

Calendar feasts: politics of adoption and reinstatement

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A famous American time and calendar researcher Zerubavel refers that the great revolutions strive to begin the new era by the reform of also the chronology and time concept. He gives an example of the Great French Revolution and October Revolution. The transmission to the new calendar system established by the October Revolution was radical and it caused a lot of confusion among people. Even fifty years later people remembered the old calendar feasts as the correct ones.

The soviet feast system was introduced during a lot longer period. During the first years after the red revolution the system remained unchanged but the entertainment was emphasised and the strong system of fairs and shows was used. The greater changes and politisation of the calendar took place in the middle of 1920's. The new system of republics replaced the earlier relevant feasts and celebration of victories. The church feasts began to be marginalised and superseded, primarily by military feasts. This meant the replacement of the old feast system where the political interests clearly dominated.

One of the feasts associated with the political power was the Women's Day that was introduced slowly. It only became a national feast through a long process and it obtained the force of the national propaganda only in 1930's when the hidden message of the Women's Day was: Women, give birth to more children as we need more working hands and soldiers. A similar campaign was simultaneously taking place in Germany.

Estonian Case

During the end of 19th century at the early 20th century the structure of feasts in Estonia largely changed.

Major changes were made in structure of state and national feasts, importance of church feasts constantly decreased under the influence of secularized society.

Also the changes in economics as well as urbanization process minimized the need for agrarian rituals and festivities. The early 20th century many new feasts (Mothers day, Labour Day) invented.

It was also a time for invention of the person focused feasts like Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day (both were introduced in America in the 19th century by Women activists and they finally got a national support). **The Mothers' Day** was introduced in Estonia also by women's movement. This was slowly introduced at schools. The song lists and celebration programmes bore fruit. Thus, the feast was in 1930ies nationally recognised. The **workers' feast on the 1st of May** was legalised a lot easier in the beginning of the 20th century by the informally minded peoples and initially it was based on the idea of social equal rights, possibilities and freedom for everybody.

The Soviet calendar system was imposed on Estonians at the period when the soviet calendar system was already developed 30 years and the basic feast were quite in fixed form. So met in 1945-1946 two different fixed systems. Major changes were made in the feast structure during the socialist period, mainly after 1946: excluded the previous state and national feasts, and Christian feasts from the public holidays.

The Estonians lost not only their sovereignty but also the related state and national feasts, heroes and victory days, also the church feasts, Mothers' Day related to family values and students' feasts were prohibited.

The latter were prohibited because the corporations and associations were abolished. Instead of this, an aggregate of students' associations was developed but it acted on different bases and only a part of the special features could be retained.

One of the breakthroughs took place in the beginning of 1970's when the students' procession was prohibited.

Rapidly invented feasts from stabilised communist calendar (women's day, the red army days), later during 1960ies also international (professional) days (children's day, teachers' day, museums day, theatre day).

Short list of Soviet feasts, Not working Days

January 1 New Year's Day

February 23 Red Army Day It wasn't official holiday unlike others.

March 8 International Women's Day

An official holiday marking women's liberation movement,

April 12 Cosmonautics Day The Day Yuri Gagarin became the first man in Space, in 1961. Working Day

May 1 International Labor Day (May Day)
("International Day of Worker's Solidarity") Celebrated
on May 1 and May 2. Now called in Russia Праздник
весны и труда ("Celebration of Spring and Labor").

May 9 Victory Day День Победы End of Great Patriotic
War,

October 7 USSR Constitution Day (Working Day)

November 7 Great October Socialist Revolution

Soviet whole system of feasts was quite military and copied ortodox calndar system. In this file, colorless are Soviet holidays. If the date is indicated as, for example, 2nd Sunday of the month, this is more reliable than a certain date since usually the celebrations were on a Sunday. Yellow is various things. Green holidays are still celebrated. Blue is new holidays that either were not celebrated or were banned in Soviet times. By the way, note the number of holidays dedicated to the military and force structures.

January

1 January **New year**

21. January – Corps of Engineers Day

February

8. February – Russian Science Day

10. February – Diplomatic Workers' Day

2nd Sunday in February – Aeroflot Day

15. February – Military Internationalist's Day

23. February – Day of Defenders of Fatherland,
Anniversary of the Soviet Army and Navy

March

8. March – International Women’s Day (**Estonian Russians, coming back during last few years**)

13. March – Day of Geodetic and Cartography Workers

20. March - Day of Retail Workers

3rd Sunday in March – Day of Edifice and Communal Economy Workers

23. March – International Meteorology Day

27. March – Day of Internal Forces, **International Theatre Day**

April

- 3. April (or 1st Sunday in April) – Day of Geologists
- 7. April – International Day of Liberation of Prisoners of Fascism, **Health Day**
- 10. April – Day of Air Defense Forces
- 12. April – Cosmonautics Day, **international flight and cosmonautics day**
- 18. April – **International Day of Protecting Monuments, International Day of Heritage Protection**
- Wednesday of the last full week of April – Day of Secretaries
- 22. April birthday of Lenin

April

- 26. April – Commemoration Day for Victims of Radiation
- 30. April – Firefighters' Day
- last Sunday of the month – Day of Kindred Cities

May

- 1. May - Celebration of Spring and Labor
- 5. May – Day of Journalism
- 7. May – Radio Day, dedicated to all communications workers
- 9. May – Victory Day

- 11. May – Nature Protection Day
- 12. May – Nature Protection Day
- 2nd Sunday – Nature Protection Day
- 18. May – Museum Day
- 28. May – Border Guard Day
- 29. May (or last Sunday?) – Day of Chemists

June

- 1st Sunday – Day of Amelioration Workers
- 5. June – Environmental Protection Day
- 6. June – Pushkin Day
- 8. June – Day of Social Workers

- 12. June (or 2nd Sunday?) – Day of Light Industry
- 19. June (or 3rd Sunday? Some data indicate 2nd Sunday?) – Day of Medical Workers
- 23. June – **Victory Celebration, Day of Land Defence**
- 25. June (or last Saturday?) – Day of Inventors and Rationalizers

July

- 2. July – Day of Air Descent Forces
- 3. July (or 1st Sunday?) – Day of Sea and River Fleet Workers
- 10. July (or 2nd Sunday?) – Day of Fishermen

- 17. July (or 3rd Sunday) – Day of Metallurgists
- 20. July – Chess Day
- 25. July – Day of System Administrators
- 4th Sunday (last Sunday?) – Day of Retail Workers
- 31. July (last Sunday?) – Marine Navy Day

August

- 1. August – Day of Rear Forces
- 1st Sunday – Day of Railway Workers
- 6. August – Day of Railway Forces
- 9. August (or 2nd Saturday?) – Day of Athletes

12. August – Day of Air Forces

2nd Sunday in August – Day of Builders

27. August – Cinematography Day

Last Sunday – Day of Miners

September

1. September – Wisdom Day

2. September – Day of Guards

4. September (or 1st Sunday?) – Day of Naphtha and Gas Industry Workers

8. September – Day of Journalist Solidarity

11. September (or 2nd Sunday?) – Day of Tank Forces

12. August – Day of Air Forces

2nd Sunday in August – Day of Builders

27. August – Cinematography Day

Last Sunday – Day of Miners

September

1. September – Wisdom Day

2. September – Day of Guards

4. September (or 1st Sunday?) – Day of Naphtha and Gas
Industry Workers

8. September – Day of Journalist Solidarity

11. September (or 2nd Sunday?) – Day of Tank Forces

3rd Sunday – Day of Forest Workers

25. September (or 4th or last Sunday?) – Day of Machine Builders

27. September – International Tourism Day

October

2. (or 1.?) October – International Music Day

1. Sunday (October 5) – Day of Teachers, actually celebrated in schools on the Saturday before (at times of 6-day school week) or Friday before (since transfer to 5-day school week)

4. October – Cosmos Forces Day, [Animal Protection Day](#)

2nd Sunday – Day of Agricultural Workers

3rd Sunday – Day of Food Industry Workers

16. October – Day of Roadworkers

24. October – UNO Day

25. October – Day of Customs Workers

30. October (or 4th Sunday?) – Day of Motorised
Transport Workers

November

7. November Great October

10. November – Day of Soviet Militia, Youth Day

12. November – International Day of Social Workers,
Anniversary of Estonian Police

17. November – International Student Day

20. November (or 19th Nov or 3rd Sunday?) – Day of
Rocket and Cannon Forces

December

17. December – Day of Strategic Rocket Forces

20. December – Day of Security Workers

22. December – Day of Energetics Workers

In 1980ies-early 1990ies a change of legal and political feast system took place in Estonia. It was also the time of media newcomers, feasts like Valentins Day, St Patricks Day, Halloween, reinvention of Walpurgis Night (volbripäev) and Mothers Day. After 50 years there was also a change to the previous structure of feasts.

Let us have a look to the changes, adoption and reinstatement politics in the celebration of May Day as the the labour-related holiday, and the dual dynamics of Walpurgis Night/May Day – both as a holiday of student corporations and as the witches' sabbath.

The labour-related holidays history in Estonia dates back to the early 20th century

History

Walpurgis Night had become virtually forgotten as a calendar holiday during 19th century. Single reports about some family lighting a bonfire, or some mentions of sowing peas and beans were known, but generally speaking, the holiday had fallen out of existence.

Attractive medieval urban rituals, like selecting a May King and Queen (in Estonian *maikrahv* and *maikrahvinna*, or May Count and Countess, respectively), archery contest, masking and procession had become a thing of the past.

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Bringing birches for maypoles (Est. *meiud*) was a fixed Whitsuntide ritual. In eastern and central Estonia, Whitsuntide celebrations also entailed the dyeing and giving of eggs, a form of expressing their affection in the past century.

Student celebration. There is plenty of material about emotionally-laden and vivid memories of student traditions in Tartu. The beginning of the celebrations date back to 1632, which were officially banned at the end of the 1940s.

The students were only allowed to wear the student cap (*tekkel*), the rituals related to which were the only newly introduced remnant of the former student traditions. A cap with colours on the lining was formerly given only to students who were members of a student society or corporation and were allowed to wear it in public only on single occasions.

After the Second World War all students were given caps of uniform colour. The colours varied depending on the university. First-year students were given caps after an initiation ritual (modified former student corporation rituals), that is, after they became full members of the students' community.

Wearing the student cap at all occasions (and this applied to the caps of preliminary and secondary schools) was compulsory, except in very cold weather. The cap was a symbol of status and affiliation; alumni wore it at the anniversaries of university and at reunions. University students were thus clearly distinguishable from other people, and so were the students of different higher education schools. Naturally, this inspired quite abundant folklore. The new cap of uniform colours, however, was more democratic and unifying than the former caps in the colours of student corporations.

In the 1960s, processions of students at student days were highly popular in Tartu, but in the early 1970s they were abruptly ended.

Walpurgis Night tradition as a combination of student traditions and witches' feasts





Student corporation traditions were revived at the end of the 1980s, among them the public procession of students through the city of Tartu and the very popular parody procession, on the following day through

Supilinn, a district near the city centre which has traditionally been the place for affordable students' rental apartments. The parody procession was the most popular student ritual in the first half of the 20th century. Around the same time, in late 1980s, attempts were made to introduce the German-influenced *Walpurgisnacht* (or *Hexennacht*) as a feast of witches and magic.

Late night



Вальпургиева ночь
3 МАЯ в Нарва - Йыэсуу
Главный зал центра культуры (Кеск, 3)

вход с 19.00
начало в 19.30
цена билета 10 еек

NARVA-JÖESUU
спрашивайте в KESKKOOL

ART-DESIGN BY TATIYANA SOMINA

Рок-вакот folk-gothic metal band **Black Raven**

театрализованное представление от
THE YOUTH THEATER NUI
конкурсы, призы, подарки и сюрпризы

**N.B. билеты только в предпродаже
количество ограничено!**

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adoption and reinstatement of both rituals bore fruit and Walpurgis Night has acquired a special significance in the tradition of Estonians but also among the local russophone minorities. The success of the adoption of these holidays makes sense since the number of major holidays in Estonian folk calendar in spring/summer half-year is rather small and thus there is less cause for celebration.

It is worth mentioning that while participating in and observing the student festivities around Walpurgis Night used to be widely popular in the early 1990s, by this day it has been reduced to the group lore of student corporations and non-affiliated students.

Celebrating Walpurgis Night as a witches' feast, however, has expanded: people organise witches' theme parties for children, and parties and bonfires for people in towns and rural areas.

Young witches



The students' rituals in Tartu follow a clear pattern:
The ritual washing of the head of the statue of Estonian biologist Karl Ernst von Baer on Toome Hill with sparkling wine.

At 8 o'clock in the evening the student corporations and societies march singing in a procession through the city, accepting the keys of Tartu from mayor, because for this night the power in Tartu is handed over to students.

The procession then heads to the front of the main university building, where students greet the university rector with a song and the rector responds with a speech.

Students head to society buildings, which open their doors at midnight to visitors from other societies and to non-affiliated students. The next morning, students take a boat down the Emajõgi River, drinking beer and singing, or finish the party with other rituals – for example, eating of porridge.















Greetings from city
meer

Greetings from the rector of Tartu University



Washing the head of monument



Washing the head of monumen







Getting inside the society rooms is not easy for those who are not students or for students of other cities already because of the dress code: many guests are turned down because they do not have a white shirt with a necktie and a suit or a (full-length) evening gown. Guests who are good singers are accepted more easily.



The Walpurgis Night celebrations of many student corporations and societies include next to singing *cantus* and dancing also staging of self-written plays, shadow theatre, different parodies or operas and definitely beer-drinking, unless the society observes a temperance policy. But there are also a number of other festive rituals.

Major parties for the entire academic circle, including all students and alumni, are organised on Walpurgis Night, which also conclude the week-long celebration of student days. The celebration of student days a week before perhaps mitigates the staying up all through Walpurgis Night.

Other student days' celebrations include the fair where students trade with peculiar merchandise, a contest of funny vehicles, a rubber boat rally on the Emajõgi River, and numerous concerts, all of which are accessible and highly anticipated events for the general public in Tartu.

Competition of vechicles





The main tendencies in recent years in celebrating Walpurgis Night and differentiation of the tradition

Competition at Emajõgi



The main tendencies in recent years Invented rituals – in other cities

The colleges and higher education schools founded in the 20th century invented their tradition on the example of the one in Tartu. Thus student culture spread to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, and the new universities established in the 1990s have adopted these traditions. Regardless of that, the student tradition has been nowhere so prominent and popular than in Tartu, where the percentage of students in the population is high and which traditional wild feats of students can be traced back throughout centuries.

A current trend in the tradition is the expansion of the student traditions characteristic of Tartu to other cities. Those who are not students and people who do not like crowded public events are lighting bonfires in the company of family and friends, which attests to the incorporation of Walpurgis Night tradition in the general cultural tradition.

What prevail, of course, are the most versatile witches' feasts, a newly invented custom of the 1990s. This tradition is accessible for all who are interested in spending time together:

“[Like in previous years, a Walpurgis Night party is celebrated on April 30 in Rakvere community centre and the community yard. The celebration starts at 19:00 with an address of the head witch, the programme also includes the Tapa brass band performance, a pony ride for children and dance girls.

At 8 in the evening, the pop group Nexus will make an appearance; an hour later Ants Viermann plays records at a terrace disco and the Walpurgis Night bonfire is lit. There is lottery and a broom auction. On the same day current and former students will have an event called Krambambuli, in the course of which the head of the statue of [Friedrich Reinhold] Kreutzwald will be washed (daily newspaper “Virumaa Teataja”)].

Will Walpurgis Night develop to the level of Finnish *vappu*?

The traditional celebration of the evening of April 30 with a witches' feast in schools and day-care centres has spread throughout Estonia, its towns and villages.

Walpurgis Night is an opportunity for wearing a costume in public, for staging minor improvisational plays and simply having fun.

In Estonian archive records, Helsinki on Finnish *vappunaatto* is described as a city of noisy youngsters, all drunk as a lord, and streets covered in garbage and broken glass. In Estonia, public drinking has become more of a problem each year and the day of minor celebration with a bonfire and entertainment has become a day before which the police gather forces and additional bans on alcohol sales are being imposed.

For example, a news report from Pärnu in 2008:

„Kolmapäeva õhtul kella üheksaks oli Port-Arturi esisel tühermaale, millest ajutiselt saanud Brockeni mägi, kogunenud tuhandeid inimesi. Traditsioonilised nõiad võis ühe käe sõrmedel kokku lugeda. Populaarsem kui luuavars on tänapäeva maagide käes gini purk või õllepudel. Nõiajahti pidanud politseinikel polnud põhjust saagi üle kurta.”

[By 9 o'clock at Wednesday night, the wasteland in front of Port Artur shopping centre, which had temporarily been turned into the Brocken, was filled with thousands of people. One could count on the fingers of one hand the witches in traditional costumes, though. The wizards of today preferred to hold on to a can of gin or a beer bottle rather than a broomstick. The cops at witch hunt had no reason to complain about the catch.]

Masking is becoming increasingly popular

While little time and effort is spent on masking on Walpurgis Night, wearing a stylised costume consisting of a few typical elements – witch or wizard hats, capes and, most importantly, face painting is still widely practised. Usually, of course, only some of the partiers wear costumes. Since no other joyous public masking festivities are celebrated in the spring/summer half-year, the Walpurgis Night celebrations are all the more important. The popularity and availability of face and body paint is perhaps the reason why these have become more widely used instead of masks.

Introducing older lore, thematic plays, amateur creation and improvisation

Walpurgis Night offers a fine opportunity for local amateur playwrights and party organisers to put together programmes at which next to local sorcerers the performances of dance and mystery by African or Siberian wisemen, witches and shamans with drums are held. Whenever possible, motifs known from folklore or children's books are used. The didactic or humorous association of different forms of arts may often be used to introduce older and newer tradition connected with ghosts, witches and supernatural beings or "the tales of our ancient past". Next to schools and day-care centres, specific programmes for children and families (a good opportunity to take a walk in a forest or park) are organised by local museums, central museums (such as the Estonian National Museum) and cultural centres.

In addition to older folklore, literary witch tales are staged: the Brocken peak and Walpurgis motifs by J. W. Goethe, the material which is far more easily accessible than folklore, has also been widely used as a source for such plays.

There are also thematic parks as Nõiariik (Witch state) in South Estonia build up as place to play witches, etc.

In addition to older folklore, literary witch tales are staged: the Brocken peak and Walpurgis motifs by J. W. Goethe, the material which is far more easily accessible than folklore, has also been widely used as a source for such plays. People have also reinvented old medieval customs, far before the medieval Hanseatic days became popular in Estonia. Among other things, the reintroduction of the election of May King and Queen and other medieval town rituals has been attempted.

What about the authorship of Walpurgis Night? Who invented the rituals?

Modern times favour authorship. We know who, and when, started to celebrate father's day and mother's day, women's day and the 1st of May as labour day. The names of people who have introduced these traditions in Estonia are known, and the local history of celebrating the holiday traditions is also known by mediation of the written press, special publications and memoirs. Many people try to claim credit for inventing the Walpurgis Night traditions. In this respect the holiday differs from St Valentine's Day and Halloween, the introduction of which in Estonia has been clearly influenced by the media while there are no specific persons who would claim to be importers of these holidays.

This presumes public recognition but also unveils the social ties and influences of a group, and also the migration and adaptation of lore. In the 19th century and even in the 20th century it was not customary for informants to claim credit for being an inventor of a holiday/tradition in the presence of a folklore collector or journalist, even though the authorship may be revealed and often followed from the recorded texts. The suggestion of the first local village jazz group to dance to a modern music or constructors of a village swing have been known to villagers and have functioned as a litmus test for reforming the tradition.

The Walpurgis Night tradition is developed by an army of kindergarten and school teachers, DJs, active schoolchildren, student governments, members of student corporations and cultural departments of municipalities. The authors of witch plays staged on Walpurgis Night and organisers of entertainment at village bonfires have been known by name, but are mentioned only in local chronicles

. Some of the inventors of today's traditions are very certain in their authorship and its importance. Kaarel Tarand, journalist and a member of the Estonian Students' Society has claimed that in 1989 he invented the ritual washing of the head of the monument of Karl Ernst von Baer with sparkling wine as a practical joke.

Still, it remains unknown who of the 20th-century students living in the rental apartments invented the Walpurgis Night ritual of running down the Toome Hill and singing "Macaroni, macaroni?"

Director of Von Krahl Theatre:

In the past we did amazing things in the theatre. After all, Walpurgis Night was our production! We wanted to have some fun on May 1, so I browsed through folk material and thought that this joking around could be called Walpurgis Night. We organised Walpurgis carnivals for five years in a row; at one point there were up to 30,000 people, which is quite a number for a theatre. At one point we were the only ones to import-export and make pyrotechnics in Estonia.]

Not conclusions

Mayday and Walpurgis Night as the Saturday of Mayday offers a opportunity to make fun, fire, mask and make merry for different layers in society. It is visibility of students and student corporations, it is masking occasion, it is connected with creativity and creation process. Mayday is a feast of civil society with its ow dynamics. It is modern feast with old roots.