Recording of Molly Andrews's lecture is available at https://youtu.be/-NZel22gFCs, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[6] On the Francophone Group's panel (chair: Laurent Sébastien Fournier, University Cote d'Azur, France) see Novik & Ryzhova & Sedakova forthcoming.

[7] The SIEF21 program is available at https://www.siefhome.org/congresses/sief2021/panels#timetable, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[8] Panel recording is available at https://youtu.be/pDHKTsrPzD4, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[9] Panel recordings are available at https://youtu.be/aecTe4jGWMQ and https://youtu.be/od-8nsTww0U, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[10] Panel recordings are available at https://youtu.be/jp6ekXJpnEI, https://youtu.be/wl-9W2Qslaoo, and https://youtu.be/UXBIWsObX4g, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[11] Panel recordings are available at https://youtu.be/RF0crBS9p7M and https://youtu.be/XGo6UNEmsyU, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[12] Panel recordings are available at https://youtu.be/Cp2pGdeAQYw and https://youtu.be/9Ss0TIYXDcU, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

[13] The second co-chair of the panel was Johannes Moser (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany).

[14] Available at https://www.siefhome.org, last accessed on 27 October 2022.

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Alexander Novik (PhD) is Head of the Department of European Studies, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Associate Professor of Albanian Philology and Balkan Ethnology at the Department of General Linguistics, Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia. His research interests are in the field of traditional and modern culture, ethnolinguistics, ethnic and religious minorities, folk costume, and festivity.

njual@mail.ru

Irina Sedakova (PhD, D.Sc.) is Head of the Department for Typology and Comparative Linguistics, Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia. Since 2014, she has been the Chair of the Ritual Year Working Group of the International Society of Ethnology and Folklore. Her fields of interest are Slavic and Balkan studies, ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, folklore, childbirth and calendric customs.

ised@mail.ru

Anastasia Kharlamova is a postgraduate student at the Institute for Linguistic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Her research interests are spontaneous speech phonetics, Balkan languages, Germanic languages, Old Church Slavonic, and paleography.

anastasia_kharlamova@icloud.com

NEWS IN BRIEF

ON THE JUBILEE OF EMILY LYLE

On 19 December 2022, **Dr Emily Lyle**, the founder and the Honorary Chair of the SIEF Ritual Year Working Group (RY WG), Honorary Fellow of the University of Edinburgh, will be celebrating her jubilee.

Since the inaugural meeting of the RY WG on 11 July 2003, at the Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, and its official establishment at the 8th SIEF Congress in Marseille, which followed on 29 April 2004, Emily has been the key source of ideas, the engine, and the heart of the group. Due to her academic knowledge and talent, her communicative skills, humour, and humanism, the group has become a prominent international scientific network, resulting in dozens of collaborative projects, conferences, seminars, and publications. *The Yearbook of the RY WG* was also Emily's idea and brainchild, and she has gone on to become the general editor and a contributor to all the volumes.

In 1984, Emily also founded the Traditional Cosmology Society with its innovative journal *Cosmos*.

Emily has been and always is ready for investigation. Her research comprises an incredible variety of data and examples from all the eras and spaces, reorganized in an innovative and unique way that leads to unexpected and ground-breaking conclusions. An internationally acclaimed scholar of ballad studies, she has also worked with the topics related to gods, colours, gender, celebrations, rituals, mythology, and calendar festivals, bringing all these data and all of her thoughts about them together in her wide range of books, research articles and papers. Among her own and co-authored books are: *The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection* (co-edited, 8 volumes; Aberdeen University Press, 1981–2002); *Scottish Ballads* (editor, Canongate, 1994; Barnes & Noble, 1995); *Fairies and Folk: Approaches to the Scottish Ballad Tradition* (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007); *Ten Gods: A New Approach to Defining the Mythological Structures of the Indo-Europeans* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012); and *Robert Burns and the Discovery and Re-Creation of Scottish Song* (with Katherine Campbell as a co-author; Musica Scotica Trust, 2020). Emily has also published numerous articles over the course of her career, one of her most recent being "Structures for the Transfer of Power in Ibn Fadlān's Account of the Rus" (*Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift*, 2022, No. 74).

This year, Emily participated in the 14th RY WG Conference "Commerce and Traditions" in Riga, with her paper "The Festival Year in Relation to the Spatiotemporal Perception of the Cosmos", and in the 15th Conference of the International Association

for Comparative Mythology, "Sacred Ground: Place and Space in Mythology and Religion", in Belgrade, with her paper "The Indo-European Deities of the Directions as Represented in Ritual".

A persistent scholar, as Emily was characterized in the title of the festschrift dedicated to her (2007), keywords such as *cosmos*, *power*, and *myth* have been central notions that run throughout her work; arguably they are also central to her nature and her soul.

We all wish you many more years of good health, dear Emily.

The SIEF Ritual Year Working Group

Emily Lyle giving her paper at the 10th Conference of the SIEF RY WG "Magic in Rituals and Rituals in Magic", September 2014, Innsbruck, Austria. Photograph by Nina Vlaskina. Personal archive.

THE 14TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN ESTONIAN STUDIES, AND THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE "BALKAN AND BALTIC STATES IN UNITED EUROPE: HISTORY, RELIGION AND CULTURE V"

Tartu, Estonia & online, 18–22 September 2022

From September 18 to 22, 2022, the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu, Estonia, hosted two parallel and joint conferences – the 14th Annual Conference of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies, and the 5th International Conference "The Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe: History, Religion and Culture V". The conference was held with the support of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies, the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the International Society for Balkan and Baltic Studies. The organizing committee of the double international scientific forum included the following researchers from Estonia and Bulgaria: Mare Kõiva, Ekaterina Anastasova, Svetoslava Toncheva, and Anastasiya Fiadotava (heads), Sergey Troitskiy and Maris Kuperjanov (secretaries), Evgenia Troeva-Grigorova, Piret Voolaid, Milena Lubenova, Tõnno Jonuks, and Reet Hiiemäe. The committee chose the topic "Nature and Culture in Ritual, Narrative and Belief" as the main unifying theme of the 14th Annual Conference of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies. The selection of the main research topic by the above-mentioned researchers is based on the assumption that the binary opposition nature/culture (formulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss) is often seen in traditional and modern societies, and that this opposition finds multiple applications in many folk genres, in beliefs and customs of the calendar and family life cycle, in folk religious practices, in language, etc. On the other hand, the organizing committee of the event assumed that nature and culture are not always opposed; they are mutually connected and complementary. Based on this, the main unifying theme absolutely fits into the context of the relatively newly emerging fields of research aimed at a different, non-anthropocentric study of the world-more-than-human geography, multispecies ethnography, archaeology of fullness, etc., based on the posthuman vision of the world (J. Igoe, W. Dressler, E. Kohn, E. Maris, B. Büscher and R. Fletcher, S. Toncheva, etc.). The interest, according to the above-mentioned researchers, in such a study of the world in postmodern society is due to the increasingly acute challenges of climate change and, accordingly, the cultural attitude towards nature, actions and debates related to development and sustainability, standing at the centre of European and global rhetoric.

Finally, the choice of the theme stems from the fact that the study of the nature/culture dichotomy has become a broad interdisciplinary field where the humanities and social sciences collaborate with the earth and environmental sciences, economics, health, and food security. With such a focus on local and traditional environmental knowledge, and European mechanisms for nature protection, the lecture topics had as exemplary focal points: economy / political economy and coexistence of human and nature, arts and nature, nature/culture relationship in religion, traditional beliefs and practices, in festive ritual and life, in Paganism and Neo-Paganism. Meanwhile, as this 5th consecutive international conference marked fourteen years of meetings and discussions on the Balkans and the Baltic region in United Europe, the questions it asked were related to it, and were as follows: What has changed in the Balkan-Baltic region in the last fourteen years, and in this sense, how is its new history interpreted and rewritten? What is the situation with ethnic and religious communities there, and what new topics of debate are emerging in the Balkan-Baltic research space?

The conference was extremely eventful throughout the five days it was held. The first day, Sunday, 18 September, began with a seven-hour pre-conference workshop on the topic "Ecology of Nature and Ecology of Culture". The next day of the conference, 19 September, coincided with the first day of the working week, Monday, kicking off the conference programme that was preceded by an official opening ceremony of the event with **Piret Voolaid** (Estonian Literary Museum) as the moderator. As VIP guests, **Tõnis Lukas**, Minister of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia, and **Merike Kiipus**, the Acting Director of the Estonian Literary Museum, delivered congratulatory speeches to the organizers, lecturers, and guests of the international scientific forum in the main hall of the Estonian Literary Museum. Congratulatory words were also presented by **Mare Kõiva**, Head of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies (Estonian Literary Museum), and online via Zoom connection by scientists from Bulgaria and Russia – **Ekaterina Anastasova** (Association of Balkan and Baltic Studies; Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), and **Irina Sedakova** (Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences).

The conference programme included four plenary lectures, given to the scientific audience by four researchers: Krzysztof Duda, Tõnno Jonuks, Marju Kõivupuu, and Yuri Berezkin. The first plenary lecture that opened the double international conference was the lecture by **Tõnno Jonuks** (Estonian Literary Museum), host of the event, on the topic "Nature, Nation, and Religion – The Appearance of Nature-Religion in Estonia", with moderator **Eda Kalmre** (Estonian Literary Museum)**.** Tõnno Jonuks is an archaeologist by profession, and his research interests are related to the materiality of religion between the early Mesolithic and the modern era, and the history of Estonian religions. His study of the prehistoric materiality of religion led him to a modern perception of

the past beliefs, and thus the religions of nature and modern paganism were a genuine continuity of ancient beliefs.

The second plenary lecture of the conference, also given on the same day, was by the Polish cultural anthropologist **Krzysztof Duda**, Head of the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Tourism at the Institute of Cultural Studies at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, and Director of the Institute of Zootechnics in Krakow. The author of national and international publications in the fields of cultural anthropology, history of science and culture, Dr Duda is a member of the American Anthropological Association, the Carpathian Society, and Res Carphatica. In addition to this, Krzysztof Duda is a member of the History of Science Section of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Scientific Policy Committee affiliated with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland. His lecture was on the topic "Highlanders of the Eastern and Western Carpathians: Nature-People-Culture". The moderator of the lecture was **Mare Kalda** (Estonian Literary Museum).

The third plenary lecture was also given by a representative of the hosts – **Marju Kõivupuu** (Centre for Landscape and Culture, School of Humanities, Tallinn University). She is Chairman of the Expert Council of Historical Natural Sanctuaries at the National Heritage Board of Estonia, folklorist and culturo-logist whose monographs reflecting her research interests related to the relationship between people, landscape and cultural heritage have been recognized not only at Tallinn University but also nationally throughout Estonia. Marju Kõivupuu supervises PhD candidates and gives lectures to graduate students on topics related to Estonian and comparative folklore, worldviews and religions, landscape heritage and everyday culture. She gave her plenary lecture on the fourth day of the conference, 21 September, on "Neo/Paganism and Nature Protection in the 21st Century", moderated by **Piret Voolaid** (Estonian Literary Museum).

The fourth plenary speaker of the conference was Russian researcher **Yuri E. Berezkin**. He is Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor of the Department of Anthropology of the European University at Saint Petersburg, Head of the American Department of Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. His research topics include cultural and political anthropology, comparative and non-classical mythology, folklore databases, distribution of folklore and mythological motifs as a source of data on ancient migration processes, prehistoric migrations and spheres of interaction and archaeology, and iconography of Native American art. Related to Professor Berezkin's research interests listed above, he lectured on the closing day of the conference, 22 September, on "Prehistory in the Looking Glass of Oral Traditions (Following Traces of Ancient Mythologies in the Post A.D. 1500 Folklore)". The plenary lecture was moderated by **Mare Kõiva** (Estonian Literary Museum).

The conference continued with the scientific papers presented in thematic sections. In section Gender – 1, with moderator **Anastasiya Fiadotava** (Estonian Literary Museum), three lectures were given: "Women's External Pieties and Art: A Case of Old Believer Journal *Rodnaia Starina* (1927–1933)" by **Danila Rygovskiy** (University of Tartu), "Men's Stories: Military Legends in Estonian Folklore" by **Eda Kalmre** (Estonian Literary Museum), and "Straight Edge, Veganism and Masculinity: Extreme American Subculture" by **Aimar Ventsel** (University of Tartu). In the Special Report section led by the same moderator, the floor was given to **Aado Lintrop** (Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum) for the lecture "The Beast with Many Faces: Bears in Mansi Folklore and Mythology".

Arūnas Vaicekauskas, moderator from the Vytautas Magnus University, led the Space and Water section, in which lectures were given by **Evy Johanne Håland** (Lifetime Government Grant Holder, Norwegian *statsstipendiat*, Arts Council, Norway) on "Water Sources and the Sacred in Modern and Ancient Greece", and by **Victoria Legkikh** (Technical University of Munich) on "Holy Patrons of the City and Their Relics: From the Medieval Time to Modernity". Meanwhile, in the Minorities section, led by moderator **Nikolai Kuznetsov** (Estonian Literary Museum), two lectures could be listened to: "Mordva (Ersa) Material in Estonian Collections and Ersa-Moksha Communities in Estonia" by **Natalia Ermakov**, and "Bilingual Ditties in the Modern Life of Udmurts of the Village Dyrdashur (Sharkhanskiy Rayon of Udmurt Republic)" by **Pavel Kutergin** (University of Tartu). The final event on this day of the conference was the workshop on the topic "Sacred Sites as Sites of Problems" with the participants **Kristel Kivari** (University of Tartu), **Elo-Hanna Seljamaa** (University of Tartu), **Tõnno Jonuks** (Estonian Literary Museum), and **Lona Päll** (Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum).

On 20 September, ten sections worked in parallel at the conference, including the Gender-2 section, which was a continuation of the connecting scientific topic in the Gender-1 section, presented on the previous day of the conference. Its moderator **Lina Gergova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) gave the floor to **Alexander A. Novik** (Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Saint Petersburg State University) for the lecture "From Headscarf to Hijab: Headdresses of Muslim Albanian Women in the Changing Balkans in the 20th – Early 21st Century", and to **Monika Balikienė** (Vilnius Institute for Advanced Studies) for the lecture "Love Magic: Spells on Menstrual Blood in Lithuania".

In the section Forms of the Relationship Between Human and Nature – 1, with moderator **Irina Stahl** (Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy of Sciences), the following scientific reports were presented: "Old Shrines, New Worshipers: Cultural Practices for Connection with Nature" by **Evgenia Troeva** (Institute of Ethnology and

Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), "Ecological Funeral: New Ideas in Contemporary Lithuania" by **Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė** (Vytautas Magnus University), "Developmentalism vs. Environmentalism or How Biodiversity and Grazing Livestock Husbandry Coexist?" by **Atanaska Stancheva** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), and "Convivial Conservation in Theory and Practice: Human-Bear Coexistence in the Mountains of Bulgaria" by **Svetoslava Toncheva** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) and **Robert Fletcher** (Wageningen University, Netherlands).

After the presented reports, the topic of the relationship between human and nature smoothly moved to the section Human and Animal, with moderator **Svetoslava Toncheva** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), where the following lectures were given: "Natural and Cultural Dimensions of a Snake in Bulgarian Folklore and Rituals: Semiotic and Ethnolinguistic Approach" by **Irina Sedakova** (Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences), "Diseases in Traditional Culture and Contemporary Society (Smallpox Variola Vera and Monkeypox)" by **Ekaterina Anastasova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), and "Mythologems and Motifs of the ATU 570* (Pied Piper) Plot Type in the Texts and Beliefs of the Belarusians and Estonians. Zoofolkloristics" by **Elena Boganeva** (Centre for Research of Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature, NASB) and **Mare Kõiva** (Estonian Literary Museum). This section, like the section Forms of the Relationship Between Human and Nature – 1, contributed thematically to the scientific work on 21 September, the penultimate day of the conference, of the section Human-Nature Relationships – 2, moderated by **Katre Kikas** (Estonian Literary Museum). Three very interesting lectures were presented there: "Zoofolkloristics: Water Horses in Belief Narratives – 3" by **Mare Kõiva** (Estonian Literary Museum), "Colours in Belief Narratives" by **Andres Kuperjanov** (Estonian Literary Museum), and "Nature in the Service of Satire: Zoomorphic Caricatures in the Russian Empire 1890–1905. The Balkan and Baltic Case" by **Sergey Troitskiy** (Estonian Literary Museum). The Human and Nature – 2 section was preceded by two more scientific reports on the same topic, united in the Human and Nature – 1 section with moderator **Ieva Pigozne** (Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia). These were "The Tribal Narrative of Reverence and Resilience: A Study of the Entangled Natureculture Relation in the Folklore of Gujjars and Bakerwals Tribe of Jammu and Kashmir" by **Tanu Gupta** and **Quleen Kaur Bijral** (Indian Institute of Technology Jammu), and "Walking as Artistic Research: More-than-Human Agency in a Performative Ritual" by **Mari Keski-Korsu** (Aalto University). Finally, the topics human/animal and human/nature were supported by another very important topic – "Protection of Nature/Culture", which gave the title to

a section moderated by **Liisi Laineste** (Estonian Literary Museum). The lectures given there were: "Study of Divination Technologies to Enhance a Deep Listening of Nature" by **Juan Duarte** (Aalto University), and "Nature for Protection, Nature for Sale: Conservation, Livelihoods and Social Conflicts in the Case of Bolata Bay in Bulgaria" by **Ivaylo Markov** and **Desislava Pileva** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences).

Nine of the research papers at the conference were united by the space sections. In the section Space – 1, moderated by **Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė** (Vytautas Magnus University), the floor was first given to **Irina Stahl** (Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy of Sciences) for the lecture "Crosses and Flowers of the Fields. A New Form of Romanian Religious Folk-Art". This was followed by **Milena Lyubenova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) with the paper "The Hıdırellez Feast in Northeastern Bulgaria", and **Solveiga Krumina-Konkova** (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia) and **Karlis Aleksandrs Konkovs** (Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Latvia) with the presentation "Life by the Lake: Lubana Region and Its People in Nature, History and Culture". In the section Space-2, the moderator was **Gavrail Gavrailov** (Plovdiv University, Bulgaria), and the lectures given there were "Life in a Coronavirus: Leisure Inside and Outside the Home Space in Lithuania" by **Rasa Paukštytė-Šakniene** (Lithuanian Institute of History), "'There is (not) such a bird out there': Conflicts of Knowledge in the Process of Designation and Management of Natura 2000 Sites" by **Petar Petrov** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgaria Academy of Sciences), and "New Sites and Rituals to Recall Vanished Cultural Landscapes (Villages under Reservoirs Waters in Bulgaria)" by **Lina Gergova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). The third consecutive section of Space – 3 was moderated by **Alexander A. Novik** (Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the RAS; SPSU) and united three papers. These were "Protected Area of Rupite, Bulgaria: Sacred Legitimization of Secular Interests" by **Violeta Periklieva** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), "Danurbanity – Valorisation of Local Heritage in Ulpia Escus-Novae Bulgarian Region (Belene, Nikopol, Gulyantsi, Svishtov)" by **Gavrail Gavrailov** (Plovdiv University, Bulgaria), and "The Pragmatic Basis of Figurative Nomination (On the Example of Belarusian Microtoponymy)" by **Tatiana Oliferchuk** (Centre for Research of Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature, NASB).

Another conference section, which united nine research reports, was dedicated to customs, beliefs, and rituals. The moderator of the Customs, Beliefs and Rituals – 1 section, **Žilvytis Šaknys** (Lithuanian Institute of History), gave the floor to **Bidisha Chakraborty** (Banaras Hindu University) for the lecture "Carving a Sacred Canopy:

Confluence of Nature and Culture in the Marwa Ritual and Songs of the Bhojpuri Community in India", **Archita Banerjee** (Banaras Hindu University) for "The Ritual of Itu: Making Space for Nature-Culture Synthes", and **Aurora Del Rio** (Aalto University, Department of Art and Media) for "Contaminating Mythologies". The moderator of the Customs, Beliefs, and Rituals – 2 section was **Solveiga Krumina-Konkova** (University of Latvia). The lectures in this sections were "The Submerged Church at Zhrebchevo Dam: Sacral Site, Center, Scene" by **Yana Gergova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), "Popular Beliefs and Sorcery Inducing Fertility at the Beginning of the 20th–21st Century: The Case of Lithuania" by **Nijolė Vailionytė** (Vytautas Magnus University), and "Folk Customs and Beliefs in Kosovo and Metohija Between the Two World Wars" by **Božica Slavković Mirić** (The Institute for Recent History of Serbia, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia). The third section, united by the theme of traditions and rituals, Customs, Beliefs and Rituals – 3, with moderator **Mare Kalda** (Estonian Literature Museum) worked on the next day of the conference, 21 September, during the entire forenoon, and five research papers were presented: "Ritual Dimensions in Calendrical Holidays" by **Kristina Blockytė-Naujokė** (Klaipeda University, Lithuania), "The Festival of the Finding of the Holy Icon ('EORTĒ AGIAS EURESEŌS) or the Lanterns (Phanarakia), Tinos, Greece" by **Evy Johanne Håland** (Lifetime Government Grant Holder, Norwegian *statsstipendiat*, Arts Council, Norway), "Sacred Footwear: Latvian Perceptions in the 19th Century and Today" by **Ieva Pigozne** (Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia), "Estonian Contemporary Beliefs and Narratives about Perpetual Motion Machines and Generators" by **Reet Hiiemäe** and **Andrus Tins** (Estonian Literary Museum), and "Folk Performance Narratives in Kurubarpet Beershwara Jatre Ritualises the Kuruba Identity" by **Yashasvi M Maadesh** (Christ University).

Božica Slavković Mirić, in addition to being a lecturer, was the moderator of the Ethnobotany and Historiography section. There **Nadezhda Suntsova** (Izhevsk, Udmurtia) gave the lecture "Ethnobotanical Analysis of G.E. Vereschagin's Works Devoted to the Traditional Economic Occupations of the Udmurts", and **Pavlo Yeremieiev** (V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University) presented his paper "Relationship Between Religion and Science in the Works of Mykhailo Maksymovych".

In the section Migration, Identity – 1, with moderator **Aurora Del Rio** (Aalto University), the lectures given were: "Plants and Migration" by **Mariyanka Borisova** (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), "Ruler Visibility, Public Space/Sphere, and Collective Identities in the Late Russian and Ottoman Empires" by **Darin Stephanov** (Kone Foundation), "Coloratives with a Dendrological Component as a Projection of the Worldview of Belarusians and Poles" by **Timur Buiko** (Centre for Research of Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature, NASB), "Celebration in Private and Public Spaces: Lithuanian Ritual Year in Three

Specific Periods" by **Žilvytis Šaknys** (Lithuanian Institute of History), and "Nature and Culture: Interaction Rites Between the Ukrainian War Refugees and the Society in Latvia (2022)" by **Māra Kiope** (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Latvian University).

Estonian researcher **Tõnno Jonuks**, who was the first plenary speaker of the conference, also presented himself as a moderator in the Migration, Identity – 2 section. This section combined the following lectures: "Giulio Clovio. The 'Foreigner"s Creativity" by **Anna Troitskaya** (Estonian Literary Museum); "Sergey Smirnov About Relics in Serbia" by **Kornelija Ičin** (University of Belgrade); "Bulgarian Tolstoy Colony (1906–1908): Followers of the Religious and Ethnical Doctrine of Leo Tolstoy in the Village of Yasna Polyana, Primorsko Municipality, Bulgaria" by **Ralitsa Savova** (University of Pécs, Hungary), and "Baltic-Balkan Encounters in the Book-Migration: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a Provider by Liturgical Books: The Ethnicities of Byzantine Rite in the Hungarian Kingdom" by **Sándor Földvári** (Debrecen University, Hungary; Hungarian Academy of Sciences).

The five-day conference was also packed with seminars, five in total. In addition to the pre-conference workshop "Ecology of Nature and Ecology of Culture", and the "Sacred Sites as Sites of Problems" workshop held on the first and second day of the conference respectively, the organizers of the Tartu Science Forum also offered the "Finnic-Ugric Animism", "Art in COVID-19 Humour", and "Estonian Singing" workshops. The "Finnic-Ugric Animism" workshop was led by **Laur Vallikivi** (Tartu University), and the speakers were **Eva Toulouze** (Tartu University, INALCO); **Stephan Dudeck** (Tartu University, IASS, Germany; University of Lapland, Finland); **Eszter Ruttkai-Miklian**, **Art Leete** (Tartu University), and **Nikolai Kuznetsov** (Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu University). The moderator of the first workshop, "Art in COVID-19 Humour", was **Władysław Chłopicki** (Jagiellonian University). The discussant of the seminar was **Anna Pięcińska** (Marie Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin), and the discussion was related to the following lectures: "Turning 'Unknown' Paintings into COVID-19 Memes as a Means of Humorous Criticism" by **Villy Tsakona** (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) and **Dorota Brzozowska** (Opole University), "Mona Lockdown. The Use of Internet Memes in Humorous Corona Discourse" by **Ralph Müller** (Universität Freiburg, Institut für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft) and **Agata Hołobut** (Jagiellonian University in Kraków), "Cartoons and Memes: Images from Childhood used as Expressions in Adulthood" by **Saša Babič** (ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, Slovenia) and **Jan Chovanec** (Masaryk University, Brno, Czechia), and "'If God Asks…': Hidden Emotions and Folk Beliefs in the 'Mythical Meme' of the Pandemic" by **Tsafi Sebba-Elran** (University of Haifa) and **Rita Repšienė** (Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, Vilnius). In one of the five scientific papers presented for discussion at this workshop, **Władysław Chłopicki** appeared not only as moderator, but also as co-lecturer, together with **Delia Dumitrica** (University of Rotterdam, Netherlands) and

Anastasiya Fiadotava (Estonian Literary Museum). The above-mentioned researchers gave a lecture titled "From Venus De Milo to Nike Ads: The Glocalization of Art References in COVID-19 Humour in Central and Eastern Europe".

The theme of humour was continued after the workshop "Art in Covid-19 Humour", with a presentation of the humour collection of Ivar Kallion. The venue of the event was the main hall of the Literary Museum. The event was followed by a visit of the conference participants to the Tartu Art Museum. After a five-day intensive scientific programme, the conference organizers announced its closing on the evening of 22 September with a cultural programme, an Indie group TARAI performance, preceded by a workshop on Estonian singing with **Taive Särg** (Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum), who spoke about Forest Song Festivals, and **Janika Oras** (Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum) on the topic "An Appetite for Singing. Singing Experiences of Elderly Singers in Estonia in the Context of Historical Singing Practices". The content of the lectures given at the 14th Annual Conference of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies, and the 5th International Conference "Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe: History, Religion and Culture V", is to be published in a book in 2023.

Ralitsa Savova
Pécs University

WORKSHOP "ART IN COVID-19 HUMOUR"

The workshop "Art in COVID-19 humour" took place on 21 September 2022 within the framework of the 5th international conference "Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe: History, Religion, and Culture V", which was held in Tartu, Estonia, on 18–22 September 2022. The project participants presented the research results of the year-long project "Study of Art in COVID-19 Humour", which was sponsored by Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland).

The panel consisted of 13 researchers representing 10 countries and an array of different academic disciplines: folkloristics, linguistics, literature studies, art history, and communication studies. Using the material from the International Coronavirus Humour Corpus, which that was collected during the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic and consists of more than 12,000 humorous items, this workshop aimed to analyse COVID-19 humour, using references to art (e.g., painting or music) and popular culture (e.g., film, TV series, literature, etc.) as the area where the global and local collide and interweave, including some hybrid forms. In particular, the workshop focused on the Central and Eastern European and Baltic cultural spaces, looking into how local and regional traditions

are mixed with transnational references in order to produce humorous effects. Each of the presentations of the workshop was co-authored by researchers belonging to different countries and often also to different academic disciplines. This ensured a versatile approach to the data and enabled making cross-cultural comparisons on different levels.

The workshop consisted of 5 presentations and a discussant's comment. The first presentation titled "Turning 'Unknown' Paintings into COVID-19 Memes as a Means of Humorous Criticism" was delivered by Villy Tsakona (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) and Dorota Brzozowska (Opole University). It revealed that the recontextualization of lesser-known paintings helped to use them to criticize COVID-19 measures and peoples' reactions to the "new normal" of the pandemic, as well as the fact that by using the "unknown" paintings meme creators were more flexible as they were not bound by the cultural connotations of these artworks. In the next presentation titled "Mona Lockdown: The Use of Internet Memes in Humorous Corona Discourse" the focus was on the well-known artworks, such as "The Last Supper" and "Mona Lisa" by Leonardo da Vinci and "Scream" by Edvard Munch. The authors, Ralph Müller (Universität Freiburg, Institut für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft) and Agata Hołobut (Jagiellonian University, Kraków) adopted the General Theory of Verbal Humour to the multimodal meme genre and outlined the dominant themes of these humorous works. The issue of art was approached more broadly in the presentation "From Venus de Milo to Nike Ads: The Glocalization of Art References in COVID-19 Humor in Central and Eastern Europe" by Władysław Chłopicki (Jagiellonian University, Kraków), Delia Dumitrica (University of Rotterdam), and Anastasiya Fiadotava (Estonian Literary Museum). By drawing upon art and popular cultural references in Polish, Romanian, and Belarusian humorous COVID-19 memes, the authors categorized the data according to the degree of adaptation to the particular culture of origin, thus dividing the corpus into local, regional, global, and glocal memes. Saša Babič (ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana) and Jan Chovanec (Masaryk University, Brno) further broadened the focus on popular culture in their presentation "Cartoons and Memes: Images from Childhood Used as Expressions in Adulthood". The researchers came to the conclusion that the intertextual popular cultural references in these memes are connected to the "hypermemetic logic" that guides the replication of images as well as the performative self which in this case indicated a contrast between pre-pandemic and new realities. The final presentation by Tsafi Sebba-Elran (University of Haifa) and Rita Repšienė (Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, Vilnius) was titled "'If God Asks…': Hidden Emotions and Folk Beliefs in the 'Mythical Meme' of the Pandemic", which explored the clash between the world of archaic mythical and religious references, on the one hand, and the realm of digital internet memes, on the other. The authors illustrated how these references contributed to the expressions of feelings and helped to regulate emotions during the initial stages of COVID-19 pandemic.

Ralph Müller (Universität Freiburg, Institut für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft) and Agata Hołobut (Jagiellonian University in Kraków). Photograph by Anastasiya Fiadotava.

The panel presentations were followed by a discussant's commentary. Discussant Anna Pięcińska (University of Warsaw) summed up the key aspects of the presentations and pointed out that most of the humorous memes that employ art references are not based on the art per se but rather on its visual elements that have some inherent incongruities and inspire the creativity of the meme-makers.

The presentations of the workshop and the discussant's commentary provided different perspectives on the use of art and popular culture in the COVID-19 humour. The workshop also opened up several directions for future studies of multimodal humorous forms and the role of intertextuality in memes – hopefully, these directions will be explored in-depth during future conferences and academic projects.

Anastasiya Fiadotava

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABOUT LIFE IN THE LHOPO COMMUNITY

The doctoral dissertation of Kikee Doma Bhutia, "Mythic history, belief narratives and vernacular Buddhism among the Lhopos of Sikkim", broadly speaking, deals with the multiple interactions and entanglements between diverse dimensions: among these intertwined dimensions the author explores relations and dynamics between the Lhopo community and the non-human entities with whom they share the landscape they live in, but also, in a broader framework, the dynamics occurring between vernacular Buddhism and orthodox Buddhism. Moreover, her attention is also devoted to exploring the social and historical landscape in which people are embedded, i.e., the Lhopos as an indigenous community among other communities claiming indigeneity, and as a minority vis-a-vis the State and its apparatuses, at least since the inception of the kingdom of Sikkim (1642) and then after its incorporation into India (1975). Equally relevant, if not more, is the attention paid to the epistemological question of discussing belief and indigenous knowledge in a complex setting, where multiple perspectives, cosmologies and ideologies coexist side by side, even when apparently contradicting each other. At the same time, of the utmost importance is the gaze that the researcher turns towards herself, as a liminal figure, betwixt and between, at the same time insider and outsider, intimate participant and yet somehow critically detached.

The dissertation is elegantly written, well-structured and finely balanced in addressing all of the abovementioned topics, and it includes the following: a general introduction; an examination of the topic of the Beyul ("Hidden Land") according to academic, Buddhist and vernacular interpretations; a historical overview; an appreciation of the entanglement between mythic and contemporary narratives; an enquiry into Lhopo cosmology, with details on ritual specialists as mediators between human and non-human communities; a theoretical and methodological framework; a section on four academic articles engaging with some of the aforementioned topics; and final considerations followed by a useful glossary of recurring terms. The only possible remark about the dissertation structure is the question of why the author has positioned the chapter on theoretical and methodological framework so late (chapter 6) in her work as the theoretical and methodological framework is surely something that a reader would like to find earlier in an academic publication.

The author was able to bring in and collate inputs from a range of diverse subjects, all equally useful to put forward a detailed account of the context of reference, and a deep analysis of specific beliefs and related narratives. In doing this, the author mastered with competence the relevant scientific literature from the disciplines of folklore studies, Buddhist studies, ethnography, and cultural anthropology. I was nonetheless

surprised to see that the bibliography does not include sources in Tibetan (which could have been useful to substantiate Buddhist stories on cosmology, Padmasambhava and local deities, etc.), except for Rigdzin Gödem (1337–1408). The same applies to sources in Nepali or Hindi, which the author knows and to which she has access.

On the Taming/Incorporation of Local Deities

I find extremely pertinent the reference to the figure of Padmasambhava (Guru Rimpoche) as the historical-mythical figure enabling the dissemination of Buddhism in the Himalayan regions. The more so since the narratives about the taming of local (or should we say indigenous?) deities are the critical node of conjunction between Tibetan Buddhist arch-narratives and cosmology on the one hand, and its vernacular receptions and adaptations on the ground. Padmasambhava is more a tamer than an exorcist: local deities are not simply banished or annihilated, but, in most cases, incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon. Yet, this incorporation is arranged through a process we may define as domestication: local deities and spirits are given a position and a role in the pantheon modelled on the image of a mandala. On these dynamics of incorporation, I suggested that the author take into account David S. Ruegg's *The symbiosis of Buddhism with Brahmanism / Hinduism in South Asia and of Buddhism with "local cults" in Tibet and the Himalayan region* (2008). Incorporation entails hierarchisation: the distance from the centre of the mandala equates with a specific position in the general hierarchy of Buddhism, which the author summarises as *yeshey ki lha* and *jigten ghi lha* (p. 13). These two expressions situate entities onto an over-arching Buddhist pantheon, and yet some of the vernacular entities are not easily included: *Aju Zom Tsering*, *pue sdé*, *bandar deuta,* and probably others escape strict classification and, as the author acknowledges, pass "through ethnic boundaries" (p. 15). It would be good if the author had elaborated on these deities/entities bypassing or crossing ethnic boundaries. In particular, at narrative level, there is an issue of the crossing of boundaries engendering specific dynamics of othering/demonisation (p. 54). The dissertation inspires the questions of whether external entities are more dangerous, more difficult to appease, and whether Lhopo deities attack intruders, foreigners, and other members of indigenous communities.

Visible and Invisible

On page 14 the author states: "I choose to write non-human entities as they are invisible, not human and have supernatural attributes". This might contradict some of the materials she collected through interviews, since some informants relate about real

encounters with some of these entities. Moreover, since several local sacred mountains are deities themselves, it is difficult to define them as invisible. I would have liked the author to elaborate more on these visible and tangible expressions/manifestations of the so-called visible side of the supernatural, as sacred mountains, lakes, and rivers. In addition, in her dissertation, the author quotes Kinnard, who says, "There is nothing inherently sacred about any place or space" (Kinnard: 2014: 2), and yet she is well aware that the places usually associated with the supernatural, at least in the Himalayas, stand out in the landscape for some striking features: mighty mountains, ominous rocks and crags, eerie forested slopes, caverns and waterfalls. They might have nothing inherently sacred in them, but surely, they are regarded as potent places inherently different from surrounding ones (see Allerton 2013).

As to the above, we could argue that non-human entities are not exclusively invisible, and that the landscape could be potent without being supernatural. These issues have been dealt with by recent ethnographies, for example Allerton 2013, and especially De la Cadena's *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds* (2015). These and other recent ethnographies take into account indigenous cosmologies, reframed as distinct ontologies (see Descola 2005), giving voice not only to humans but also to non-human collectivities. Bridging the gap between humans and non-humans opens up for us the topic of cosmopolitics, which the author explores in her second article. Elaborating more on the agency of Sikkimese vernacular non-human entities (deities, mountains, territorial gods, etc.) in cosmopolitics would add significant layers of analysis, enriching the understanding of dynamics unfolding in and around the notion of sacred landscape.

More on Cosmology

There are several hints towards a deep understanding of the interactions between pre-Buddhist and Buddhist cosmology. But can a discourse on current, contemporary times avoid discussing the emergence of a post-Buddhist worldview, i.e., a worldview combining belief, religion, science, secularism, and even scepticism? This is what is seemingly emerging from some of the interviews, and it could be a fruitful venue on which to tread further to explore individual ideas, perceptions, expressions, and feelings.

Shared Cosmos or Parallel and Conflicting Ones?

Cosmological narratives of diverse groups, moreover, provide elements for collective identities but also create alternative and sometimes conflicting worldviews. I especially like that the author avoids simplistic generalisation, by giving voice to informants who

express doubts about cosmological narratives, yet it emerges that sometimes doubt is used to deny the essentialist views embedded in mythic narratives. For example, on page 31, the author mentions the myth of creation of the Lepcha indigenous people, as opposing the ideas of the Beyul established by Guru Rimpoche. Such narratives propose mutually exclusive narratives. Are these narratives not only cosmopolitical, but also intrinsically political and communalist? The author seems to elaborate on this idea in her final (re)consideration (p. 56). Does the author see these narratives as related to political assertiveness of the diverse communities inhabiting Sikkim? Is there a Sikkimese identity at all, or is there a fragmented one? In other words, is Sikkim a "world where many worlds fit" (p. 53), or is it an arena of competing interests? Such questions seem to be only hinted at in the final (re)considerations (p. 56), and yet it would be interesting to delve deeper into these aspects.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the author demonstrates her academic skills in developing a coherent, original, and well-structured discourse, going beyond the literature of reference and integrating it with novel perspectives, data, and analysis. She shows a remarkable level of engagement, investigation, and insight in relation to the object of her research, substantiated by the main body of her dissertation and completed by the four articles included. Her work is enriched beyond measure by the awareness and self-reflection on the scholar as a liminal figure in the field, even when her field is one with which the researcher has cultural intimacy and to which she has privileged access. Equally relevant and interesting is the idea of proposing a "partially native theory" to finally decolonise the objectifying gaze of the observer, acquired through distancing and learning to unlearn and relearn while based at the University of Tartu, as she herself states (p. 57). As a final remark, I would like to point to the concluding words of her dissertation: "My study at the University of Tartu as well as geographical distance provided me with a space to be true to the evidence, helping me develop the position of the partially native that I aspired to embody from the beginning" (p. 57). I would like to suggest a change, if I may: instead of "partially native", I would say "a critical human being". That is what academia needs the most.

Davide Torri
Università di Roma La Sapienza

Kikee Doma Bhutia defending her doctoral dissertation at the University of Tartu on 7 March 2022. Photograph by Anastasiya Fiadotava.

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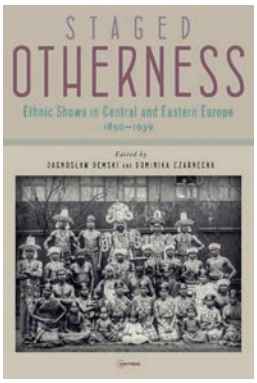
BOOK REVIEW

STAGED OTHERNESS AND PERFORMED IDENTITY

Dagnosław Demski & Dominika Czarnecka. *Staged Otherness: Ethnic Shows in Central and Eastern Europe, 1850–1939*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2021. 460 pp.



This edited volume brings together 13 research papers that describe the development and significance of ethnic shows in Central and Eastern Europe from 1850 until 1939. While each paper offers a slightly different take on the details on what constitutes an "ethnic show", collectively, the papers approach ethnic shows as theatrical performances that display cultural qualities of an ethnographic group. Ethnic shows featured members of the ethnographic community performing cultural practices like horse riding exhibition, a dancing troupe, music group, craft-making exhibition. Ethnic shows differed from their contemporary "freak show" and "human zoo" exhibitions in that ethnic shows provided the audience with theatrical aspects of cultural practices while retaining an aura of ethnographic credibility. In this sense, ethnic shows represent an early instance of the meeting of science and entertainment.

The collection contextualizes the development of ethnic shows in relation to an emerging globalized industrial modernity in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular the role that ideas associated with "empire", "nation", and "culture" played in designing and promoting the shows. The entrepreneurs who developed the ethnic show expanded on an already existing network of exotic animal trade – which included Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Scandinavia – to recruit performers from these locations to tour Europe for paying audiences. This business model relied on industrial mobility infrastructure like trains and transoceanic shipping lanes, an established print media network (e.g., newspapers and posters), and on a public discourse on Otherness that framed the performances as exotic. Ethnic shows were a product of and contributed to an experience of modernity alongside increasing urbanization, tourism, the development of museums, zoos, the world fair, cinema, and the emergence of new fields of research like ethnology and anthropology.

The collection is divided into three parts which address (1) the power dynamics at stake in organizing this form of entertainment, (2) its politics of authenticity, and

(3) the role the shows played in constructing narratives of local identity. I will address each theme in turn.

The papers that are grouped in part 1 of the book are concerned with the question of agency of the performers of ethnic shows. While the sustainability of the ethnic show required a structural context which necessarily disempowered, exploited, and at times ridiculed the performers, the authors of this section paint a more complex picture of the relationship between the performers and their promoters. For instance, Warsame (chapter 3) describes Somali performers who professionalized their acts through extensive touring and developed their own ethnic show careers. The performers also drew the interest of anthropologists and ethnologists who were interested in engaging the performers with their research questions. While some performers were open to these kinds of collaborations, others actively resisted and frustrated the overtures of anthropologists to study them. Collectively, the papers show that the power dynamics at stake in these relationships were multi-directional and inconsistent.

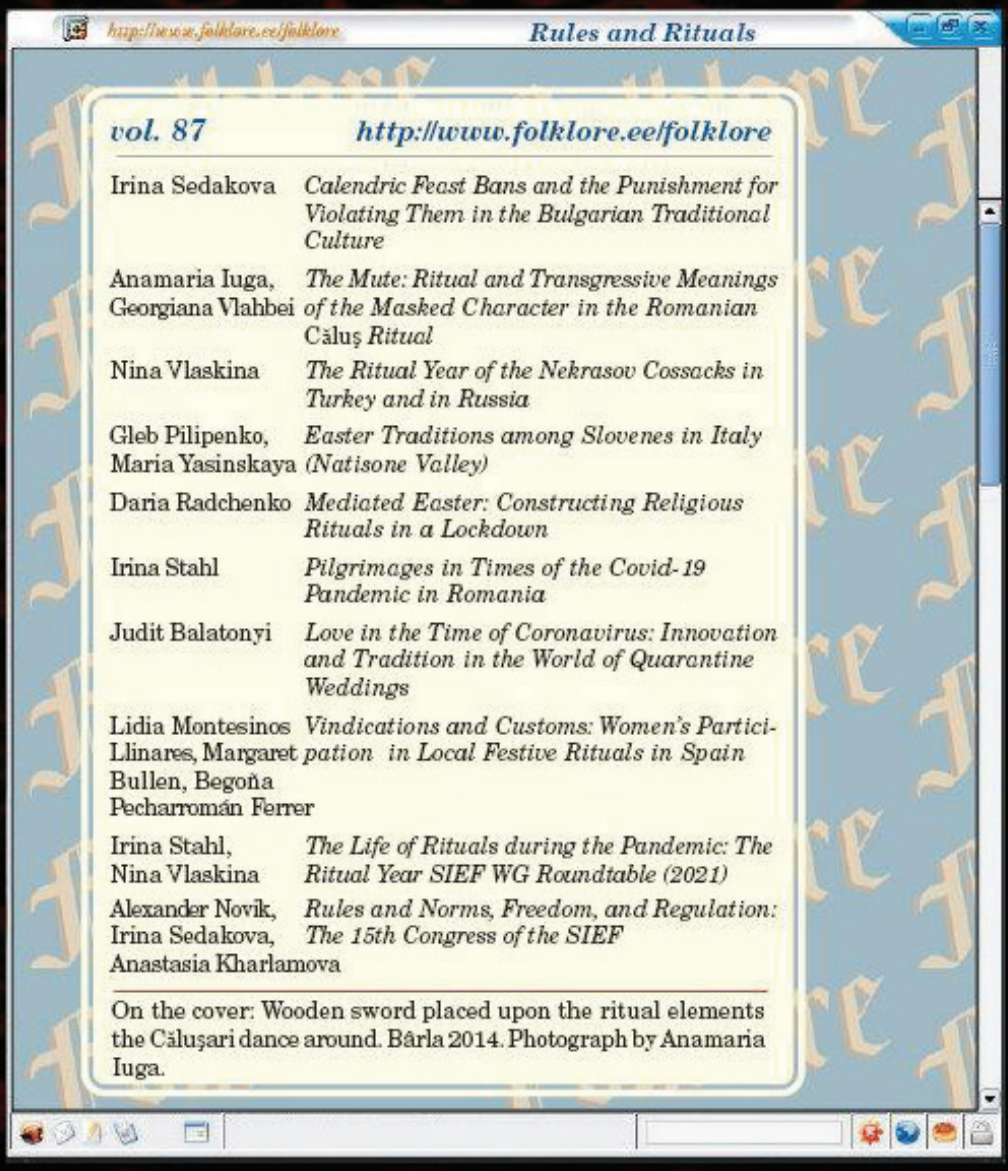
The papers in part 2 describe the ways in which promoters of ethnic shows, as well as journalists who covered them, placed a high value on ethnographic authenticity. The papers examine the promotion materials and reviews of the shows and show how promoters and journalists would reference colonial and imperial language, couched in a language of scientific rationality and classification, in their description of the shows. However, a recurrent argument of the papers is the suggestion that notions of ethnographic authenticity were more related to the construction of European exoticism, rather than a presentation of an unmediated cultural expression. The papers consider, for example, the contradiction at stake when there is a demand for exoticness that is framed in a familiar, non-threatening way, which ultimately results in the reproduction of well-known exotic tropes, rather than educating the audience on cultural relativism.

The papers that make up part 3 describe ethnic shows in relation to nation-building discourses in Central and Eastern Europe during the early 20th century. The context of this argument acknowledges that ethnic shows in cities like Riga, Vienna, Warsaw, and St. Petersburg were a Western European import, which, in turn, were developed in a context of Western empire building. While the shows in Central and Eastern Europe retained the format and tone of their Western European counterparts, the local ideological context that framed the shows was slightly different. Latvia, Poland, and Slovenia, for example, did not possess overseas colonies. From this position, the discursive agenda of the shows was more directed towards outlining the terms of their new nationhood. In this regard, the shows' take on race and culture was not predicated on a theory of empire, but was more directed towards describing an ethnographic Other in relation to the nation, the local. This approach presents an alternative to the view of a unified European experience and offers up a more complex story. For example, local reviews of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* tour of Banat and Transylvania display a suspicious attitude towards

Native American performers, but describe an attraction to the American cowboy. These narratives suggest a position that is subservient towards the West, while maintaining a sense of repulsion towards the non-European Other. The reviews and promotional materials of ethnic shows provide interesting insights into notions of domination and submission, advanced and backward, Self and Other, which were instrumental in the development of modern ideas of the nation in Eastern and Central Europe.

This collection contributes to existing research on ethnic shows by focusing on the Central and Eastern European network, which, according to the authors, has hitherto been neglected and under-studied. In my reading, the research material on the Central and Eastern European network interrogates some of the binary oppositions that have historically dominated the field. It interrogates, for example, questions of power relations between Europe and non-Europeans, the relationship between empire and nation, culture and race, and elaborates on ideas of cultural authenticity and performance. I would suggest that this collection would be of interest to researchers of ethnic shows, museum studies, Eastern European nation building, and postcolonial studies.

Carlo A. Cubero
Tallinn University



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