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FOLK COSTUME IN THE RITUAL YEAR AND BEYOND: HERITAGE, IDENTITY MARKER, AND SYMBOLIC OBJECT

Irina Sedakova, Nina Vlaskina

The idea of this issue of *Folklore: EJF* emerged from the panel we organised on behalf of the Working Group on the The Ritual Year at the 12th Congress of the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore (SIEF) held in Zagreb, Croatia, in June 2015.¹ We concentrated on the calendric and life cycle usage of the traditional garments and their parts, and we also followed, as much as possible, the new development trends and even the expansion of authentic clothes.

Folk costumes are amongst the most topical and discussed issues in historical and contemporary folklore studies, ethnology, and cultural anthropology, and remain important for many people in many countries. The bibliography on costumes is vast, and it includes huge academic volumes, albums, and articles. Moreover, academic, popular, political, and commercial interest in the garments and their accessories continues to grow. The old pieces of traditional clothes and their replicas are being sought by museums and private collections, for cultural performances, and occasionally they are sold in flea markets, as we saw in Zagreb.

During the past decade, we have witnessed the growth of a number of conferences,² publications and discussions on folk costumes (Kawar 2011; Vintilă-Ghițulescu 2011; Hulsbosch 2014; Shukla 2015; Eklund 2016, etc.). Also, new developments have taken place in social life regarding the costumes. In this context, we would like to mention the following public festivals that have emerged recently: the National Day of Folk Costume established in Moldova on June 26, 2016; the National Costume Day established in Georgia on May 18, 2016; the All-Ukrainian National Costume Day established in Ukraine in 2015, where it replaced the Annual Parade of the Embroidered Shirt (*Vyshivanka*). In many countries, such annual festivals are traditional: the International Festival of Folk Costumes in Zheravna (Bulgaria); the National Costume Festival on Männlichen (Switzerland); the National Costume and Clothing Heritage Festival (Kamnik, Slovenia); the Mongolian National Costume Festival and Parade in

Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia); the Icelandic National Costume Festival; and Sarafan: The Festival of Russian Costume (Russia).

It seems obvious that these new festive activities using the symbolism of costume have appeared in the post-Soviet states, where the necessity of strengthening the national identity is urgent and topical. We have to note, though, that the attitude to and the social value of the folk costumes in the countries of the socialist block, even in the fifteen republics of the USSR, differ. For example, firm traditions to wear traditional costumes have been maintained in the Baltic countries and in the Czech Republic: the Ritual Year group had a wonderful opportunity to see them when the annual conferences were held in the corresponding countries.³ Attitudes have changed even in countries not as keen to maintain the authentic traditions. In Bulgaria and Ukraine, for example, an increasing number of people have started to celebrate weddings with the bride and the groom dressed in traditional clothes; there are also new trends to wear parts of folk costumes at school or university graduation ceremonies, etc.

This is explained by the multitude of meanings and functions of traditional national folk clothes and their potential to preserve the cultural heritage and make the identity explicit in a number of ethnographic and religious contexts. It is exploited in various spheres, such as folk-cultural, political, economic, and fashion events. There are many groups on Facebook that discuss and present the most interesting items and examples of various regions for academic and practical purposes and to maintain traditions (cuts of traditional parts of clothes, embroidery, etc). Museums and city exhibitions often display new arrivals and acquisitions.

The beauty and picturesqueness of the national costumes add to the renaissance and growth of interest in them.

The traditional costume is one of the most vibrant elements of cultural heritage and is regarded by ethnologists (e.g. Piotr Bogatyrev) as a semiotic system carrying explicit social, gender, and age differences. In traditional societies, it is so rich in its festive and everyday usage and is correlated with its magical and symbolic properties. Folk dress is an important sign of festive behaviour. In modern societies some ethnic groups still wear their national costumes in an attempt to preserve their cultural heritage and oppose globalisation, revealing an 'us/them' divide. Meanwhile, national dress has developed new social functions and often emphasises political identity issues and commercial purposes (local touristic ethnographic performances, folk festivals). Many traditional costumes and their typical elements (shirts, skirts/kilts, hats, shawls, belts, ornaments) have become fashionable items and spread internationally.

The aim of the articles in the presented volume is to analyse changes in the symbolism and functions of folk costume as used in the festive calendar year and in everyday life. The texts published in this volume embrace various ethnic and religious traditions of different places and epochs.

Focusing on the issues discussed and the chronological scope of the studies, we can divide the contributions made to this volume into several groups. In one of them, issues related to the changes taking place in traditional costumes and their role in society at different historical stages are put forward.

The article co-authored by Alexander Novik and Andrey Sobolev, and the articles by Anamaria Iuga and Nina Vlaskina reflect this aspect. As the congress took place in Croatia, many scholars concentrated on the local costumes of the Balkan and South Slavic region – Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania. The articles by Marija Gačić and Urszula Wilk discuss the traditional costume competitions and stress the issues associated with the interpretation of the terms ‘tradition’ and ‘authenticity’, the parameters used to assess costumes, and the role of the costume in the preservation of cultural heritage. The semiotic and pragmatic functions of garments come to the fore in the articles by Cristina Clopot and Irina Sedakova, and in the article co-authored by Britt Eklund and Katarina Ek-Nilsson. Finally, the papers by Milana Černelić and Rosa Isela Aguilar Montes de Oca are aimed at analysing recent cultural processes, including the revitalisation of festivities and invention of new garments based on traditional knowledge.

Alexander Novik and **Andrey Sobolev** describe in detail and analyse the wedding costume of the Mrkovići Muslim ethno-local group in Montenegro. They consider folk costume as an important part of tangible heritage and describe the historical changes of the elements of women’s garments and their dialectal names. The authors reveal the transformation of the garments under the influence of Islamic fashion at the early stage and that of European fashion at a later time. They examine not only the sources of innovation and selection of costume elements but also the development of cultural preferences; they also characterise the local specificity of the Mrkovići wedding costume.

A diachronic approach to the study of traditional clothing also forms the basis of **Anamaria Iuga’s** research. She analyses the festive costume from the Maramureş region (Romania), identifying scenarios of cultural dynamics and influential factors. The author traces the change of the material used for making clothes (from homespun to naturally manufactured, and then to synthetically manufactured). Anamaria shows how one traditional model is replaced by another, when the elements of the costume adopted from neighbouring cultures

are considered as typical for the host country in the course of time. She also investigates the influence of the mass media on the unification of costumes and how the surviving elements represent the local identity and the continuation of traditions at the cost of losing the costume as a complex.

The articles by **Marija Gačić** and **Urszula Wilk** raise similar problems. Both authors consider how traditional garments are presented at contests, and how the assessment procedure and selection of the best costume are carried out. Marija Gačić depicts several beauty elections in traditional costumes in Croatia, and Urszula Wilk examines the specially sewn traditional festive clothes, worn by the participants in the annual feast *las Fallas* in Valencia (Spain). A wide range of issues concerning the contest procedure itself and the costumes displayed in public are scrutinised. In particular, they discuss the different use of the terms ‘authentic’ and ‘traditional’ by the contest participants and professional ethnographers, and they describe the situations when the jury has to prioritise and choose between the costumes of different historical periods. The rules for assessing costumes are another topical issue.

Urszula Wilk concludes that the development of the documentation for the contest leads to the codification of costumes and reduces the diversity of traditions. Marija Gačić describes another situation when some rules exist but are not recorded anywhere, rendering the degree of subjectivity, as well as the responsibility of the appointed experts, in the decision-making process very high. The authors also draw attention to the change in the roles of participants at the events. In the case of *las Fallas*, the new aim of a folkloric presentation of the local culture to tourists and the active participation of costumed women in a contemporary festival deflect attention from the main part of the event – burning of the specially-built monument *falla*. Marija Gačić describes the new type of participants in the selection of beautiful objects, namely, the collectors, and poses the question whether one may place under one umbrella both the members of the traditional communities presenting the cultural heritage of their families and those who perceive tradition only as subject to third-party admiration.

The unique diversity and the high degree of preservation of traditional garments in the Swedish parish of Boda (the county of Dalecarlia) are depicted in the article by **Britt Eklund** and **Katarina Ek-Nilsson**. The authors examine the conditions of the long-term preservation of traditions, stressing the equality of the parishioners with respect to property and social status, as well as the active use of the identity presentation function. During long-term work outside the home village, for the representatives of the local community, the costume became a way to maintain ties with their homeland. They also explore the new contexts of the existence of this unique costume complex in modern conditions,

when in other parts of the country the traditional costume has been lost. In the countryside, interest in the traditional heritage has increased, and the aesthetic and semiotic functions of costumes have moved to the forefront; and in certain contexts, the costumes of the parish of Boda have come to represent Swedish folk costumes in general.

The symbolic functions of costumes, which are relevant to magical rites and daily life from infancy and later, are characterised in **Irina Sedakova's** paper. The author explores the traditional Slavic semiotic opposition of the bareness of a new-born child (as a sign of the lack of its social links) and its first clothes. Each piece of the baby's garments is seen as a bearer of a symbolic meaning and is used in the ritual setting to facilitate the socialisation of the baby, to guard it from evil spirits and illnesses, to help it develop some positive qualities, etc. The clothes of adults also acquire specific features in the context of the authentic birth-lore, which in many ways are forgotten and not used in the modern society.

Two articles in the volume analyse the dynamics of costumes in the enclaves of Russian Old Believers living outside their historical homeland, particularly in Romania and Turkey.

Cristina Clopot examines the transformation of the traditional garments of Russian Old Believers (Lipovene) in Romania through the prism of identity representation. The author demonstrates the close connection between wearing the traditional costume and the value system and moral orientations of the society. In particular, Cristina reveals how the concept of purity is reflected in the division of clothing appropriate for the secular and church context in a symbolic interpretation of certain elements of the costume (for example, a woven belt). The author describes in detail the wedding dress of Old Believers and the symbolic meaning of its elements. She shows how the substitution of a locally specific costume by a stereotypical version of Russian clothes has occurred in public performances related to the representation of the cultural heritage. She also traces the change in the status of traditional clothing in modern conditions and the reduction of its value in the community.

Nina Vlaskina investigates the dynamics of the festive clothes of the other group of Russian Old Believers settled in Turkey – the Cossacks, named after their leader, Ignat Nekrasov, who took them away from religious and political persecution. Nina traces the history of the formation of their costume complex, the influence of other ethnic groups, and the gradual narrowing of the costume's functions after their return to their homeland and the environment of ethnically related neighbours. She concentrates on the conditions and the stages of the loss of traditional garments and amply discusses their role as a representa-

tive of the group's heritage in the context of museum exhibitions, folk group performances, and souvenir production.

Milana Černelić examines the role of costumes in the revival of the traditional rituals in a group of Bunjevci Croats in Serbia. Wearing traditional costumes becomes mandatory for participation in the celebrations during the Shrovetide period (*Prelo*), Pentecost Pageant, and the harvest festival (*Dužijanca*), while in other contexts traditional costume is now hardly ever used. The author dwells on the changes caused by the desire to make the costume more comfortable (simplification of the heavy headdress of *kraljice*), as well as the transformation of the functions of garments (the use of working clothes and underwear as festive attire).

Rosa Isela Aguilar Montes de Oca discusses the theme of inventing a costume and shows the connection between two opposing processes in the strengthening of local identity: activities aimed at the preservation and promotion of a common cultural heritage, on the one hand, and the invention of a new costume, as well as a search for new ways to draw attention to the local heritage, on the other hand. The author characterises the celebration of the Day of the Dead in La Huasteca region (Mexico) and describes the actions of the locals concerned with the problems of cultural specificity to protect their ritual practices against the impact of globalisation, the United States, and their closest neighbours.

A brief review of the articles presented in this thematic volume reveals a range of issues common to different religious and ethnic groups related to the historical development and current existence of the traditional garments. Most of the authors illustrate the idea that costume is a valuable means of expressing identity. They also underline the increased interest of society in folk costumes both in the folk calendar and life-cycle celebrations and festivals. Most of the articles underline the details created and invented in the authentic garments today, and discover the influence of the clothes on national fashion trends. In the conditions of varying degrees of costume preservation in different areas, which is due to historical and socio-economic factors, women's costumes are usually better preserved than men's, while festive costumes are better preserved and more symbolic than everyday costumes. The studies also show the irreversible effect of industrialisation on manufacturing, technological processes, priorities in the use of materials, unifying processes, and the loss of local diversity in some areas. The valuable conclusion is drawn that when part of the elements fade into oblivion and are replaced with their modern counterparts, the 'survivors' acquire primary symbolic value and start to represent the costume tradition as a whole and sometimes even the entire cultural heritage of the group.

This issue cannot cover or even touch upon all the aspects of symbolism and heritage-related issues specific to festive clothes in various churches and confessions. Many topical issues still need to be discussed, especially as we bear in mind the high rate of migration and the co-existence of typical traditional religious garments in Europe and the political discussions around it. There are interesting prospects for studying folk dresses in their historical and modern 'new' life, which in some countries and regions has taken the form of a folk renaissance.

NOTES

- ¹ About a detailed review of the 12th SIEF Congress see Vlaskina et al. 2015.
- ² See, for example, *Conference on Dress, Popular Culture and Social Action in Africa* (Northwestern University, Evanston, USA, 13–14.03.2009); *In Between: Culture of Dress between East and West. The 64th Annual Conference of the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Costume* (Belgrade, Serbia, 25–30.09.2011); *Living Folk Costume* (Estonian Folk Art and Craft Union, Tartu, Estonia, 14–15.09.2012); *The Historical Dynamics of the Traditional Costume of the Peoples of Russia: International Conference* (State Republican Centre of Russian Folklore, Moscow, Russia, 25–27.11.2015); *Folk Costume in Siberia: All-Russian Conference* (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 27–29.10.2016).
- ³ See, for example, *The Ritual Year 3* (Sedakova 2008) in the Czech Republic, where the cover shows beautiful garments during the ritual "The Ride of the King", observed by the participants of the conference.

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TRADITIONAL WEDDING COSTUME OF THE MRKOVIĆI IN MONTENEGRO: BETWEEN REAL HERITAGE AND FOLK CONSTRUCTION (MATERIALS OF THE RUSSIAN EXPEDITIONS IN 2012–2014)

Alexander Novik, Andrey Sobolev

Abstract: The traditional clothing of the Mrkovići Muslim ethno-local group in Montenegro began to change at the turn of the 21st century in response to several factors. Firstly, this clothing was more and more reserved exclusively for ritual (and festive) occasions. Secondly, the group demonstrated increased interest in its own history and culture. And, thirdly, the group confronted challenges associated with globalization processes by transforming its traditional clothing. This paper recounts the results of fieldwork conducted by the recent Russian Balkan expeditions. We briefly outline the history of the prototypical oriental female dress and provide commonly used names for its elements. We then describe a costume variant common among the Mrkovići in the 19th and 20th centuries and give the dialectal names for its elements. We have recorded the 21st century transition to a new variant of the wedding costume, dominated by the color white, which is motivated by aesthetic, pragmatic, mythological, and religious factors. Finally we describe this contemporary costume and name its details. The specific combination of archaic and innovative, inherited and borrowed elements shapes the peculiar profile of the Mrkovići culture as a whole and their traditional wedding costume in particular.

Keywords: Balkan expeditions, Balkan Muslim Slavs, ethno-confessional groups, ethno-local groups, history of costume, identity markers, Montenegro, Mrkovići tribe, names of costume elements, wedding costume

INTRODUCTION

The inhabitants of approximately ten villages in the far southwest of Montenegro, to the southeast of the city of Bar (Alb. Tivari), make up the ethno-local Mrkovići community (Fig. 1), also known as Mrkojevići, and as Mërkot in Albanian (Jovičević 1922). The members of this community have used and are still using a specific dialect of the Serbo-Croatian language (Vujović 1969). The northern, southern, and eastern borders of the Mrkovići settlements are shared



Figure 1. View of Dabezići mountain village.
Photograph by Alexander Novik, September 2012.

with the Albanian speaking regions of Shestani, Ulqini (Serb.-Croat. Ulcinj), and Ana e Malit (Ahmetaj 2006; Šekularac & Pavlović 2012). The overwhelming majority of the Mrkovići converted to Sunni Islam in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the group now constituting a rather insular local ethno-confessional population of about 3000 (Metanović 2005; Grgurević 2013) has historically evolved a separate existence (Metanović 2001)¹ that has nevertheless escaped notice by foreign scholars during the 20th and 21st centuries.

In a series of Balkan expeditions conducted by the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) and Saint Petersburg State University (SPbSU) in 2012 through to 2014 (cf. Sobolev & Novik 2013), Andrey Sobolev (Institute for Linguistic Studies (ILS) of the RAS and SPbSU), Alexander Novik (Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (MAE) “Kunstkamera” of the RAS and SPbSU), Denis Ermolin (MAE RAS), Maria Morozova (ILS RAS and SPbSU), Alexandra Dugushina (MAE RAS), and Anastasia Makarova (ILS RAS) all took part in research activities organized in the Mrkovići settlement area.

According to literature and our own observations, this group’s most important differentiating markers are its collective notion of the historical unity of all the Mrkovići and its confessional adherence to Islam, possibly supplemented by traditional costume, vernacular architecture (Fig. 2), textile crafts (Fig. 3), various kinds of handiwork, traditional cooking, traditional etiquette, and a fading local dialect. This research deals with the traditional wedding costume of the Mrkovići, which began to change substantially at the turn of the 21st century.



Figure 2. *Traditional stone house. Village of Lunje.
Photograph by Alexander Novik, September 2012.*



Figure 3. *Aiša Lunić at a weaving loom in her old house. Village of Lunje.
Photograph by Alexander Novik, September 2012.*

First of all, traditional clothing has vanished almost completely from everyday use, while retaining its ritual status for the most important family events and calendrical rites (engagement, marriage, circumcision rite, funeral, Kurban-Bayram, and Ramazan-Bayram), for communal celebrations (village day, national holidays of Montenegro, group pilgrimages to holy places), for festivals such as Mrkovići Days, and for similar occasions.

Secondly, members of the group have demonstrated a noticeably increased interest in their own history, culture, traditional dialect, and features of domestic lifestyle. This interest, among other things, stimulates development of folk arts and crafts, a development supported by the local administration. Whenever performances by contemporary *folk* groups involve *folk* dress, the notion of *folk* itself becomes subject to new interpretations, together with the real clothes that satisfy new demands under new conditions.

Thirdly, the standardized forms of culture and mentality promoted in a modern globalizing world provoke perennially new forms of opposition towards their homogenizing tendencies, while also exerting a considerable influence on material processes of costume transformation.

One approach to countering globalization can be seen when various ethno-confessional groups actively assert their identity by striving to affirm their own distinctiveness and emphasize their differences from other groups. The Mrkovići represent an interesting example of such a group (Peročević 2005). Their costume is one of the most salient markers for emphasizing their unique status among neighboring Orthodox Montenegrins (cf. Mrvaljević 2006), Orthodox Serbs, Muslim Albanians, Catholic Albanians, Muslim Gorani, Muslim Gypsies, Muslim Turks, Muslim Bosniacs, and other groups.

ON THE GENESIS OF THE MRKOVIĆI FEMALE COSTUME

It has been established that for a number of decades following the Ottoman conquest in the 15th–16th centuries the coastal and mountain regions of South Dalmatia and Albania witnessed a competition between Venetian and Oriental fashion (Gjergji 1988). In this process, garments with trimmings and patterns imported from Istanbul and other major centers of the Ottoman Empire acquired a higher status. As a result, the dress worn by the multiethnic reference groups in the territories controlled by the Ottomans became dominated by the dress worn in Istanbul. The Mrkovići clothing was necessarily subjected to Muslim influence during the process of conversion to Islam in the 17th century; the Mrkovići, in declaring allegiance to Islam, would most likely have accepted the new prestigious Ottoman culture along with it. The costume, with its complex semantics and expressive significance, must have played a central role in a whole range of changes. We can assume that the costume worn by the Islamized Mrkovići resembled, in its basic features, the costume worn by the Turks (Muslims by definition in this time and region),² by other Islamized Slavic groups (Čulić 1963), and by Muslim Albanians, their closest neighbors.

The many ethno-local groups of Balkan peoples recently converted into a new faith usually devised their own clothing variants. On the one hand, they extensively borrowed forms, cuts, styles, technology, materials, and decorative solutions from the costume worn in Istanbul and other significant centers of the Muslim world. On the other hand, they also created clothing that conserved their own achievements in form and aesthetics, evaluating them in the light of new criteria for judging *beautiful ~ ugly, prestigious ~ not prestigious, high status ~ low status, right ~ wrong*. By marking the group's initiation into the predominant faith, these new costume variants helped establish the aesthetic perspectives of the dominating social group at all levels of local tradition. The changes encouraged members of the group to assign new meanings to particular elements and details of their clothing; in other words, common things in the culture changed their semiotic status.

The oriental costume prototype that existed in social reference groups in the capital (in particular among the Ottomans) became the most widespread variant of female dress among the Mrkovići. Albanian ethnography designates it as the “Middle Albanian Costume” (cf. Alb. *Shqipëria e Mesme* ‘Middle Albania’) (Shkodra 1973; Gjergji 1988; Statovci 2009; Onuzi 2015)³ (Fig. 4). It is prevalent over territories from the city of Durrës on the coast of the Adriatic through the regions of Tirana and Elbasan to the territories of Metokhia, Kosovo, and western and northern Macedonia, including Skopje. This costume has been recorded in the northwest, around the cities of Shkodra (Serbo-Croatian Skadar), Ulcinj (Alb. Ulqini) and Bar (Alb. Tivari), among others – the three urban centers in the region settled by the Mrkovići.



Figure 4. Female festive costume, common among Muslims. The City of Bar Regional Museum (Zavičajni muzej Bar). Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.



Figure 5. Embroidery detail on a džamadan waistcoat. The City of Bar Regional Museum (Zavičajni muzej Bar). Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.

The prototypical Albanian oriental female costume consisted of the following elements: 1) *dimi* (a word borrowed directly from Turkish), loose pantaloons that often had different names in different places; 2) *komza* (in Gheg Albanian) to go with the *dimi* or *kalce* – gaiters of closely woven fabric with embroidery and sewing; 3) *këmishë* (from Latin *camisia*, which is a loan from Greek (Çabej 2014: 74)), a blouse made of thin fabric, usually silk; 4) *jelek* (a word borrowed from Turkish), a waistcoat of closely woven fabric, richly decorated with embroidery and sewing (Fig. 5); 5) two cloth belts of thin fabric, decorated with embroidery and sewing using the same colors applied to the waistcoat and gaiters; 6) a round cap of closely woven fabric or a kerchief made of thin silk fabric. The ensemble was completed by fancy shoes or slippers made of fabric or leather, or wooden-soled shoes called *nallane* (loan word from Turkish).

This costume type was worn exclusively by Muslim women and clearly indicated that its bearer belonged to the Mohammedan faith. Thus, for example, the peculiar version of the female Muslim costume developed in the city of Shkodra, which is traditionally subdivided into two main quarters (Catholic and Muslim), still includes the *dimi*. In fact, while up to 300 types of traditional clothing may be found in Albania (each *krahina* (region), city, or village, as a rule, has its own variant; sometimes several types of traditional clothing coexist in a single village) (Gjergji 1988), the costume that includes the *dimi* is universally recognized as a *generalized type* (*prototype*) of the female Muslim costume.

The widespread, generalized type including the *dimi* has, nevertheless, specific features associated with various regions: in one place it is embroidered with gold, in another with silver; in some *krahinas* the costume is accompanied by a round cap, in others by a kerchief. Here it is necessary to emphasize that rural Muslim women have taken the dress of townswomen for a model. According to our informant's memories, the unified types of the female festive costume formed by the end of the 19th century in Bar and Ulcinj displayed no difference among those worn by Turkish townswomen, Albanians, and Slavic women converted to Islam.

THE MRKOVIĆI FEMALE FESTIVE COSTUME IN THE 19TH-20TH CENTURIES

In our fieldwork, we familiarized ourselves with exemplary costume artifacts from the collections of the regional museum in Bar, the archeological museum in Budva, and the ethnographic museum in Cetinje. We have studied authentic artifacts that represent local Mrkovići tradition, preserved in the school museum in the village of Pečurice (Fig. 6), and in the private collection of Bisera Alković in the village of Dobra Voda. We have also examined antique dress specimens kept in chests by local women, especially Aiša Lunić of the village of Lunje and



Figure 6. Ddžamadan waistcoats. 20th century. Museum of the village of Pečurice, Montenegro. Photograph by Alexander Novik, September 2012.

Jasmina Dapčević of the village of Dabezići. Finally, we were able to gather a small but extremely illuminating collection of ten items, most of which relate to the traditional textile and clothing of the Mrkovići. These items, now part of the MAE collection, serve as an important resource, perhaps unique outside of Balkan Europe, for research on the production and use of folk dress in the region under investigation.⁴

The features that distinguish the Mrkovići clothing from the clothing worn by their Muslim neighbors who speak other languages⁵ have been described only for their everyday costume, in which the local character clearly stands out. We see this emphasis on distinctions in everyday dress as a rare phenomenon, because it is far more common for the burden of representing the local character to be carried completely by the most *festive / celebratory / fancy / marriage* variant.⁶ With the Mrkovići, these celebratory functions have been carried out by the prototypical Muslim female costume with the *dimi* designated as the costume of Middle Albania. It consists of the following elements:

- 1) *brageše* trousers (cf. Slovenian, Serbian, Croatian *brageše*, Albanian *brakeshe* (Skok 1971: 196; Vinja 1998: 64–65; Çabej 1976: 299–300; cf. Papahagi 1974 [1963]; Andriótis 1995; Ciorănescu 2001) from Venetian *braga* ‘leather belt’) made from thin white cotton fabric; the Mrkovići call it *demija*, but they believe this to be a Bosnian word;
- 2) *fanjelica* blouse of thin fabric, often silk (Fig. 7);
- 3) *džamadan* waistcoat (cf. Serbian *džemadan* ‘chest buttoned waistcoat’; borrowed from Turkish (Skok 1971: 472)) made from dense fabric or thin fabric with a lining;
- 4) a gaiter of dense fabric or thin fabric with a lining;
- 5) *pas trbulus* silk belt (cf. Serbian, Bulgarian *taraboloz*; borrowed from Turkish, the toponym of *Tarabulos*, *Tarabulus*, *Trablus* ‘Tripoli’, where kerchiefs and belts were produced (Skok 1973: 490)) 5–7 meters in length and about 60 cm wide, wrapped around the waist (Fig. 8);
- 6) *otos* headgear (cf. Serbian, Bulgarian *otoz* (Georgiev et al. 1995: 967) and Albanian *hotoz*, borrowed from Turkish (Dizdari 2005: 396)), made from a colored *šamija* kerchief (a word borrowed from Turkish) and decorated with golden coins (Figs. 9–10);
- 7) footwear made of fabric or leather;
- 8) socks of white cotton yarn.

During the cold months the costume was supplemented by loose overcoats, socks of white wool, mantles, kerchiefs, etc.



Figure 7. Fanjelica blouse. 20th century. Museum of the village of Pečurice. Photograph by Alexander Novik, September 2012.



Figure 8. Pas trbulus belt. 20th century. Demonstrated by Jasmina Dapčević from the village of Dabezići. Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.



Figure 9. Otos headwear. 20th century. Demonstrated by Jasmina Dapčević from the village of Dabezići. Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.



Figure 10. Silk jašmak kerchief covering an otos. 20th century. The two-element head-piece is demonstrated by Jasmina Dapčević from the village of Dabezići. Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.

The costume variant described here remained unchanged until the beginning of the 20th century. Based on extant family pictures, reports from our informants, and literature on local history (Peročević 2005), it is possible to extend that continuity even further: during the whole of the 20th century, the costume with the *dimi* (Mrkovići *brageše*) maintained its function as ritual clothing among Muslim women (as a wedding costume, but also as the costume worn by the women – female relatives, close acquaintances, and female friends – invited to the marriage ceremony as guests), while a single female Muslim costume type persisted in the Bar region in its festive variant.⁷

BREAK FROM TRADITION AND MODERN CHALLENGES

The 20th century was marked by intense innovation in the spheres of the economic order, social relations, and traditional culture in the Western Balkans. Considerable changes happened to costume as well: the clothing previously in use (oriental in its origin, form, cut, and aesthetics) was first superseded in cities, but then everywhere and at virtually all levels by the forms and variants that go under the conventional name *European dress* in scholarly works dedicated to costume. This process became especially intensive after World War II, although male variants of the traditional clothing, for instance, had already been superseded by ‘European’ innovations in the first decades of the 20th century.

The new circumstances brought important changes to the Mrkovići female wedding costume. A significant innovation was the predominance of the color white in the whole ensemble: the majority of costume elements were now made of white fabric. The reasons for this change may be found in aesthetics, pragmatics, myth, and religion.

Firstly, the color white was always common for festive dress variants among many ethnic groups. It was considered pure, fancy, and beautiful (in the perspective of traditional aesthetic preferences). It was also considered ‘expensive’ – when people saw a woman dressed in white, they perceived her as being dressed expensively because a white costume needed extra care and treatment that was not cheap by definition. This is why the practice of whitening shirt fabric or fabric for female trousers and other items made from linen, hemp, cotton, and Spanish broom (Lat. *spartium junceum*) was so common.

Secondly, the color white plays one of the most important and profound roles in Slavic color symbolism (Tolstoy 1995; Ajdačić 2001). It is also known in Islam as ‘the color of Allah’ and the white dress is considered ‘Sunnah⁸ for living’.

Thirdly, the elements of the festive costume variant were made of silk. As a rule, the fabric used was produced from naturally colored (light yellow or cream) silk thread. It was expensive to produce clothing, and according to the stereotypical attitudes taken in this society, silk clothing connoted high status and its natural color gained in prestige.

Fourthly, the invention of aniline dye in the 19th century and of synthetic fabric in the 20th century made it possible to produce almost perfectly white clothing. The most appealing snow-white color became available not only for the whitened linen, cotton, and other (hemp or juncus) fabric used for shirts, but also for the silk fabric used to make festive clothing.

Although white is found in the clothing ensembles of neighboring ethnic groups, none of them has as many white elements and costume details as the Mrkovići. The predominance of white in their costume is overwhelming. The traditional silk belts and waistcoats provide the only exceptions to this 'celebration of the color white'.

It is exceptionally important to note that men from some families of the Mrkovići tribe traditionally take Albanian women from the neighboring regions of Shestani, Ana e Malit, and Ulcinj as their brides (Jovičević 1922: 113). According to information gathered by A. Novik, the groom's family, in such cases, brings a complete traditional Mrkovići clothing ensemble to the Albanian bride's house as a wedding gift. The bride is expected to appear in this costume at the groom's house to partake in the wedding ceremony. After the wedding ceremony the costume becomes the new wife's festive clothing, marking her assimilation from another area and family into the Mrkovići community as a result of marriage. Even though it is possible that the young spouse does not speak and may never start speaking her husband's Slavic language, she wears the Mrkovići costume during holidays or important family celebrations. When the young wife departs to visit her relatives, however, she dresses in a costume characteristic of her own family and region.

During the expedition's work in the Dapčevići quarter of the village of Dabezići, we documented a complete wedding ensemble owned by Jasmina Dapčević (born into the Omeralovići family). The attire, worn by the female informant at her wedding in the 1960s, corresponds in its elements to the prototypical festive variant of the Muslim female costume:

- 1) silk shirt – *košulja od svile* (Fig. 11);
- 2) cotton pantaloons – *brageše pamučne* (Fig. 12);
- 3) waistcoat – *džamadan / jeleče* (Fig. 13);
- 4) short inner shirt – *potkošulja / fanjelica* (Fig. 14);
- 5) red kerchief – *šamija*;

Figure 11. Silk shirt. 20th century. Demonstrated by Jasmina Dapčević from the village of Dabezići. Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.



Figure 12. Brageše. Detail: decorative lacework. 20th century. Demonstrated by Jasmina Dapčević from the village of Dabezići. Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.



Figure 13. Džamadan/jeleče. 20th century. Demonstrated by Jasmina Dapčević from the village of Dabezići. Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.



Figure 14. Potkošulja/fanjelica. 20th century. Demonstrated by Jasmina Dapčević from the village of Dabezići. Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.

- 6) silk head kerchief – *jašmak svileni*;
- 7) breast covering – *siskač*;
- 8) homemade silk belt – *pas svileni*;
- 9) a decoration made of gold coins or imitation coins – *dukat* (worn both on the breast or on the head kerchief).

Besides the predominance of the color white, the following elements of the ensemble can be singled out as its strongest distinguishing features:

- a) two variants of headgear: red bridal wear for the marriage ceremony and a white head kerchief for a married woman (both are perceived by the informants as necessary components of a complete ensemble);
- b) waistcoat (most commonly white in a wedding costume, sewn with gold and silver decoration or metallic thread embroidery);
- c) obligatory homemade silk belt patterned in many colors; red must predominate.

Similar wedding ensembles have been documented in various areas settled by the Mrkovići, based on the evidence of modern wedding photographs (Fig. 15)



Figure 15. *Mrkovići women in traditional wedding costumes. Village of Dabezići, 20th century. Picture from Jasmina Dapčević's family album. Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.*

and videos that show almost all brides wearing identical dress. Modern Mrkovići brides do not make their own wedding clothes, as they still did even in the 1950s, according to informant Aiša Lunić from the village of Lunje. Rather, they purchase the ensembles from local craftswomen who specialize in sewing wedding and festive garments, following local traditions and expectations. Data from A. Novik implies that currently two such seamstresses are working in the region.

We ought to mention that local Mrkovići activists and regional history experts, who wish to promote their own ethno-local culture and assert their group's unique status in the region, have initiated attempts to create a costume type different from those of their neighbors.⁹ As a result, the costumes worn by contemporary folk performers are frequently made up according to amateurish subjective notions of what is proper rather than sewn according to the pattern of older prototypes. This process of inventing tradition under the banner of revitalizing realia and phenomena that symbolize and distinguish the culture of a certain group resembles processes taking place in other regions of the world.

CONCLUSION

The small ethno-local and ethno-confessional community of the Mrkovići in Montenegro, while maintaining linguistic, confessional, and political contact among its own members, preserves close relations, including blood ties, with Slavic and Albanian populations in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia (Sandžak region), and Albania. Group identity among the Mrkovići is marked by realia, ritual practices, attitudes, lifestyle, and the organization of everyday affairs characteristic of the Muslim population of the Western Balkans as a whole, which are also historically oriented towards multiethnic reference groups of the Ottoman Empire. Specifically, the traditional Mrkovići female costume, derived from prototypical Muslim clothing with the *dimi* (loose pantalons), is a product of multiethnic and multicultural creation of new forms and aesthetic preferences. Nevertheless, the awareness of group unity, specific local dialect, multiple Slavic cultural and linguistic archaisms, Romance, Ottoman, and Albanian borrowings, europeisms, as well as their own oftentimes unique new creations shape the inimitable profile of the Mrkovići language and culture, represented in this article by such a salient marker of local identity as the traditional wedding costume.

Through the last several decades, the basic costume has, on the one hand, survived substantial innovations in the color palette, where the color white now

Figure 16. Aiša Lunić in a traditional jašmak kerchief and modern clothing. Village of Lunje. Photograph by Alexander Novik, September 2012.



Figure 17. Mrs. Metanović in a traditional jašmak kerchief and modern clothing. Ulcinj field. Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.



Figure 18. Sepulcher in a graveyard in the village of Mala Gorana. Portrait on the sepulcher: a deceased woman in a traditional kerchief. Photograph by Alexander Novik, August 2013.

predominates, as well as innovations in cut, choice of materials, and decorations, among other things (Figs. 16–18), while, on the other hand, conserving such elements as the *otos* (headgear) and *pas trbulus* (belt). The traditional Mrkovići wedding costume makes this ethno-confessional group clearly distinct when contrasted with the clothing of other ethnic communities in the region, and there is every reason to believe that the costume not only maintains its symbolic, cultural, confessional, and social role, but will continue to do so for a long time.

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NOTES

- ¹ From a national and political standpoint, the Mrkovići could be identified as Muslim Slavs, Bosniacs, Montenegrins, or Serbs, while naming Serbo-Croatian, Bosniac, Montenegrin, or Serbian as their language. The issue of the Mrkovići's beliefs about the degree of unity among Slavic Muslim groups and their cultures in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia is a subject of future research (see Uzeneva 2014). What is important for the current study is the explicitly stated awareness of community among all of the Mrkovići.
- ² The Ottomans comprised the administrative, economic, military, judiciary, and clerical elites of the society in almost every region of the extensive empire.
- ³ We should point out that a new classification for the types of Albanian traditional female wear, more detailed than the one suggested by Andromaqi Gjergji (1988), has been proposed by Afërdita Onuzi (2015). Following the new classification, as we do in our work, the costume worn by Muslim women in the city of Ulcinj constitutes a separate type.
- ⁴ The field materials produced by the expedition (audio files with interview recordings, field logs and journals, pictures) as well as the items of traditional culture collected during it have provided a basis for the new collection of the Department of European Studies of the MAE "Kunstkamera" RAS. The collection will function both as a research aid and, fulfilling the intention of the research community, as a supplement to the collection of the *Minor dialectological atlas of Balkan languages* (Russ. MDABYa) (Ermolin 2014) archived by the museum.
- ⁵ We do not have space in this paper to delve more deeply into elaborating on such obvious facts as the differences between Muslim and Christian clothing in the Western Balkans, which fundamentally determined both clothing construction (arrangement of elements, style, etc.) and aesthetics (color palette, decoration, etc.).
- ⁶ In the majority of local traditions in the Balkans the fanciest variant of their costume – the marriage costume – also holds a festive status. After the marriage ritual the woman begins to wear the dress she wore during the marriage ceremony in public places on holidays, family celebrations, important events and so on (if the costume wears out, begins to fade or look shabby, or no longer fits, it is replaced by a costume

completely identical in style and arrangement, preserving the tradition). Nevertheless, a number of ethno-confessional and ethno-local groups have different costumes for marriage and for other celebrations. The festive costume may differ from the wedding costume in one or several elements, most commonly addition or removal of headgear, head drape, or belt. In this article we refer to this kind of costume, in general, as the ‘marriage costume’, keeping in mind its other possible functions and variations on other occasions.

⁷ The variety (in form, cut, etc.) of various elements and details, as well as the choice of the color palette for decorations served to indicate ethnic and local identities.

⁸ The body of traditional social and legal custom and practice of the Islamic community.

⁹ We have not been able to address in this article an immensely important factor that affects the economic and cultural development of the Mrkovići: migration to the USA and back. Elements of traditional culture are present in the life of the big Mrkovići community in Chicago (see the activities of the cultural center Rumija) and the practices associated with this community exert an influence on their fellow countrymen in Montenegro.

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CONTEMPORARY TRADITIONAL CLOTHING IN MARAMUREȘ

Anamaria Iuga

Abstract: The article is concerned with presenting the meanings and the dynamic of contemporary festive traditional garments in the region of Maramureș (northern Romania). Based on an empirical approach, it analyses the morphology of local clothing, describing the two types of costumes considered as traditional today: an older type, with all the component pieces homemade, and a newer type, using industrial fabric, bought in the local markets. As clothes bear meanings, and people create and use them in a variety of contexts, the study is exploring, also, the different meanings that garments acquire when used, such as how they contribute to expressing the public self of a person, but also how they are valued and presented as important local heritage.

Keywords: dynamic of tradition, festive clothing, Maramureș, Romania, traditional garments

INTRODUCTION: OBJECTS AND CLOTHING

Objects and, implicitly, clothes, generally speaking, are man-made, but as they are invested with meaning and make cultural categories visible (Douglas & Isherwood 1996), it is acknowledged that they make people just as much as people make, exchange, and consume them (Gell 1998; Miller 1994). In relation to man, objects are valuable, and they trigger multi-layered values, as presented, for example, by Jean Baudrillard (1996). Firstly, there is the 'functional value', explained as the instrumental purpose of objects. Secondly, there is the 'exchange value' visible in the field of the economic meaning of an object. Moreover, thirdly, there is the 'symbolic' value assigned by the subject, which creates and/or uses objects. Lastly, there is the 'sign value' revealed only in relation to other objects. But, as artefacts embody and exhibit "personal and collective identities, aesthetic and instrumental purposes, mundane and spiritual aspirations" (Glassie 1999: 42), one must consider the different contexts in which objects are used and are given meaning. Henry Glassie, for example, emphasises three main 'master' contexts that contribute to the understanding of an artefact's 'life'. These contexts are a serviceable instrument for the

present study: firstly, the context of creation, where individual aspirations and knowledge, which are entangled with the collective ones, are handed down by means of memory and tradition; secondly, the context of communication, which collects all the important messages or codes that are transmitted by an object within the community of its creator; and thirdly, the context of consumption, when the meanings foreseen by the creator of an object are ‘eclipsed’ by the ones given by the person who is using, preserving, or assimilating the object (ibid.: 48–67).

When active, objects are studied, as such, in a variety of contexts. However, concentrating more on the symbolic value of things, as the present article does, the work of Daniel Miller is considered important, since the anthropologist asserts that the meaning of clothes can only be given by the people who produce and wear them (Miller 2005: 10). The gist of this argument reveals that clothes do not merely communicate aspects of cultural and social belonging, but that they are active agents in creating a person’s identity, in relation to one’s gender and broader sociality. Thus, like any other artefact, clothes “embody goals, make skills manifest, and shape the identity of their users” (Csikszentmihályi & Rochberg-Halton 1981: 1).

Following these theoretical considerations, the present article investigates the situation of traditional garments in three communities in the region of Maramureş: Dragomireşti, Ieud, and Sălişteia de Sus. Our diachronic approach is looking into how this type of clothing has evolved over time and what its morphology has been in different periods of time. In doing so, we shall refer to the traditional clothing mentioned in the 20th-century ethnographic studies (Papahagi 1981; Bobu Florescu 1969; Petrescu & Stoica 1981). Relying on an empirical approach, this study investigates, nevertheless, the different meaningful contexts of contemporary traditional clothing. We shall thus analyse the message attached to garments by the people who create and use them. Also, useful for this approach is the gist of tradition, which is perceived as a process that includes continuity and discontinuity (Handler & Linnekin 1984: 273) as well as innovation. In this light, tradition involves the transmission of local values and the preservation of culture. But, at the same time, tradition is selective, as it reinterprets the past according to contemporary criteria concerning values (see Iuga 2011: 21–22). For this reason, as part of what is considered tradition, local clothing still has a vivid meaning and is important for contemporary communities in Maramureş. It follows the rules of tradition by adapting old shapes and values to new social and cultural needs.

MEANINGS AND VALUES OF CLOTHING

In both traditional and modern societies, the use of garments is one of the ways in which the public self is fashioned in order to express itself not only in front of the others, members of the same community, but also in front of strangers. In order to proceed with the article, it is necessary to elaborate on the meanings and values of traditional clothing, as presented in ethnological and anthropological studies. They will be useful here, as they explain the situation in Maramureş. First, one must stress that traditional clothes have a collective value: of course, their shapes and significance are transmitted and inherited over generations, along with the necessary changes that have occurred over time due to a change in taste and values. They reflect codes, shapes, and meanings that are common to a whole social group, expressing the communitarian function of traditional art (see Bănăţeanu 1985: 133–135). This function states that each community has its own particularities concerning material culture (materiality, patterns, design), which are different from those characterising any other community, even if regional common features can be found (see Zderciuc 1963; Cristea & Dăncuş 2000). As such, clothes help people differentiate from each other within different communities: “A peasant who goes to the market and meets another peasant knows where he or she comes from, just by looking at his or her garments” (Int. 10).¹ Actually, what the speaker explains is that in front of the other (the stranger), a person expresses his or her belonging to a certain community by means of objects – by clothes, in this case. Also, it is important to notice that the knowledge of how to read and understand significant details is the exclusive preserve of insiders. As artefacts, such details are meaningful only to those who know the codes embedded in them.

Extremely significant for the present study, the socio-economic function of traditional art is the second important feature of clothing (see Tzigara-Samurcaş 1987: 41). It implies that the variety of artefacts and art is given by the need to be different from one’s neighbour within the same community, from other people belonging to a different social class or from a different age category. Objects are used to express social hierarchy (Stoica 1976: 6). Thus, local identity is more and more defined by material culture, even dramatically, as Gail Kligman (1998: 46) stated when conducting research in the Maramureş region in the 1980s. Thus, artefacts increase the inner competition between individuals. Similarly, Daniela Moisa’s study (2008) concentrates upon the manner in which traditional clothing contributes as a visible sign to defining one’s own social self. The foregoing researcher presents the situation in the neighbouring region, Oaş, which is also situated in northern Romania. She meticulously analyses the ritual clothing used during weddings, describing it, but also pre-

senting its social meanings in a community that has radically changed in the past 25 years, as a result of the process of migration abroad. When speaking about garments during the research, my interlocutors emphasised the same socio-economic function: “Nobody agrees that both the rich and the poor wear the same clothes; there must always be something that is different, something that is grabbing attention, and people will see it immediately” (Int. 11).

The third and last aspect that is interesting for the present study is the meaning given to garments within the mainstream of the heritage-making process in contemporary cultural contexts, in which people are aware of the rapid change and partial loss of tradition. In Maramureş, there is an important movement towards the conservation of local heritage, which also includes traditional clothing preserved and displayed, for example, in regional or local museums. Since 2004, two local museums have been opened in two communities where this research was conducted (Ieud and Dragomireşti). In each of the two exhibitions, garments play an important part due to the way they are displayed and presented. These are quite recent actions. However, when analysing this tendency, we need to recall the communist legacy related to heritage conservation. When talking about the establishment of the open-air museum in Sighetul Marmăţiei (also Maramureş Department), Corina Iosif (2009) explains that during that time, a political meaning was attached to the work in the field of heritage conservation. The local festivals initiated and organised in the communist period were also crucial in changing traditional garments all over Romania. In the context of folklore performance, traditional costumes started to be standardised, as the members of professional dance groups had to be dressed in the same manner. This change in regional costume also influenced local fashion with respect to the traditional costumes from Maramureş, where people started to create clothing similar to that seen during festivals, for their own use and mainly for children. Another change provoked by industrialisation, perceived as yet another driver of change, adds to the former. Clothing was influenced and changed especially during the 1960s (Moisa 2008: 112). It was much easier to buy off-the-peg clothes, at least working clothes, which formerly used to be homemade. This change, which occurred all over the country, led to the abandonment of traditional clothing. Nevertheless, parts of the old costumes remained and were still in use in Maramureş, being combined with industrial blouses or trousers. Women wearing fancy blouses, traditional dresses, and headscarves are a telling example. In many cases, however, garments used during feasts and celebrations were and still are traditional.

CHANGING COMMUNITIES

The study is based on an empirical approach, a field research conducted in northern Romania unequally, but in constant periods of time, between the years 2000–2013. More specifically, it was carried out in three communities located in the mountainous region of Maramureș: Dragomirești, Ieud, and Sălișteea de Sus. The three communities are situated in Iza Valley, which is considered a sub-region of Maramureș (seen as a unitary region, insofar as cultural typologies are concerned), with material and spiritual culture peculiarities (Zderciuc 1963: 7). It evinces a regional sense of belonging whose importance is expressed by its inhabitants as part of their local identity. The research focused on the material culture of the region, mainly textiles prepared as part of women's dowry, as well as clothes used for festive occasions, which form the basis of the present article. Maramureș is one of the most conservative Romanian regions that are marked even by some archaism. Here one can still find wooden constructions (old and new churches and houses). Rituals are still important and people still wear traditional clothing. But, like in any region, intense transformations are the result of the area's strong social and cultural dynamic. Here tradition is continued, though vividly changed and adapted to the new requirements of the communities. The dynamic of tradition is best illustrated by local garments embedded in a cultural, social, and personal meaning to be detailed later in this study.

This region is not only conservative but also marked by changes which, among other cultural and social aspects, have also affected local clothing. But this statement makes the historical approach necessary for a better understanding of the cultural and social values of the region. Maramureș has an important historical tradition. Documents speaking about important families and events in the region date from the 14th century. The social structure of the region at the time, and until the mid-20th century (until the end of the Second World War), was based on a social structure that values the noble peasants (called *nemeși*) from the region. This structure still contributes to ordaining social relations in contemporary villages (Kligman 1998: 30). Thus, village life cannot be understood without its reference. This aspect is even more worth stressing, as each of the three communities can be considered a “memory collectivity”, as defined by Sanda Golopenția-Eretescu (2001: 36–37): all the members of the social group know each other, are familiar with their lineage and nicknames, communicate with each other and establish ritual contact with each other. In such a community, it is important that each of its members stresses and confirms in some respects their social status and belonging to one class or another. This

is also done by means of objects, which are sometimes ostentatiously used for ritual display (Kligman 1998: 45).

Over time, the region has been affected by social and political changes that have also caused a cultural change. The most important one occurred after the Second World War, when the communist regime came to power in Romania. On this occasion, all the three villages were subjected to collectivisation and punishing acts against the peasants and intellectuals that stood against the political regime at the time. This meant that land ownership changed and peasants were deprived of their property. Later on, it was common for the people living in all three communities to search for work elsewhere (in other parts of the country). After the fall of communism (which occurred in 1989), search for work abroad became more intense, especially after the year 2000, when Romanian citizens no longer needed visas in order to travel to Europe. Due to the opportunity to travel to other regions or countries, people have broadened their horizon, although wherever they go, they symbolically re-create their native community because there is a strong attachment to their native village:

People who go elsewhere re-establish Sălișteea de Sus [native village] where they are, in whatever city they are; but there are also those who come back and build their home on the ground that once belonged to their ancestors. (Int. 11)

If people from one village go and settle elsewhere, either in Romania or abroad, they also re-create their community symbolically by means of material culture. Garments are an important aspect of it (Iuga 2015), as shown by the research made in a Spanish community where people from Maramureș migrated to find work.

What kind of change took place in native communities? Although political changes imply social change, people are still attached to their traditions, which are adapted, of course, to contemporary values. Woollen textiles are still used to decorate the interior of big houses, especially the festivity room called “dressed in a peasant manner”, which displays all the textiles prepared for women’s dowry (Iuga 2011). Nowadays people get modern clothes very easily. However, on important occasions or on feasts, they use traditional costumes with new pieces imported from elsewhere and transformed into local pieces that acquire a new meaning. Festive garments are presented in detail in the following sections in which I shall explain why and how people find them important, given that they are suggestive of local identity.

OLD TRADITIONAL CLOTHING

Ethnographic studies on the Maramureş region provide a thorough description of the traditional festive costume, its shapes, colours, patterns, and sometimes ritual use (Cristea & Dăncuş 2000; Cuisenier 1994; Bobu Florescu 1969). These studies claim that in terms of general typology, these clothes are basically unitary in shape and cut, with sub-regional differences concerning their colours and patterns, sometimes mentioned in the studies (Zderciuc 1963; Cristea & Dăncuş 2000). Broadly speaking, the costume of the Maramureş region is made up of general components. Men's clothes are very simple: white hemp shirt and trousers during the summer (Fig. 1), with a waistcoat made of sheep skin or felt, decorated with various techniques and patterns that differ from one village to another. Thus, it has an important communitarian function. During the winter, men's trousers are made of felt. The shirts they wear are decorated around the V-shaped neck and sometimes have a collar. The sleeve ends are decorated. The sleeves are wide (a peculiarity which differs from one village to another, as in some villages the sleeves are not voluminous). Thus, men usually wear colourful

woollen cuffs during the winter. Men's hats are usually made of felt, bought at the local market. During the summer, they wear a straw hat of a peculiar shape, which is popular in Cosău Valley (another sub-region) where one can still find artisans who produce them (Fig. 2).



Figure 1. Men's clothing in Iza Valley. Celebration of the patron saint in Dragomireşti in 2010. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga.



*Figure 2. Men's clothing in Cosău Valley. Local festival in Șieu in 2015.
Photograph by Anamaria Iuga.*

Women's clothes include a long white hemp shirt, or a short shirt with a square neckline, and a white underskirt, with colourful patterns that are usually geometrical or floral; the shirt is voluminous and decorated around the wrists and at shoulders. In the front and at the back, the underskirt has two aprons that are locally called *zadie*. They are made of wool, with wide black and red, orange, yellow, green, or blue stripes (Fig. 3). These colours differ from one village to another, and, within a specific village, from one age category to another. Actually, a headscarf is not necessarily worn with festive clothes – it is worn on a daily basis. This textile item is usually inherited or bought at the local market. A waistcoat is always worn during the cold season. It is made of sheep skin, intensely decorated, and fulfils the same communitarian function as men's waistcoats. In the wintertime, both men and women wear coats made of felt, but their colours vary according to the specificity of different communities or sub-regions (for example, they are usually dark-coloured in Iza Valley).

Of course, these costumes are different as regards the sense of belonging to one village or another. The three villages where the research was carried out reveal a difference in details, colours, patterns, and sometimes even in

Figure 3. Women's clothing in Cosău Valley. Local festival in Şieu in 2015. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga.



shape. Men's clothing is different, and this is visible in the waistcoat they wear. In all the three villages, brown leather is the background of the waistcoat, but the patterns are distinct. In Săliştea de Sus, men still wear the old type of waistcoat, both with floral ornaments and *bumbi* (buttons), a decorative detail that only has an adorning function; in Dragomireşti, coloured tassels are attached to the waistcoat; in Ieud, it is adorned with simple floral ornaments sewed on leather. Nowadays men wear traditional clothing only on very special and festive occasions as they have abandoned traditional garments more easily (see also Moisa 2008). Important religious feasts, such as Easter, the celebration of the patron saint of the village, or weddings are just a few occasions when traditional clothing is worn. But on these occasions, men's clothing is half traditional, half modern, as the white hemp trousers are usually replaced by black trousers bought at common shops.

Women, on the contrary, seem to be keener on wearing traditional clothing. On various, though highly festive occasions, they still wear the garments presented above. They display local characteristics, for they are considered to be festive clothing. In each village, for example, leather waistcoats are different and similar to men's ones in shape, patterns, and colours. In Săliştea de Sus, though, fashion has somehow changed more rapidly, so the waistcoat is



*Figure 4. Contemporary traditional clothing. Dragomirești 2010.
Photograph by Anamaria Iuga.*

also changing. As people recall, in the 1960s–1970s it was fashionable to wear a waistcoat that came from the neighbouring city of Vișeu. It is mainly made of felt and the decoration is sewed in green wool thread. Even its name – *vișeonesc* – tells the place of its origin (meaning “from Vișeu”). As fashion is constantly changing today, the waistcoat has been replaced with a different one, which is more specific to the region of Bucovina (north-eastern Romania), where leather is not decorated at all. It is only bordered with fur around the shoulders and the neck hole of the waistcoat. White shirts are also changing. Since the late 1990s, it has been common to have a white shirt made of synthetic material, not of hemp. Although it is more easily sewed, the interlocutors always speak about the good quality of hemp shirts (Fig. 4). The reason why this shirt is so popular has a social background, as everybody has to be careful to local fashion, especially young girls, as “wearing an old shirt would be considered a disgrace” (Int. 11). Last year, though, more and more women returned to hemp shirts. They are now highly appreciated, as seen at a wedding in the village of Ieud in 2015. But the woollen apron worn by women is the most visible and important sign, which shows a person’s belonging to one or another community. Aprons have a particular colour and design in each of the three villages under study:



Figure 5. Women's woollen aprons. *Ieud* 2010. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga.

Every village is different and we know it [when looking at aprons]. In our village, the stripes are not that wide, they are tighter. In Sălişte, both the black and the red stripes are wider [---] there is also a difference in Ieud, as you have seen. There is a different shade of yellow, which differs from the one we use; it is closer to orange, somehow. Ours is like a pumpkin's flower. We know where a woman comes from because we are familiar with different types of aprons. (Int. 9)

Difference can be expressed by clothes within a community as well. For example, colours differ according to the age and marital status of the woman who wears them (as Int. 6 also explains). A distinction between the aprons worn by girls and married women used to be made in all the three villages: "I cannot wear the same clothes as my daughter. Because she is younger, I give her yellow aprons. Mine are red" (Int. 9). Girls wear aprons with alternating black and yellow stripes. Of course, each village has a different shade of yellow. Orange-yellow, called pumpkin yellow, is typical of Sălişte de Sus and Dragomireşti (Int. 2). It is sometimes combined with thin stripes of blue (as it happens in Dragomireşti). The difference between the two communities resides in the stripe width. In Ieud, the yellow colour is not so orange-like and is combined with thin

blue and red stripes towards the bottom of the apron (Int. 6). Married women wear aprons with black and red stripes whereas young married women in Ieud still wear mainly yellow or orange-yellow aprons. Unlike the aprons worn by girls, the latter lack the additional stripes in other colours, red or blue (Fig. 5). They are simpler. In the past 40 years or so, aprons have also been subject to change. The materials used to weave them have been modified. Wool has been replaced by synthetic fibres. Colours have also changed. It is now common to wear an apron with red and black stripes, such as those worn by traditional music singers on television. The variety of colours and the social difference conveyed by clothes has been put aside.

Although this type of traditional clothing is considered to be old, people still wear it on important occasions. According to them, the reason is that this costume will never go out of use, as it seems that “nothing has changed. People still wear the same clothes they wore ages ago” (Int. 11).

NEW TRADITIONAL CLOTHING

Clothing changes according to fashion and even traditional clothing follows the logic of fashion that normally remains within the limits imposed by local traditions. But a radical change, which exerted a major influence on the local garments in Maramureş, occurred at the beginning of the 20th century. Buying clothes at markets and shops has become easier. This has led to the disappearance of home-spun clothes. In this regard, men have been less conservative than women: they readily prefer urban to traditional clothing. Women’s clothes have also changed, but they still follow traditional rules when it comes to their functions. At the turn of the 20th century, richer families (as “wealthier people are the first to provoke change” – Int. 11) started to purchase industrial textile materials at the market or, probably, at shops in larger cities, and to use them to make skirts similar to the ones they probably saw in the city. These voluminous skirts are locally called *sumnă rotată* (round skirt), as Tache Papahagi noted in his study first published in 1925 (Papahagi 1981: 99), or simply *sugna* or *sumna*. The word derives from the Hungarian word *szoknya* (skirt). This richly coloured piece of garment is usually made of cashmere, with floral patterns. It is a textile item that is commonly used in the traditional clothing of Central Europe, mainly the Northern Carpathian Mountains: not only in Maramureş and Ukraine but also in Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland. Concerned with the origins of this material, the research was oriented towards the Polish example, where this type of textile is called *tybet*, the Polish name for the Tibet region.

Thus, the name signals the original place of this type of wool, a material used for weaving this piece of special cloth.² In naming this cloth, the regional denomination remained the same, although textiles began to be made of other materials, such as cashmere, or even synthetic fibres.

This textile does not have a special name in the Maramureş region, but it is still used to design special skirts that are now labelled as traditional clothing, along with the older type, which is now regarded as festive clothing. As mentioned before, it appears in research carried out in the early 20th century (Papahagi 1925), and over time, especially after the Second World War, when market goods were easier to purchase, this skirt has gained in importance in such a way that the generation of those who are now in their fifties already consider it part of the local costume: “Since I was a child, I wore this dress and peasant sandals (*opinici*); this is what was worn by everybody in my early days” (Int. 1). Partially replacing the long white hemp shirt, this skirt is now combined with industrial T-shirts or blouses. However, it is usually worn together with a shorter shirt, especially on festive occasions. The underskirts are no longer worn with two aprons. More importantly, this skirt became part of what today is considered to be traditional clothing in Maramureş. It has even taken over the identification functions of the aprons, marking the community sense of belonging and age category. Also, as mentioned by ethnographers, it has “particular identification tokens for each village” (Cristea & Dăncuș 2000: 76), special markings found in colours and patterns. When wearing this new type of local clothing, women usually match the skirt with the headscarf, both being crucial for expressing their marital and social status within the community. Thus, unmarried young women wear vividly coloured skirts and headscarves with floral patterns on a red, blue, green, or even white background (Fig. 6). Young married women also wear this kind of skirts and headscarves in their first years of marriage. After 35 years of age, women start to wear colourful skirts and headscarves with paler nuances (Fig. 7). After turning 50, they wear only skirts in one colour. These are usually brown, dark blue, or dark green, with a much simpler headscarf lacking so many floral patterns on the textile material. Sometimes it has “only a small flower on the back” (Int. 4). In their sixties, women are already considered to be old. Their clothes stand solid proof of this assertion. They usually wear clothes in black colours: a black skirt and a black headscarf patterned with little flowers. Even older women wear one single striped apron over the skirt, either behind or in front of the black skirt. This apron is usually part of the first type of local clothing (white hemp shirt, white long underskirt, and two woollen aprons with black and red stripes, one worn at the front, and one at the back side of the underskirt).



Figure 6. Contemporary traditional clothing. Unmarried young women. Dragomirești 2010. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga.



Figure 7. Contemporary traditional clothing. Married woman. Dragomirești 2011. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga.

Regarding all these characteristics, this type of costume is now considered to be the traditional one in these three villages. Even on highly festive occasions, women can choose to wear this type of clothing, not the old one made up of two aprons and white shirts, which people describe as the very festive one. Actually, it is a matter of people's choice. Nevertheless, in the past years, the costume with a colourful skirt has been increasingly used at local festivals where performers are usually dressed in old traditional garments.

OLD AND NEW TEXTILES

As was already mentioned in the descriptions of the two types of traditional clothing, I was able to notice that the locals generally tend to maintain that nothing has changed in the shape of clothes. Yet, "something new comes up all the time, whereas something typical of these garments fades away" (Int. 11). This change is caused by the constant competition between people within a certain community, who "do not want to lag behind the rest of the village" (Int. 5). As was seen above, all villages are marked by an important dynamic of the traditional costume. This dynamic can be noticed particularly in women's clothing, as men do not seem to be so interested in local fashion. The general tendency is to easily adapt what is new, as the old is no longer considered so meaningful or valuable. Instead, new pieces of clothing are highly appreciated for their money value: "People consider that something new is beautiful, [it should be both] new and expensive. It has to be very expensive. Actually, this is the main criterion" (Int. 11). Change can also occur as an impact from another community or cultural space. Today both men and women travel and see other regions both in Romania and abroad. They have the opportunity to see what garments look like elsewhere. Sometimes they come home and create innovative garments "seen, liked, and taken; one takes something from elsewhere and adapts it to his or her clothing. You adapt it in such a manner that no one can say that you copied someone from another village. You adapt it to such an extent that they will say that it is your own, that it is your own doing and conception" (Int. 11). Fast-paced fashion is strictly linked to the need of expressing one's identity (see also Moisa 2008: 122–124).

This tendency has determined both types of traditional clothing to be subject to change. For the old two-apron costume, change occurs in the new materials used for the creation of shirts (currently synthetic materials with different patterns and decorations that are made by machines, not by hand) or aprons (also synthetic materials with a slight change in colours). More importantly, one must observe that the coloured stripes on the aprons have been standard-

ised. Old shirts or old types of clothing are not so much appreciated because they are old-fashioned, although a new tendency to value them has emerged this year. Fashion is changing. As for the other type dominated by a colourful dress, one can notice a tendency to introduce innovations and to treasure what is old. The introduction of a new coordinate, a new context of use – migration abroad – is important. During a research project carried out in 2013 in a community situated in the region of Almeria (Spain), where migrants from Sălișteea de Sus work and live, I noticed that women bought textile materials at the local market in Spain in order to make voluminous skirts or to send the materials back home so that the other members of the family could create new, unique skirts. This action responds to the pressing social and aesthetic requirement of differentiating oneself, and reveals the important dynamic of this garment in the communities from Maramureș (Iuga 2015).

The new and the uncommon are valued to a greater extent, but, paradoxically, the old is also valued when it comes to colourful skirts and headscarves because these pieces of clothes are becoming uncommon. They are considered to be more valuable because they are older, because the fabric is believed to be of better quality: “The old ones need no ironing; they are more beautiful and last longer” (Int. 1). Even the patterns are seen as colourful and more beautiful than the fabrics that can now be bought at local markets. Their rarity is also a reason to value them more and determine the rise in their price: “Only richer women have old headscarves because not everybody can afford to pay millions of lei for one scarf” (Int. 1). Thus, wearing old skirts and scarves is important for showing one’s own social and economic status in the community: “When you go to a wedding or to church, or just walk in the village on Sundays, you can only wear very old [scarves and skirts], so everybody would be jealous” (Int. 11).

If a normal skirt made of a new fabric costs around 25 euro, the price of an old one can amount to 150 euro, as seen at the local market (Dragomirești, August 2015). Headscarves are sold at an even higher price because they are highly appreciated. In 2001, V.I. (Int. 11) recalls, her neighbour sold two scarves for 500 euro; in the summer of 2015, in the market in Dragomirești, a woman remembers having sold an old scarf for 800 euro to another woman who used it during a wedding ritual as a gift for her future daughter-in-law. It is important to observe that these expensive clothes are mainly used by unmarried young women in order to gain men’s interest and people’s admiration. For example, I.V. (Int. 8) recalls that, in order to gain the community’s attention and appreciation, she gathered exquisite clothes for her daughter before the latter got married:



Figure 8. Skirts hanging on the bed in the festive room. Sălişteia de Sus 2011.
Photograph by Anamaria Iuga.

I designed so many peasant costumes with old scarves for her, each of them summing up to 10 million, 15 million [lei – approx. 400 euro]. [---] These are soft and do not crumple. Insofar as holy days are concerned, people wonder what my girl was adorned with at Easter. With this and that, I answer. [---] 200 euro for each skirt. [---] The most expensive [headscarf] was 1000 euro. I found it in Certeze, in the Satu Mare region. [---] Value counts. We have old scarves, just as someone else has luxurious cars. (Int. 8)

Both new and old colourful skirts that are more valued are so important that people need to show them off even when they are not worn. They are highly taken care of and are kept in important places in the house (Fig. 8). They are hung on the wall or kept in visible places in the festive space of the peasant house or in the ‘good room’, a space used only on festive occasions, such as religious feasts or life cycle rituals (Iuga 2011).

NEW CONTEXTS OF USE

Traditional clothing plays an important role not only in stressing one's own identity within the native community but also in relation to other communities in the same region. In the last part of this article, I would like to explain what happens with this garment when linked to migration abroad seen as a new cultural context. It is one of the social phenomena that were common to the studied region even during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of which Maramureş was also a part. The people of this village used to go to the bigger cities of the empire to sell their products: wood, fruit, etc. (Papahagi 1981). Establishing borders between countries after the First World War reduced people's mobility. But during the communist period, especially after the collectivisation process, when land ownership changed in favour of the state, people needed to search for work outside the region. Transylvania and the south-western part of Romania were the main regions where they went for seasonal work. This "circular migration" (Sandu 2000) was common to men and women alike. After the fall of communism, this type of migration continued, but people started to travel abroad, especially after 2000. This has increased the importance of the function of traditional clothing, that of expressing the sense of belonging to a community and a region. Altogether, new uses, such as the acknowledgement of the heritage value of these garments, can be foreseen. This is the case of the Romanian community of migrants in Spain. Originating in Maramureş, they take pieces of traditional clothing or entire costumes in order to be worn on festive occasions:

Here I go to church [the Romanian Orthodox Church in Spain] and I dress in my own traditional suit. I have my shirt, my skirt; I have them all. [---] I never part from my shirt! When I have my shirt on and put in an appearance at church, everyone can notice that I have arrived [in the church]. (Int. 3)

Also, the children who live with their parents in Spain have traditional garments from the Maramureş region. They wear them, although, in some cases, they have never been to Romania, and, as a consequence, to Maramureş, and to the native village of their parents. It is important, thus, to notice that clothing is one of the most important items of material culture used by parents to make the children become aware that it is the Maramureş community, not the Spanish one, which stands for their identity mark:

Yes, I have peasant clothes for my children. Here they have this custom, children go to school dressed as Santa Clauses, shepherdesses or shepherds, as they say. So shepherds have some clothes like those of our

peasants. The only difference is that instead of being multicoloured, their skirts are red and have a green apron. [...] I bought traditional sandals, a shirt, and a skirt from Maramureş for my daughter, and I even took her to the kindergarten dressed in these clothes for their Christmas party. [...] Everybody wondered how come this girl had such beautiful and special shepherdess clothing. I do not care, they are Spanish here, I do not know, I do not care that much. But she must be dressed like in Maramureş. (Int. 7)

Thus, using traditional clothes in the host country is a way for Romanian migrants to be connected to their native community by means of the tangible heritage they use. At the same time, it is also an important way of informing the Spaniards about their specific culture (Iuga 2015).

The heritage-making process is yet another context that produces a change in the way that traditional clothing is perceived in Maramureş. In the region, traditional clothing is also considered important within this logic, when in use during local, regional, or national festivals. These festivals value both old traditional dances and old traditional costumes. Participants usually have the same type of clothing, a somehow standardised one, in the same colours, shapes, and patterns (Fig. 9). However, an independent singer or a leader of a group is trying to differentiate him- or herself from the others, by using old traditional pieces of garments. These garments usually belong to their family and emphasise the difference. It is also important to mention that old garments are given more points by the jury at certain festivals and competitions involving traditions, thus being much more appreciated.

Local museums also contribute to the heritage-making process, as the traditional garments exposed there become a tourist attraction. In some places, people are allowed to try them on in order to see what it feels like and to experiment local culture. In this context of use, garments contribute to the museum's discourse meant to explain the cultural particularities of the region. When people try them on just for fun, they experience local culture, even if temporarily. It is thus important to notice that this has always been a common practice among the inhabitants of Maramureş. They invite strangers, such as tourists, to try on the local garments, to go to church or the village dressed like this, or to simply put them on when taking a picture of themselves. Once again, this practice shows that the natives are proud of their traditional clothing and that the latter has an important representative function. Also, it shows that the traditional clothing becomes a means to boast of their specific local culture and values, and, consequently, their cultural heritage to the others (strangers).



Figure 9. Local festival in Șieu in 2015. Photograph by Anamaria Iuga.

CONCLUSIONS

When investigating traditional clothing in the Maramureș region, one could notice an interesting dialogue between old and new, continuity and change, and how they oppose each other or intertwine. Attention has been paid to the contemporary fashion of the local costume with its two aspects: an older type continuing the local tradition, and a newer one, which has initiated a new trend that is now regarded as tradition. Stressing the meanings they carry within, these artefacts have been presented in their contexts of use. I have thus emphasised how they contribute to highlighting local identity and one's own public self within the same community. The common denominator of all these aspects is that local garments express the pride of belonging to a specific region and community with particular cultural characteristics. It is thus salient that the use of traditional clothing ensures a strong sense of belonging and cultural identity by illustrating local heritage in both local museums and festivals. Still in use for the life of the community and related to other communities/regions/nations, traditional clothing is, therefore, an important, meaningful, and dynamic cultural aspect of the local communities in the region of Maramureș.

NOTES

¹ This research was conducted in Romanian language. The English translation of the interlocutors' (marked as "Int.", with a list at the end of the article) words was made by the author of this study.

² This information is available online at www.polartcenter.com.

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THE ROLE OF RITUAL TRADITIONAL CLOTHING AMONG BUNJEVCI CROATS IN SERBIA IN THE REVITALISATION OF ANNUAL CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

Milana Černelić

Abstract: The article deals with the traditional costume worn in the course of calendar festivals and the feast marking the end of the harvest among a Croatian subethnic group in the region of Bačka (county of Vojvodina) in Serbia. The traditional costume carries an important symbolic meaning in the process of revitalising customs and, as such, it represents an ethnocultural identity marker of the group. The customs analysed have undergone a great revival in the past twenty years, being observed in certain calendar periods or on specific days during the ritual year, such as the central cultural and social event – the *prelo* (spinning bee) in the winter period of Shrovetide, and the Pentecost pageant called *kraljice*, as well as on the occasion of the *Dužijanca*, a celebration marking the end of the harvest among the Bunjevci Croats in the region of Bačka, which has existed as a public event for over a century. The article is based on the actual field data gathered by the author and her associates.

Keywords: annual customs, Bunjevci, *Dužijanca* (harvest celebration), *kraljice* (Pentecost pageant), *prelo* (spinning bee), St. John's Day, traditional costume

INTRODUCTION: THEORETICAL ANNOTATIONS

In an attempt to understand the reality which we live (in), we often rely on ethnology and cultural anthropology. As a conceptual science it directs us, theoretically and methodologically (with the pertaining terminology), towards the definitions and concepts of culture and identity, i.e. towards the cultural and identification strategies and practices that can be used for categorising and classifying communities in the introspection process and the process of interaction with others: throughout centuries of changes, what has led and maintained a community is confidence and self-respect, the feeling of affiliation and continuity. This implies that each community has a name, space, history, tradition, and culture, a consensus as to its common origin, the feeling of sameness and the feeling of togetherness and belonging. In other words, identification processes and practices emphasise the objective dimension (cultural

repertoire) and the subjective dimension (emotions and loyalty). Both dimensions are constantly being transformed and never appear in any sort of 'original form'. At the same time, however, they imply the existence of certain constants, i.e. belief, thought, and statement on the duration and continuum on which rests the basis of togetherness. In the last fifty years, referring to the notion 'search for identity', anthropological literature has produced numerous and often contradictory theories directed towards the affirmation and reaffirmation of cultural, ethnic, national, and other identities, such as regional ethnocultural identities of minority communities. Some of them foresee the de-ethnicisation and overall homogenisation of society. However, the strengthening of ethnicism and regional identities in the last two decades points to a different direction of thought. This is supported by pragmatism and historical experience (Černelić & Grbić Jakopović 2013: 500–501).

Identity lives in objective cultural contents, in which tradition has a special status, since tradition is (still) a pool from which ethnical and cultural markers – media for ascription and identification – are in most cases selected. This tradition is not original, but it is modified and transposed in each coming new era, since we can recognise the variability of identities in this new modification of, so to speak, 'originality': being the same but always in a different way (Banac 1992: 88). Identity co-exists on the global and local levels: in, at, and beyond borders. People become aware of their culture when they become aware of its borders, i.e. when something different and diverse appears, or something that departs from what is usual or normal: the norm becomes the border, a symbolic sense of recognition and consolidation of identity. What is also important for the process of symbolic identification is the notion of what we have 'inside' and what is different from that (Cohen 1985). Identity also exists in historicity. By selective (re)constructing of the past and by discovering references from the past and referring to them, each generation finds its reflection in the contemporaneity (Budak 1999, Heršak 1999; cited in Černelić & Grbić Jakopović 2013: 501). To conclude, genesis, limits, symbols, common destiny, and traditional customs are evidence that the stability of the identification process, as well as its final result – identity – in spite of everything, can remain undisputed for a long time.

A SHORT OVERVIEW ON BUNJEVCI

Serving as proper evidence of the mentioned processes, there are some ritual annual customs that are an expression of the symbolic identification of the Croatian subethnic group (at the same time a national minority) in the multiethnic environment of the region of Bačka (county of Vojvodina) in Serbia. I will be

focusing on the importance of their traditional costume worn in the course of calendar festivals and the feast marking the end of the harvest. The ethnonym Bunjevci stands for the group of ethnic Croats, originating from Dalmatia, south-western Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the 17th century, they migrated to the regions of Primorje (the Croatian Littoral), Lika, and Gorski kotar, situated in western Croatia, and to the Danube area in the north (the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, today the territories of Hungary and Serbia), thus forming the three basic remote branches of the ethnic group of Bunjevci, known as Dalmatia, Primorje/Lika, and the Danube-area Bunjevci (Černelić 2006: 13). A short account of their contemporary position as a national minority in Serbia is necessary for better understanding of the position of the Bunjevci subethnic group in Bačka. During the 20th century, the Bunjevci were under constant questioning and politicising of their ethnicity. These were in fact the attempts to deny the rights of the Bunjevci of Bačka to belong to Croatian nation during the existence of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes between the two world wars (from 1929 the state was renamed as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia).

Under the cover of the common name 'Yugoslav' for the three peoples living in one state, three basic forms of manipulation with the ethnonym Bunjevci came to light: 1. neutralization of the Bunjevci by emphasizing their distinctiveness: they are neither Serbs nor Croats; one explanation being that they are the fourth tribe of the unique Yugoslav people, and the other one that they are the fourth nation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. 2. The Bunjevci can be both Serbs and Croats, which is a matter of an individual choice; it is irrelevant anyway, since both Serbs and Croats are in fact Yugoslavs. 3. Denial of the Croatian ethnicity of Bunjevci, by manipulating their religious belonging, expressed in the claim that the Bunjevci, as well as the Šokci, are Serbs of Roman Catholic religion. (Černelić 1997: 178)

Writings of the kind can be found in different forms in various published sources.

In the period of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the question of Croatian national affiliation of the Bunjevci subethnic group was not posed directly, but, by the means of the proclaimed 'Yugoslavianism', all the institutions in Vojvodina lost their Croatian mark already in 1956, by a political-administrative ban (Žigmanov 2006: 20). The number of Croats in Vojvodina decreased in the 1990s, during the period of the war between the Republic of Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro, as a result of their deportation, property devastation, creation of the atmosphere of fear and insecurity, threats expressed through media propaganda, etc. All of the mentioned factors led to mass emigration and a flight into ethnic mimicry. In the given context the policy of 'the

Bunjevci nation' was successfully established (ibid.: 26).¹ At that time, for the first time in their history, all Croatian ethnic groups in Vojvodina were detached from their parent country fellow-citizens by a national border for a longer period of time. Thus a subethnic group was turned into a national minority (ibid.: 21). Besides, Croats in Vojvodina waited to receive the status of a national minority for more than ten years after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. In the law on the protection of rights and freedoms of national minorities from 2002 the provided legal definition of a national minority is not a classic definition thereof but of an ethnic group, thus levelling out the two substantially different terms and consequently creating a formal legal space for misuse, which has indeed occurred in the case of the subethnic group of Bunjevci (ibid.: 27–30). This was further facilitated by the census possibility in 1991 and 2002 to declare oneself as a member of the Bunjevci or Šokci for the first time,² which renewed the tendency of manipulating ethnicity, and supported the idea of Slobodan Milošević's regime to encourage the process of a parallel 'construction of a nation' based on the subethnic and regional names of Croats (ibid.: 22).

In their attempt to place the problem of the Bunjevci identity in the context of contemporary theories, some authors put the Bunjevci in the category of stateless ethnic groups (Prelić 2008: 190). In this way the issue of objective determination of national affiliation of the Bunjevci is further obscured, and the fact that the Bunjevci in Bačka are not an independent ethnic group but were resettled and dispersed in several branches in the past is being neglected. The tendencies that had originated in the first half of the 20th century reappeared in the early nineties. Some members and associations of the Bunjevci subethnic group use the ethnonym again as a mark of their national belonging, denying belonging to the Croatian nation, and stand in opposition to other Bunjevci representatives who declare themselves as Croats. Such polarisation has been stimulated with the isolation of the ethnonym Bunjevci as a special ethnic category, starting with the census of 1991 in the former Yugoslavia, up to the present day in Serbia. Both of the opposed Bunjevci groups share common ethnocultural heritage, but the subjective perception of their ethnic identity is different (Černelić 2012: 172–173). I deal with the Bunjevci who declare themselves as Croats in the interviews conducted during my fieldwork. The research is based on the interviews combined with the actual observing of these customs between 2011 and 2014, as part of a scientific project dealing with the heritage and identity of the Croatian subethnic group of the Bunjevci.³

THE TRADITIONAL COSTUME AS AN IDENTITY MARKER DURING THE CALENDAR YEAR

Vojvodina is a multiethnic and multicultural province, and each subethnic group and/or national minority has a specific traditional costume, which for each of them has an important symbolic meaning. As such it represents an ethnocultural identity marker of each particular group. I deal with the traditional costume worn by the Bunjevci Croats in the process of revitalisation of their annual customs and on the occasion of the feast marking the end of the harvest. Some of these customs have undergone a great revival in the past twenty years, being observed in certain calendar periods or on specific days during the ritual year, such as the central cultural and social event – the *prelo* (spinning bee) – in the winter period of Shrovetide, and the *kraljice* (Pentecost pageant). In addition to the festive calendar year, the traditional costume has an important continual role on the occasion of the *Dužijanca*, a celebration marking the end of the harvest among the Bunjevci Croats in the region of Bačka, which has existed as a public event for over a century. I am going to provide an overview on the use of the traditional clothing on these various occasions with a special focus on its significance as an identity marker and a symbolic object.

For this purpose it is necessary to provide some basic information about the traditional folk costume that is most often used in the revitalised customs.⁴ The basic parts of the traditional female costume are always the same, regardless of the type of the costume: a shirt, 7–9 petticoats, a skirt (both cut out of 5–6 parts), a waistcoat, and an apron. In the 19th century and in earlier times the materials were woven from home-made hemp and flax, later alternated with cotton, but as early as the end of the 19th century they were replaced with manufactured materials both for everyday and ceremonial costumes. A characteristic part of the Bunjevci female costume was the *igrač* – a belt made of the appropriate material, depending on the occasion, 15–20 centimetres wide and 3 metres long, tied into a bow around the waist. Women wore a kerchief over the hair, called *konda* or *kapica*, and a scarf over their shoulders. Since the late 19th century the ceremonial silk costume made of manufactured silk, which relatively wealthy peasants purchased from the famous silk factory in Lyon in France, has formed a recognisable marker of the Bunjevci identity. Since that time the girls' characteristic costume has been a white cotton costume, each part of which is decorated with white embroidery (*šlinga*). The everyday costume was also made of different manufactured cotton materials with various ornaments: the *sefir* for girls, with characteristic vertical stripes, the *paja* for older women, consisting of a wool skirt and a cotton shirt (*parketski leveš*), most often having a tartan ornament, and so on. The function of the everyday

costume has also transitioned into a ceremonial one nowadays. In wintertime the most characteristic pieces of female clothes are different types of coats: the ceremonial *čurdija* made from a scarf and welted with fox fur, decorated with silver buttons and ribbons made of various materials (leather, wool, silk, silver or golden threads), with a specific narrow waist. Other winter coats are made of similar materials, differently cut and less decorated. The basic parts of the traditional male costume are: a shirt, wide pants (each pant leg being cut out in two parts), and a waistcoat. The ceremonial costume differed from the everyday one in material and decoration. In winter men wore trousers over pants, different types of decorated ceremonial dolman jackets (*dolama* or *reklja*), sheep fleece waistcoats (*pršnjak*), and long fleece robes (*opaklija*).

Under the influence of urban fashion, both male and female costumes changed in different periods.⁵

PRELO

The complex phenomenon of the *prelo* (spinning bee), which consists of various social gatherings during the period of Shrovetide, is one of the important customs belonging to the Bunjevci traditional heritage. *Veliko prelo* (the Great Spinning Bee), the most important event of the period in the form of a public festivity, is held in Subotica, the administrative and cultural centre of the Bunjevci Croats. After a long break it has undergone a great revival in the past twenty years, today being the central cultural event in the winter period, socially particularly important to the Bunjevci in northern Bačka. Along with *Veliko prelo*, many similar smaller gatherings are organised during that period in Subotica and Sombor (another urban settlement in Bačka), and in the surrounding Bunjevci rural settlements. In earlier times such gatherings were traditionally held in rural settlements, on the Bunjevci farms, which represented the central institutions of rural life in the Bačka region. As a family gathering combining spinning and other textile crafts and entertainment, the *prelo* survived up to the 1970s. In its latest stage it was coupled with pig slaughter, another tradition characteristic of the winter period, although those were originally two different traditions (Dronjić 2014: 118–120). *Veliko prelo* was first held as a public festivity, concurrently with the family *prelos*, in Pešta hotel in Subotica, in 1879, in the period of the national revival of the Croats in Bačka. The festivity continued to exist until the mid-20th century, with a short break during the First World War. It was revived in the 1990s. Since then it has been held every year in the great hall of the Croatian Cultural Centre *Bunjevačko kolo* (meaning: Bunjevac wheel dance). In 2015 several other cultural associations organised it together



Figure 1. Reconstruction of the prelo on stage. Photograph by Matija Dronjić 2012.

for the first time; earlier on they had each organised their own *prelo* during the period of Shrovetide.

The traditional dress used to be obligatory in the 19th century when the public festivity was initiated. Nowadays it is not obligatory anymore, but some participants appear in traditional costumes, most often the organisers and their families. The guests are welcomed by girls dressed in folk costumes, and each of them gets a handkerchief with the embroidered motif of the spinning bee, the same motif being on the invitation card. The programme leaders are dressed in folk costumes, along with all the participants who perform the original family spinning bee on stage as well as those who play and sing on the stage (Fig. 1).

An important part of the programme, besides singing and dancing, is also a fashion show of the traditional costumes, wherein the best dressed and best-looking girl is proclaimed (Fig. 2) (ibid.: 120–132).

In 2011 another event came into existence – the *prelo sićanja* (the Memory Spinning Bee) (Fig. 3). Its aim is to revive and represent the original *prelo*, which means that the traditional costume is a necessary prerequisite for participation. The reason behind its initiation is nostalgia. One of the organisers, Ivan Piuković, has explained that it serves to remind the older members of the community of the good old days, of what the *prelo* looked like in the past, as well as to teach the young about it and to continue the tradition (cf. Sudarević 2012). The participants gather in front of the Town Hall; then they attend the Holy Mass in the nearby Franciscan church.⁶



Figure 2. The first three awarded traditional costumes in 2013.
Photograph in possession of the newsweekly Hrvatska riječ.



Figure 3. The participants of the prelo sićanja in the Franciscan church in 2013.
Photograph in possession of the newsweekly Hrvatska riječ.



Figure 4. Men and women playing cards. Prelo sićanja in 2013.
Photograph in possession of the newsweekly *Hrvatska riječ*.

Afterwards, they socialise in a restaurant, accompanied by players on the *tambura* (a characteristic Croatian long-necked plucked string instrument), eat donuts, drink wine, and play cards. The spinning and other textile crafts are not demonstrated any longer, but both younger and older men play cards, as they used to do in the past, with girls and women joining them nowadays, which was not the case when the *prelo* was a living tradition (Fig. 4).⁷

PENTECOST PAGEANT

Another custom that has also undergone revitalisation in the last decade of the 20th century is the Pentecost pageant, which was practiced more or less continuously in the first half of the 20th century. Research based on interviews was combined with the actual observation of the custom itself on Pentecost (called *Dove* in the local vernacular), in Aleksandrovo and Ker (two parishes in Subotica) on June 12, 2011, in the village of Tavankut and its surroundings in 2013, in Vancaga in Serbia (suburbs of the city of Baja), and in the village Kaćmar, in Hungary, on May 28, 2012. I am dealing only with the custom as observed in Serbia. Although the basic elements of the original custom and ritual practices are recaptured, the revived custom also contains some new elements adapted to the present-day context. The *kraljice* (meaning queens,



Figure 5. *Kraljice* in 1932. Photograph in possession of Grgo Piuković, Subotica.

which is the name for young girls performing the pageant) are dressed in the traditional costumes of girls who in earlier times, up to the mid-20th century, performed the pageant barefoot (Fig. 5).

The traditional silk costume alternates with the white embroidered one, but the waistcoat is obligatory in both types of the costume. Older girls that accompany the *kraljice* are dressed in everyday costume made of industrial cotton, the *sefir*, with characteristic vertical stripes. They are also accompanied by boys, the shepherds, who collect presents – mainly money nowadays (Fig. 6).

The headdress of the queen is important as well and it differs in the two parishes in Subotica where the custom has been revitalised thanks to the local nuns. In the parish of Ker it is similar to the original one (cf. Figs. 5 and 6), but in the parish of Aleksandrovo nun Eleonora Merković decided to change it, since, quoting her words: “it is too heavy for the poor young girls’ heads” (Černelić & Štricki Seg 2014: 217) (Fig. 7).

The *kraljice* pageant forms a part of various other events during the year: folklore festivals, the festival of the Bunjevci songs, literary evenings, etc. In the past three years, this custom has also been revitalised in the nearby village of Tavankut, organised by the Croatian cultural society in cooperation with the local church authorities. The *kraljice* wear traditional silk costumes (Fig. 8) (Černelić & Štricki Seg 2014).

The custom of the *kraljice* pageant is perceived by the Danube area Bunjevci as a distinctive feature of their own, which sets them apart from the others



Figure 6. *Kraljice in the yard of the family who welcomed young girls during their pageant in the parish of Ker in Subotica in 2013. Photograph in possession of Bernadica Ivanković.*



Figure 7. *Kraljice in the parish of Aleksandrovo in Subotica in 2010. Photograph in possession of Eleonora Merковиć.*



Figure 8. *The kraljice sing in front of the church in Tavankut. Photograph by Ivica Dulić 2013.*

in their surroundings. The custom is thus translated into a symbol of identity of this Croatian national minority in Serbia. Within a multicultural context its members express their distinctive ethnocultural identity through a public display of certain segments of their traditional heritage. The traditional costume plays an important role in these processes.

DUŽIJANCA

As already mentioned, *Dužijanca* is the celebration marking the end of the harvest among the Bunjevci Croats in the region of Bačka, which has existed as a public event for over a century. Being part of the traditional heritage of the Bunjevci, *Dužijanca* was organised jointly by family members and reapers up to the mid-20th century. The family *dužijanca* was practiced every summer during the final stage of the harvest, through mutual assistance between families, called *moba*, which was a common type of economic cooperation on Bunjevci farms up until the period of the Second World War. It was imbued with a religious dimension, giving thanks to God for the collected crop. Blaško Rajić, a priest in St. Rocco's Church in Subotica, first fostered the celebration as a public event in 1911. The leading male and female figures of the harvest (*bandaš* and *bandašica*) were selected for the first time in the city of Subotica.

The celebration of *Dužijanca* lasts for almost four months and includes various festivities of which I will mention only the most important ones: the blessing of the wheat in the fields on St. Mark's Day, April 25, which is the first event of *Dužijanca*, followed by the competition of reapers in July (which is, in

fact, the reconstruction of the harvest), an exhibition of articles made in straw technique, artists' colonies (naive art in general and in straw technique), literary evenings, the 'big wheel dance' of the reapers when their male and female leaders are elected, the competition and election of the best-looking traditional costume, etc. After the Holy Mass the procession enters the main town square where the reapers are welcomed and received on stage, which is set to represent the *salaš* (rural estate). An important part of the performance is giving a symbolic present to the mayor of the town of Subotica: a loaf of bread made from new flour. The celebration of *Dužijanca* ends with a pilgrimage to the suburban shrine, Bunarić, and a visit to the grave of the priest Blaško Rajić, the founder of the urban celebration of *Dužijanca* (Černelić & Grbić Jakopović 2013: 502–509).

The traditional costume acts as an important symbol of *Dužijanca*, being one of the key elements of the traditional heritage and an outstanding identity marker. The competition of reapers stands as one of the most significant events. It is, in fact, a reconstruction of the authentic harvest. The reapers are dressed in the traditional everyday costumes, similar to those they used to wear during the harvest in the past (Fig. 9).⁸



*Figure 9. Reapers on their way to the field.
Photograph by Nevena Škrbić Alempijević 2012.*



Figure 10. Bandaš and bandašica together with other participants of the procession in front of the church. Photograph by Mihovil Gotal 2012.

The ceremonial traditional dress also forms an important part of *Dužijanca*. The participants of the procession are dressed in different types of folk costumes, both everyday (*sefir*) and ceremonial (silk, with white embroidery), along with the leading male and female figure of the harvest, the so-called *bandaš* and *bandašica*, who wear ceremonial folk costumes (Fig. 10).

People do not quite agree on what particular type of traditional costume is proper for the occasion. Today girls like to wear white dresses with characteristic embroidery (*šlinga*), which some of the representatives of cultural associations consider to be improper, because it used to be one of the underlayers of the traditional costume in the past. According to some people, it looks as if someone appeared in the street in their underwear (Škrbić Alempijević & Rubić 2014: 285).

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of *Dužijanca* in 2011 a statue of the reaper dressed in the traditional working costume was erected in the town's central park near the Town Hall, which is also meant to express the identity of the Bunjevci Croats in the region (Fig. 11). Opinions differ as to whether it fits in the urban environment (ibid.: 288).

The mentioned *kraljice* of both parishes are also involved in the *Dužijanca* harvest festivity. Those from Ker parish participate in the ceremonial procession – they escort the leading male and female figure of the harvest at the



Figure 11. One of the reapers puts a wheat wreath on the hat of the statue of the reaper.
Photograph by Mihovil Gotal 2012.

head of the procession, after they have received the priest's blessing in the church. The *kraljice* from Aleksandrovo parish take part in the pilgrimage to the suburban shrine Bunarić, which is the final event of the *Dužijanica* harvest festivity (Černelić & Štricki Seg 2014: 231, 233).

In recent years the custom of lighting bonfires and jumping over them has been revived within the *Dužijanica* harvest festivity in some rural settlements; originally it was practiced on Midsummer, i.e. St. John's Day. In this way, this custom has been newly revived on the Bunjevci rural estates (*salaš*) as a vivid reminder of one of the major customs in their ancestors' calendar (Fig. 12).

This custom is closely related to the harvest: many magical beliefs are connected with the protection of the crop from thunder, fire, or vermin. Boys and girls jump over the bonfire, dressed in traditional costumes (Černelić 2014). In the village of Tavankut in 2014, jumping over bonfire was also practiced as part of the *Dužijanica* harvest festival. In 2015 it was organised separately by the local Croatian cultural association. I had the opportunity to witness the performance of the custom on June 20 of the same year. Today it is not observed exactly on St. John's Day, for practical reasons, but rather on a weekend day closest to this date. Along with the girls and boys dressed in traditional costumes, other participants observing the custom, especially children, join in and jump over the bonfire as well (Fig. 13).



Figure 12. A boy jumping over the fire in the village of Mala Bosna in 2013. Photograph in possession of the newsweekly Hrvatska riječ.



Figure 13. Girls jumping over the fire. Photograph by Katarina Čeliković 2015.

Dužijanica as one of the most prominent festivities belonging to the cultural heritage of the Bunjevci Croats serves as an important symbol of group identity in the contemporary context. Such a meaning of *Dužijanica* has found its expression as the key symbol in the culture that comprises various symbolic meanings.⁹

FINAL REMARKS

The national folk costume plays a very important role in all the mentioned events that occur during the ritual year. Even before Bogatyrev (1937), whose contribution was re-actualised in 1971 (Bogatyrev 1971), in light of semiotic theories, the founder of Croatian ethnology, Antun Radić, in his work titled *The Foundation for Collecting and Interpreting Material about Folk Life*, pointed to the differences in the function of the traditional costume as well as to the changes in both the style and function of clothing (Radić 1897: 23).¹⁰

As long as the traditional costume was part of everyday rural life, it had several functions, first of all, practical and aesthetic; the latter was not very comfortable for those who wore the traditional costume, especially girls and women (Bogatyrev 1971: 34–35). An interesting example applied to the Bunjevci case is the nun's intervention on the headdress of the queens, so as to make it more comfortable for the girls to wear. Its function has changed because its purpose is different today – the traditional folk costume is used for ceremonial purposes and as an important means for demonstrating ethnocultural identity.

According to Bogatyrev's (ibid.: 43–44) categories of the transition of the traditional costume through ritual stages and functional changes, the ceremonial holiday costume (the traditional silk costume and girls' white cotton costume decorated with white embroidery) is of crucial importance in the ritual annual customs of the Bunjevci. The function of the everyday costume has also transitioned into ceremonial. It is worn for the purpose of reconstructing the harvest, and on the occasion of jumping over the fire on St. John's Day; so it has taken on a ceremonial function nowadays, to recall and revitalise traditional costumes as originally as possible in the present day context (most often the *sefir*, made from industrial cotton with characteristic vertical stripes). Over the past several decades, the traditional costume has also stood for a national symbol and, as such, has played an important role in all the analysed customs as a symbolic object and an ethnocultural marker of the identity of the subethnic and national minority group of the Bunjevci Croats in Serbia. Their ambivalent position, as depicted earlier, seems to reflect their intense need to further demonstrate their ethnocultural heritage.

NOTES

- ¹ As already mentioned, similar tendencies already appeared during the political regime of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and even earlier. It is not possible to present in detail all historical (and political) circumstances that affected the aspects of constructing the identity of the Bunjevci in Bačka.
- ² Šokci is another Croatian subethnic group in Bačka.
- ³ The scientific project *Identity and Ethnocultural Shaping of the Bunjevci*, approved and financed by the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, was carried out between 2008 and 2013, and dealt with all three Bunjevci branches. Research results on the Danube area Bunjevci are published in the monograph *Traditional Heritage and Ethnocultural Identity of the Bunjevci Croats in the Danube Area* (2014). The research was realised by me as a project leader, my project associates, and students. Our articles are published in the mentioned monograph.
- ⁴ The purpose of this article is not to give a thorough presentation of the traditional costume. It would include more complex analyses of different types of traditional costumes according to gender, age, season, and occasion, including the transformations starting from the late 19th century, which is not possible to provide in such a short account.
- ⁵ Much more detail on the mentioned costumes, as well as on some other parts of the traditional costume of the Bunjevci can be found in Sekulić 1991, Maglica 1998, Suknović 2010.
- ⁶ See Sudarević 2012.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ See more about the competition of reapers and about *Dužijanca* through the prism of collective memory in Škrbić Alempijević & Rubić 2014.
- ⁹ See more about various symbolic aspects of *Dužijanca* in Škrbić Alempijević & Rubić 2014; Vugdelija & Gotal 2013.
- ¹⁰ See more about his contribution in Bonifačić 1995/1996.

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BEAUTY ELECTIONS IN SLAVONIA: A STUDY OF TRADITIONAL COSTUME COMPETITIONS

Marija Gačić

Abstract: The article focuses on the phenomenon of traditional costume competitions and interprets its importance for the local community and the contestants. The author analyses the issue of evaluating, selecting, and awarding the best traditional costumes. The research draws on the material of Slavonia, a region in Croatia with a constantly growing trend of traditional costume competitions. The author also emphasises the importance of the role of ethnologists as members of expert committees in the process. The study is based on ethnographic research, discourse analysis of documents related to the contests, and on the author's personal experience, since she has participated in traditional costume competitions in different roles.

Keywords: competition, Croatia, ethnologists, selection, Slavonia, traditional costumes

INTRODUCTION

Beauty contests have been held in Slavonia, the eastern part of Croatia, for almost 80 years now. As early as in 1936, ethnologists recorded this phenomenon within the frame of the first folklore festivals, organised by the Peasant Concord organisation, where different villages competed in the beauty and cleanliness of their costumes. In the same year, 1936, the organisation decided to give the award to a girl with the most beautiful costume (see Bonifačić 2008: 21). Today, the most popular contests are still connected with larger folklore festivals, such as *Đakovački vezovi* (embroideries of Đakovo), *Brodsko kolo* (the *kolo* (dance) of Brod), and *Šokačko sijelo* (festival of folk heritage) in Županja, eastern Slavonia. Nevertheless, there are a number of independent competitions, often specialised in a certain type of traditional costumes, such as *Zimsko spremanje* (Winter Wearing) in Antin, which specialises in winter traditional costumes, or *Bil me mamu u Kupinu dala* (*Would You, Mother, Give Me to Kupina*) in Kupina, specialising in traditional wedding costumes. These are smaller manifestations of local significance, but they gather a great number of contestants from different parts of Slavonia and Croatia.

The paper aims to address selected competitions, followed by the analysis and comparison, and to highlight specific and general characteristics of the elections and the roles of the contestants, organisers, and the expert committee. It also endeavours to reveal the role of elections in the festivals that they are a part of, but also in the life of the local community and that of the individuals who apply for these contests.

My analysis is based on the documents that the organisers send to potential competitors. These mainly consist in the invitation letter for potential participants and the application forms. The rules of the contests do not generally exist as a separate document but can be deduced from the questions in the application form, while some restrictions are listed in the invitation letters. Besides that, I have used the data collected during fieldwork in the period from 2007 to 2014, and by personally participating in some elections in various roles: as a contestant, an organiser, and a member of the expert committee.

In this review I will give short individual descriptions of the competitions, describe the general characteristics, and try to answer questions about why people apply for beauty elections in traditional costumes, what these elections mean to people, what is the role of the traditional costume in contemporary elections, etc.

'BEAUTY ELECTIONS' AS A TERM

In Slavonia, the term 'beauty elections' is a common name for the competitions in which participants are dressed in traditional costumes and are competing for the title of the most beautiful or the best traditional costume. If one wants to know whether another person is going to watch the final programme of the largest folklore festival in Slavonia, *Dakovački vezovi*, they usually ask: "Are you going to watch the beauties?" The phrase 'beauty elections' refers to every contest related to traditional costumes, no matter what the exact name of the contest is, or what its theme or ideas are. Croatian ethnologist Branka Uzelac explains the development of the present name for the elections, *Dakovački vezovi*, from *The Most Beautiful Worn Traditional Costume* to *The Best Worn Traditional Costume*: "This way the expression 'beauty election' is avoided as the way of usual shorting of the full name of the show" (Uzelac 2001: 19).

The phrase 'beauty elections' is used from the very beginning of the contests in which the most beautiful traditional costumes were elected, and it points to an important question: what is the best traditional costume?

Contemporary competitions of beauties in traditional costumes are generally known as elections, although they have different titles and they allow

men to compete as well. The official names of the contests, like *The Best Worn Traditional Costume of Slavonia, Baranja and Srijem*, or *Youth and Beauty of Slavonia*, etc., are secondary. This is based on the fact that the official names are used only in printed programmes and posters, and rarely in public speeches and in everyday conversations. The term that is used more frequently is 'election', combined with the name of the town or the village where it is held. In this sense, when speaking about a young man, Mladen Seletković, from the village of Donji Andrijevci, who participated in *The Winter Wearing* contest in Antin, one would say that he "went to election in Antin". So there is the election in Stari Mikanovci, the election in Slavonski Brod, the election in Trnjani, the election in Županja, the election in Đakovo, etc. Considering all that, in this article I will also use the term 'election', but the terms 'contest' and 'competition' are also used as synonyms, because all the elections are structured as contests and competitions.

WHAT DO BEAUTY ELECTIONS LOOK LIKE?

In Slavonia, almost every village has its own folklore festival and a certain kind of traditional costume election. Here I discuss seven contests with the longest history, like those in Đakovo and in Stari Mikanovci, established in the 1960s, and those specialised in a certain kind of traditional costumes, like winter costumes in Antin (est. in 1999) or bridal costumes in Kupina (est. in 2011). What they have in common is a two-part structure of the competition. The first part is a presentation in front of the expert committee, and the second takes place in front of a wider audience. The contests are held throughout the year, except for the time of the Great Lent and Advent. Some of them are a part of bigger traditional festivals that are held at the same time every year, and some of them are independent programmes, with their own dates (Saturday or Sunday) during the year. The date of the contests can be changed, as some of them are held during the Shrovetide that depends on the date of Easter. Others are not connected to specific holidays but try to keep the same date because they strive towards the title of traditionally held programmes.

The contests I am analysing in this article are the following:

1. *The Best Worn Traditional Costume*¹ is the central part of the final show of one of the largest folklore festivals in Croatia, *Đakovački vezovi*. It was established in 1967. The festival is always held during the last week of June and the first week of July. Until now it has changed its name and rules several times. For the first three years only unmarried women were allowed to compete. In 1970 the competition was opened to married women as well, and in 2002

the possibility of competing also opened up for men. The potential competitors have to fill in the application form before the competition. On the day of the competition they are asked to present their costume and show their knowledge about it in front of an expert committee, and in the evening in the central park in Đakovo, in front of numerous audiences. The expert committee consists of three ethnologists. They give three awards for the best costumes (the first, the second, and the third prize) in three categories: men, married women, and girls. Along with that, the Mayor of Đakovo gives his own prize to a girl that he thinks is the most beautiful, and she is proclaimed the most beautiful girl in a traditional costume. That overshadows all the other winners selected by the ethnologists.

2. The contest called *The Youth and the Beauty of Slavonia* was founded in 1968 in the village of Stari Mikanovci.

From the very beginning, there were rules defining who can compete and under what conditions. Competitors can be neither younger than 16 nor older than 30 years of age. They need to possess good knowledge of the traditional costume that they are wearing, they need to know for what occasion which sort of traditional costume is intended, how it is made, and the traditional costume should originate from the village where the competitor lives, etc. (Frković et al. 1997: 52)

Besides questions about traditional costumes, the application form contains questions about competitors' everyday life, such as: "Do you do some kind of traditional handicraft?" (Application Form, Stari Mikanovci 2015).² The expert committee consists of three ethnologists. They give three prizes in the same three categories as in Đakovo. The competition takes place on the last Saturday in February.

3. *The Flower of Šokci*³ is the contest of girls from 16 to 25 years of age. They have to be from the region in which the Šokci live (Slavonia, Baranja, Srijem, Bačka). The election is the final show of the carnival festival *Šokačko sijelo*, which lasts throughout the last two weeks of the Shrovetide period⁴ in the town of Županja. The members of the expert committee are: an ethnologist, the mayor, and one or two sponsors. They give three awards. The first awarded girl is conferred the title of the Flower of Šokci.

4. *The Election of the Most Beautiful Croatian Girl in a Traditional Costume* is the final show of the oldest Croatian folklore festival, *Brodsko kolo*, in the town of Slavonski Brod. In this election girls from all over Croatia can compete. The expert committee has several members: an ethnologist, the director of the



Figure 1. The audience, expert committee, and the contestants at the Flower of Šokci contest in Županija. Photograph from *Glas Slavonije 2014* (<http://www.glas-slavonije.hr/galerija/216/Sokacki-cvit-2014/7>).

local tourist board, the festival director, and so on, depending on the organisers' wishes every year. They give three awards. The first awarded girl is proclaimed to be the most beautiful Croatian girl in a traditional costume. The event takes place every year, on the second Sunday of June.

5. *The Winter Wearing* contest has been held in the village of Antin since 1999, as an independent programme. The competitors (female and male) must wear traditional winter costumes. The expert committee has three members, all of them ethnologists or ethnology students. They hand out three awards in three categories: men, married women, and girls. The election takes place every year, on the third Saturday in January.

6. *Would You, Mother, Give Me to Kupina* is a specialised election that focuses only on brides in traditional costumes; yet, it refers to a wider circle of wedding customs. It was established in 2011 and takes place on the third Saturday of October. It is an annual gathering of a local folklore group in the village of Kupina. The title is a verse from a traditional local song. The expert committee is comprised of three ethnologists, and they give three awards to the best brides.

7. *Renewing Our Heritage: The Show of Reconstructed Croatian Traditional Costumes* was established in 2011 in the village of Trnjani. The date of the event was changed by the organisers from the third Sunday in October, when it was held for the first three years, to the last Saturday of September, because in September it is still warm enough and there is no need to turn the heating on. In this competition only newly made costumes based on traditional patterns can compete. The award does not go to the person who is wearing the costume but to the person who made it. The event is organised by a local folklore group and the Workshop and Traditional Costumes Lending Department – an institution in Zagreb that is involved in the reconstruction of traditional costumes. Members of the expert committee are four ethnologists. They give three awards for the best reconstructed traditional costumes, one award for the best stage presentation, and commendations for a successful reconstruction.

There is a difference between the elections that are a part of a bigger event and those that are organised as independent programmes. The former always occupy a central place in the festival, while the independent ones are organised like small festivals. However, formally all of the elections function in the same way: a few months or weeks before, there is a public invitation for applications, or the organisers directly call the potential contestants. Filling in the application form, different for every competition, is an imperative part of the application process. In the application form every contestant has to fill in the basic information about himself or herself and about his or her traditional costume. The question related to the origins and the age of the costume is obligatory, as well as the one defining all the parts of the costume. Only in *Renewing Our Heritage* contest there is a space for information about the person who made the costume, and in *The Flower of Šokci* one is asked to fill in the information about the person who made the traditional hairdo.⁵ The contestants send the application forms to organisers, who forward them to the expert committee. As a rule, the expert committee consists of three members, mainly ethnologists. On the day of the competition they spend a few hours talking to the contestants. They evaluate, rank, and decide about the awards on the basis of the elements of the competition.

PUBLIC PRESENTATION OF THE CONTESTANTS AND TRADITIONAL COSTUMES

After presenting the traditional costume to the expert committee, there is a show that is held in front of the audience. It includes the public presentation of the contestants with the narrative about the traditional costumes they are wearing. This is often accompanied by humorous and lascivious comments by the official presenter or by the contestant himself or herself. The contestants present their costumes by emphasising some particular parts and traditional techniques of making and decorating the traditional costume. The public presentation is often shaped like a story that deals with a certain segment of folk life that the traditional costume evokes. The traditional costume is, thus, placed in the usage context. For instance, in 2010 at the election in Antin, a young man was wearing a winter traditional costume and a torch in one hand. He talked about the old way of celebrating Christmas, when people were coming from their cottages⁶ to the village to celebrate the Midnight Mass. He was dressed in an appropriate way, and had an additional object (a torch), but it was his story that provided his presentation of the traditional costume with the desired context.

The public presentation is a complex programme. The contestants' presentations dynamically alternate with those of local bands, playing traditional musical instruments, folklore groups, traditional singing groups, comedians and folk theatre groups that stage humorous plays related to traditional life, etc. The elections differ from each other in the way the presentation of the traditional costume is carried out. At some elections contestants are allowed to talk about the folk costume themselves: how they are dressed, where they would go dressed like that, why they are carrying some additional objects – all these elements are shaped into a story connected to traditional life. This is the case with the election in Stari Mikanovci, Antin, and sometimes in Đakovo, depending on the scenario. Other elections allow this kind of presentation only in front of the expert committee, while in the public presentation, in front of the audience, a presenter reads all the information about them, like at the elections in Slavonski Brod and Trnjani.

The age of the traditional costume is often highlighted. The older traditional costumes are valued more highly. The age of “a hundred years” is a typical formulation that is emphasised at all elections, except at the *Renewing Our Heritage*, where only newly made costumes are allowed to compete.

The expert committee makes the decision about the winner before the public presentation, but it is kept a secret until the very end because of the suspense and drama effect created for the audience and contestants.



Figure 2. The contestants are presenting newly made traditional costumes in front of the expert committee in Trnjani. Photograph by Bojana Poljaković 2015.

Apart from such contests, there are those that are part of gatherings of local folklore groups, for example, the election in Kupina. The evaluation and presentation of the contestants take place in front of the audience, and the decision about the winner is made during a musical interlude. There is no stage and official show. The election is a part of a party, and it takes place on the dancing floor. No matter what the differences, all the elections have a similar structure. The expert committee has the leading role in making the decision of the winner, but the most important part of the elections for the contestants and the audience is the public presentation. It is shaped like a show with the main goal of entertaining the audience.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ELECTIONS

The common elements of all the elections are competition/evaluation and representation. It is important to highlight the fact that all of the elections function on the basis of fluid, in some cases even non-existing, rules. Each expert committee

knows what to evaluate, but there are neither written instructions defining the rules for a certain contest, nor a universal document with instructions for the evaluation of traditional costumes in general. This means that every committee, individually gathered for an election, makes its own implicit criteria on the spot. Those criteria are based on certain interrelations between traditional costumes applied for a certain election. The final decision is always based on the comparison of all participant costumes. In most of the elections the older traditional costumes have an advantage. However, more precise information about the age of the traditional costume is rarely given, since the contestants mostly define it as “(more than) a hundred years”. Ethnologists in most cases know how to estimate the approximate age of the traditional costume by analysing motives, techniques, and materials. But, on the other hand, it does not mean that the oldest traditional costume at the elections will certainly win. Furthermore, the traditional costumes are informally divided into two categories: festive and working costumes. Traditional festive costumes are usually more decorated and have more chance of winning. But that is not a rule either, because every selection sends a message. If, for example, one year the winning traditional costume is festive, next year, at the same election, there will be more festive costumes, but then the committee can decide to award a working costume to send a message about the importance of protecting the traditional costumes that are in some way neglected. These



Figure 3. A contestant holding an apple and a candle while presenting herself and the traditional costume she is wearing at the Would You, Mother, Give Me to Kupina election of the most beautiful bride in traditional costume in Kupina. Photograph from Šokački portal 2013 (<https://www.facebook.com/sokackiportal/photos/a.391554640915021.83082.152079494862538/391556984248120/?type=3&theater>).

elements are not listed in invitation letters or application forms, but in the same documents we can find expressions like “expert criteria”, “aesthetic”, or “traditional criteria” (Application Form for *The Best Worn Traditional Costume* 2015). Since the mentioned criteria are not explained in more detail, the problem of evaluating traditional costumes and selecting the best one can well be understood. It is the easiest for the election of *Renewing Our Heritage* to arrive at the solution, since it chooses among newly made costumes only, that is, those that are most similar to the originals. Here the expert committee can determine if something is made the way it is made in the village from which that reconstructed traditional costume originates.

In other elections, where only ‘original’ traditional costumes are allowed to compete, the basis for the evaluation and awarding is hard to find. In these contests the story, that is, the context that the contestants evoke, plays a very significant role.

If the story is humorous (like the story from the election in Đakovo in 2013, where a young married woman came to the stage and said that she had come from the next village on foot, because her husband got drunk and was sleeping in the carriage), the possibility of getting an award is bigger. Although her costume was not so festive, or lavishly decorated, she had a better chance to get an award, based on the story she told. So, there are no rules regulating what kind of traditional costumes are given awards. On the other hand, it is problematic to define the best traditional costume as there is no description of it: what it looks like, what kind of decorations it has, what materials are used, etc.

My experience of working on expert committees tells me that the committees always try to find a solution when proclaiming the best traditional costumes which will justify the committee’s expertise and achieve a balance in relation to other elections held during the year. However, the tendency of organisers and contestants is to present the costumes that have not been seen before. That is why, in the last few years, there has been a growing number of collectors who, due to their own diligent collecting of traditional costumes, have expanded their collections and obtained some rare pieces. This leads us to an important question: How is it possible to include in the same category traditional costumes from old chests, costumes that are family inheritance (a granddaughter with no modelling experience wearing her grandmother’s costumes), and the ones from the collection of a collector, who will dress a beautiful girl from the next village (thereby carefully removing nail polish and putting on some light makeup)? By preparing the contestants for the election, we discover that, although the rules are not so specific, the contestants and the audience are aware of some kind of rules. In that case, nail polish cannot be compatible with traditional costumes, because it is a sign of modernity. While wearing a traditional costume and

presenting it at the elections, contestants strive for authenticity and presentation as close as possible to tradition. But if the person is wearing his or her own traditional costume, they represent themselves, their region, village, and heritage. An element that connects all the beauty elections is the contestants' wish to present their identity through traditional costumes. In this manner, I participated in the election in Đakovo and stood in my traditional costume from early afternoon until midnight, trying to show to all the people in the audience the traditional costume from my village, with a strong conviction that my traditional costume was the best.⁷

I can conclude that the elections are an important part of a contemporary public presentation of traditional costumes but also an indication of keeping alive one's tradition and expressing one's identity. Also, the importance of ethnologists as experts in the field is clearly expressed.

PROBLEMS WITH THE ELECTION OF TRADITIONAL COSTUMES

When analysing the characteristics of the elections, I found several problematic moments. Since in the application form one of the requirements is to define the traditional costume as original or reconstructed (Application Form for the election of *The Flower of Šokci* in Županja, 2015), one can conclude that it is one of the criteria. Yet, here we can find a connection with the problem of canonisation of traditional costumes. It points to a clear dichotomy between traditional and modern, about which Croatian ethnologist Vjera Bonifačić wrote as follows:

There has been a lot of discussion among scholars and museologists in Europe and North America concerning the preoccupation with selected older pieces of traditional costumes that are defined as traditional and valued as 'original' or 'authentic', as well as concerning the neglecting of 'inauthentic' peasant clothing that continued to change in the course of the 20th century. (Bonifačić 2008: 10)

Along with this problem, I have raised the question of determining the age of traditional costumes, which is information required in all the application forms. It does not say anywhere whether the older costumes get more points and have more chance of winning the contest than the newer ones. Today's implicit preference of awarding older costumes at the elections originates in the time of activities of the organisation Peasant Concord and its folklore festivals. The peasants were encouraged to revitalise the home production of natural materials and traditional costumes: "A publication of Peasant Concord reveals



Figure 4. The winning contestants at the Renewing our Heritage contest in Trnjani. Photograph by Zvonimir Ilić 2013.

that there was a pressure on women to go back to making older, hand-made traditional costumes and textiles” (Bonifačić 2008: 21). Even today we can still find the attitude that the older is more valuable.

In application forms it is necessary to explain how the contestants are supposed to present themselves at the election. In every application form requiring that answer, there is the preposition ‘as’. A contestant can apply “as a girl”, “as a married woman” or “as an unmarried man”. The preposition ‘as’ presupposes the role that the person will play firstly in front of the expert committee, and secondly on the stage in front of the audience, dressed in an appropriate traditional costume. Yet, there is an interesting example of disqualification at the election in Stari Mikanovci, which took place in 2014. An unmarried young woman applied for the election in a role of a married woman, wearing the appropriate traditional costume. She was disqualified because in real life she was not married. This was an act that showed the intention of emphasising the seriousness of the election. However, it is interesting that the year before there had been a divorced woman dressed like a young married woman among the contestants. She was not eliminated from the contest. So, my question is:

if the presentation at the election in Stari Mikanovci is a performance, as it is pointed out in the application form, why is it connected with real life outside the stage? Here the border between the stage and real life is even more unclear as the questions refer to contestants' private life, regarding private activities connected to 'traditional life'. But it is not clear what kind of activities these are, and how they affect the decision made about the winner.

A specific part of all the invitation letters and application forms is connected to the expert committee/judges. The members of the expert committee are never stated by name; some documents only disclose that the judges are experts, i.e. ethnologists. However, the invitation letters and application forms suggest who the judges could be. The contestants have that in mind while filling in the application form and formulate their answers according to that.

My experience of working on the expert committees is slightly different. The committee consists of at least three people, and not all of them have to be ethnologists – the composition depends on the organiser. Besides ethnologists, the judges can be local or regional politicians, important sponsors, mayors, and so on. Every member of the committee has his or her own attitudes, opinions, and experience related to traditional costumes that they try to implement in the activities that they are engaged in. The decision on the prizes is often a result of negotiations, stressing the judges' own impressions that are finally shaped into a unique decision of the expert committee. Working on this kind of committees is unrewarding because of the lack of rules. Even if the rules of the competition are elaborated, like in the *Renewing Our Heritage* contest, the judges always bear in mind the message that the selection will send. This part of the beauty elections is indeed an effort of ethnologists to reconcile their own attitudes with the knowledge about traditional costumes, expectations of the audience and organisers, and often with the expectations of the sponsors, local government representatives, and others.

No matter what the attitude of the judges is, ethnologists have a strong position among them and they have to fulfil the expectations of the contestants and the audience, as it is commonly believed that every ethnologist knows everything about traditional costumes and folklore. Despite that, I allow the possibility of unaffected elections if the judges were less of the experts or totally non-ethnologists, as the fun role of the elections is very present. The elections do not depend only on the opinion of the ethnologists on the expert committee, but on the wish of the people to compete.

Announcing the winners is the most important moment of the elections. Although the audience does not participate in the selection process, after proclaiming the winners people from the audience comment on the judges' decision and express their own opinions on it. One can hear people discussing whether

the award went to the contestants who deserved it or it should go to someone else. This is especially interesting because the rules of the competitions, if they were to exist, are not available to the general public, but only to the contestants and committee members. Nevertheless, the audience has its own system of evaluating and 'awarding'.

CONCLUSION

Today beauty elections are highly popular in Slavonia and new ones are established every year. This paper covers only a certain number of the elections for the sake of emphasising particular characteristics and problems. The analysis of the basic features of the elections shows that there are some common elements: competition, dichotomy between the old and the new, putting the traditional costume in a context narrating the story related to tradition, an expert committee, etc. There is also a significant fun factor included, but the beauty elections are complex shows that involve traditional music, humorous plays, and competitive spirit, and attract a great number of people – the contestants and the audience – and not only for fun. The other possible reason for the elections' popularity is that people need to present themselves publicly, and need to be acknowledged for their own heritage.

There is the issue of non-existing rules, but the system of the elections functions anyway, because contestants present themselves and the traditional costume from their village. They firmly believe that their costume is the most beautiful. The audience carefully follows the programme and identifies themselves with the contestants but also with judges, because they have their own unofficial 'awards' for 'the most beautiful' traditional costume. These are not actual awards, but the public opinion about who are actually supposed to get the main prize.

The increasing number of the collectors who also take part in the contests by showing their traditional costumes indicates that these elections are the only public place where a person can get some acknowledgment for the traditional costume they possess. The same goes for the traditional costumes from family collections: the traditional costumes do not function the same way as they did 60 years ago, when it meant something in a local community if a girl changed her hair style or if she had abundant jewellery. The beauty elections are the only contemporary events where people can deserve recognition for their family inheritance or for the good choice while shopping in someone's old wardrobe.⁸

The role of ethnologists is important in this context, especially because the evaluating and selecting of 'the best' traditional costume is highly problematic.

People respect the opinion of the experts and by that they put big responsibility on ethnologists, but they also have great expectations. Fortunately, ethnologists are aware of that, and in most cases they are very careful when proclaiming 'the best' traditional costumes.

NOTES

- ¹ None of the elections has an English version of the title. All the English titles are translated by the author.
- ² Application forms are kept in the author's personal archive.
- ³ The Šokci consider themselves to be the original inhabitants of the region of Slavonia.
- ⁴ Shrovetide activities in Slavonia start after the New Year celebration and last until Ash Wednesday. The activities are comprised of carnival festivals, different costume parties, traditional Shrovetide horse riding ceremonies, etc.
- ⁵ Both application forms are available from the author on request.
- ⁶ The *cottage* is literal translation of the Croatian term *koleba* or *stan*, meaning a relocated small residential building and outbuildings with livestock outside the village. Family members used to take turns in living at these places and during big holidays they came to the village to attend church. Each bigger family in the village had their own cottage outside the village.
- ⁷ In 2007, as a high school student, I participated in the election in Đakovo, wearing the traditional costume of my village, Donji Andrijevi. I presented a story about taking food to the church for blessing on Holy Saturday.
- ⁸ Most collectors buy traditional costumes from old people, directly from their wardrobe or an old chest, so I use the image of *shopping*. Beauty elections are the only chance of public acknowledgment for collectors who have bought something valuable.

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THE DAY OF THE DEAD: ONE RITUAL, NEW FOLK COSTUMES, AND OLD IDENTITIES

Rosa Isela Aguilar Montes de Oca

Abstract: The article provides an analysis of the role of the folk costumes in the attempts to revitalize an authentic cultural identity within a geographical region and to oppose the effects of external cultural influence. The inhabitants of La Huasteca region in Hidalgo, Mexico, perceive Halloween – imported to Mexico through international migration and media in the decade of 1980 – as potential threat to the local tradition of the Day of the Dead. The costumes used for the Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest, a pageant performed on November 1 and initiated in Tehuetlán in 1989, display important items of the celebration to reinforce the Day of the Dead ritual, to rebuild La Huasteca region and the Huasteco identity, and to create a direct kinship with the Toltecs. This ritual, celebrated once a year to gather the living and their dead relatives, has economic, cultural, and social functions, which are fostered through the Miss Cempoalxóchitl beauty pageant.

Keywords: Day of the Dead, folk costume, heritage, indigenous identity, Mexico, ritual, symbolic object

INTRODUCTION

The traditional Mexican ritual, the Day of the Dead (Día de Muertos), was inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2008. As an old tradition that combines Spanish and pre-Hispanic cultural elements and is transmitted through generations, this festivity is dynamic and transforms itself continuously in creative ways. Ortiz (1995 [1947]) asserted that culture is the result of a complex process of transmutations. He called this process transculturation to explain the continuous readjustment through cultural transplantations. The process follows a disadjustment and readjustment, deculturation and acculturation, that is, transculturation. In America, the transcultural processes were initiated in the 15th century with the arrival of Spanish culture, a representative of Mediterranean, African, and many other cultures. The redefinition of cultural borders through intercultural encounters takes place then in transcultural spaces, which connect different space-time venues even when distant geographically and chronologically (Schütze & Zapata 2007). Global flows include a part that

uniforms and another that reinforces the production of cultural difference (Meyer & Geschiere 1999). Transnational intercultural encounters are important in the construction of gender, ethnicity, race, and nationality (Kummels 2007). Migration has been analyzed as one of the main experiences that impact the cultural analysis of locality against global processes (Dürr 2009). The media is an important transmitter, modifier, and re-producer of culture (Schlehe 2005) as well.

This article¹ stresses the transcultural transformations of the Day of the Dead and the political, economic, and social functions of the new folk costumes for the Miss Cempoalxóchitl beauty pageant in Tehuetlán, in La Huasteca, Hidalgo, Mexico.

Brandes (1998) says that the Mexican Day of the Dead ritual is a political enterprise that promotes a national cultural identity. Cultural differentiation and national distinctiveness have been needed to keep distance from Spain and the United States; hence, they are promoted by the Mexican state. Originality and authenticity were important during the War of Independence that ended the rule of Spain in 1821, and again increased in importance beginning in the 1840s, after the loss of half of its territory.² Mexican intellectuals, journalists, government officials, and several institutions have promoted this international symbol of Mexico for decades. The Mexican Nobel Prize in Literature 1990, Octavio Paz, wrote:

The Mexican... is familiar with death, jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it; it is one of his toys and his most steadfast love... The Mexican indifference toward death is fostered by his indifference toward life... It is natural, even desirable to die, and the sooner the better. (Paz 1961: 57–58)

The state cultural institutions promote contests of original altars all around Mexico and discard those influenced by US American items, such as Halloween pumpkins, masks, and sweets. Halloween symbols coming into Mexico are experienced by the government as a cultural threat even when this Mexican national identity reinforces the image of the morbid, death-obsessed Mexicans (Brandes 2003: 141). The population in Mexico is very aware of this cultural threat and makes big efforts to represent an original ritual in their towns.

The Day of the Dead fosters local economy (Haley & Fukuda 2004; Brandes 2003), and it brings international migrants home (Marchi 2005; Haley & Fukuda 2004). The politics of the Day of the Dead have been analyzed in the American diaspora³ (Marchi 2005; Orellana 2011a) and in the urban context (Orellana 2011a), but much less in rural contexts. The Day of the Dead in Tehuetlán

serves to construct an old cultural identity, to reinforce economic development and kinship ties, and to introduce new gender representations.

I participated in the Xantolo ritual on the Day of the Dead in 2011, and witnessed the Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest together with the pueblo of Te-huetlán. During my visit, I observed a remarkable difference between this particular ritual and those performed in other places in the State of Hidalgo. I was surprised to see the huge emotion that the contest provoked in people and how they were enjoying it even if it was organized in a very US American style, which they wanted to avoid in the first place. Also, some people in town regarded it as improper to reinforce a tradition for the dead with a mundane contest. Nevertheless, they were so excited that they used professional cameras, as those used in TV productions, even though the event remained local. There were no tourists; I and a photographer from a newspaper from the capital of the state, Pachuca, who had followed my advice, were the only ones. This contest has no parallel in Mexico, as far as it is known.

THE DAY OF THE DEAD IN MEXICO

Halloween and the Day of the Dead share historical symbolic origins (Brandes 1998). Halloween is a part of Scottish and Irish folk customs of pre-Christian times. The pagan Druid priests believed that souls were immortal and they passed from one body to another at death. On the last night of the old year (October 31) the Lord of the Dead, Saman, gathered the condemned souls together to inform them which animal they should inhabit for the next year. This pagan celebration became Catholic, as November 1 is celebrated as All Saints' Day (Hallowmas), and October 31 as All Hallows' Eve (Halloween). The Catholic Church introduced All Souls' Day on November 2 to give gifts and pray for the souls to go to heaven. Odilo, Abbot of Cluny, France, introduced the ceremony of praying to or for the dead into church in the 11th century, and two centuries later it was widespread (Linton 1951).

The Christian days dedicated to the dead merged partially with the Mexica (better known as Aztec) celebrations of the dead during the colonial era (Orellana 2011b). The Mexica dedicated two main ceremonies to the dead.

1. *Tlaxochimaco* (the birth of flowers), or *Miccailhuitontli*, on the ninth month of the Mexica year, was a small festivity or a festivity for the dead children. The small dead went to the highest, divine heaven, where they would reintegrate to the cosmos. For this festivity people picked flowers in the fields, which represented children who were offered to the god called

Huitzilopochtli. According to written records, this festivity was celebrated already in the 16th century.

2. On the last day of the tenth month, men had to cut down a tree; when cleared, this tree (called *Xócotl*) was honored with offerings and food. The mast symbolized fertility, life, and the old men surrounding the mast on four sides represented the dead. *Xócotl Uetzi*, or *Hueymiccaiuitl*, honored the old dead. The dead were able to come to and leave the town twice a year, at the beginning of the year, on the spring equinox, and on the autumn equinox.

Other Mexica ceremonies served to honor different gods as well as dead bodies and souls according to the manner in which the person had died.⁴ The festivity to honor Mixcóatl, the hunting and astral god, and those who had died in the war and would go up to the sun and come down in the afternoon, transformed into butterflies and humming birds, was celebrated in the month of Quecholli (the fourteenth month in the Aztec calendar). In the 16th century, when it was first introduced by Spanish missionaries, this ceremony coincided with the Catholic festivity of All Saints. The new Mexican ritual of the dead honors dead children on November 1, and dead adults on November 2, as in the Mesoamerican tradition. A yellow corn bread of wrinkly skin, *cocolli*, made out of the sacred seeds of some cobs, *ocholli*, was used for the celebration of *Xipe Tótec*, the autumn god, and used as an offering to resemble death (Dufétel 2011). That is maybe the origin of the recent offerings to the dead.

Today, the rituals for the dead are performed in very different ways in Mexico. There are thousands of different rituals of the Day of the Dead, but despite the huge diversity within regions, the constant is people building altars in homes all around the country. There are all sorts of *ofrendas* (offerings); they consist of objects with symbolic meanings, set on altars at home or on graves in the churchyard: Cempoalxóchitl flowers (the Mexican marigold) expanding their scent; water and salt representing life; candle lights, incense burners, and copal guide the dead into the world of the living, and the food (mainly *tamales*⁵), drink, and music bring joy to the dead. Sugar skulls and photographs that depict the dead person replace the practice of Mesoamericans, who used to dig up the remains of their dead to clean up the bones and paint the skull in bright colors, forbidden after the *Conquista* (Spanish colonization) (Haley & Fukuda 2004). Distinguishing between urban-western and rural-indigenous celebration began in the 19th century, when indigenous rituals were seen as backwardness, as the main obstacle for national modernization. The urban festivity abounds in skeletons, Grim Reapers, and sugar skulls that are not found in small towns. Here, the most important symbol is the food that the dead enjoyed in life (Orellana 2011b).



Figure 1. La Huasteca in Hidalgo, Mexico ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hidalgo_in_Mexico_\(zoom\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hidalgo_in_Mexico_(zoom).svg)).

Another difference is that Christians pray for the souls of the dead, whereas Mesoamericans, through the rituals performed in small towns, pray to the souls of dead relatives (Lechuga 2011).

THE DAY OF THE DEAD IN LA HUASTECA: XANTOLO

In La Huasteca, the Day of the Dead is slightly different from that in other regions of Mexico. La Huasteca, in the center of Mexico (Fig. 1), is a relatively confined region, mainly because of its difficult geographical access: it is surrounded by a green and fertile mountain chain, and there are frequent fractures on the roadway. The region experiences political difficulties and violence.

Spaniards introduced All Saints' and All Souls' days into La Huasteca through the Catholic missions, and the Huastecos called the celebration Xantolo, an adaptation in the Náhuatl⁶ language of the Latin word *Sanctorum* ('of



Figures 2, 3. Representative of the Xantolo is the arch of flowers, palms, and fruit. The dances have a strong US American influence. The Comanches are represented as those who scare the dead. Cowboys lead this activity and protect pregnant women in order to preserve life. Tehuetlán, Hidalgo, Mexico. Photographs by Rosa Isela Aguilar Montes de Oca 2011.



the Holies': *de los Santos*). In the small town of Tehuetlán, the Xantolo ritual is celebrated with altars and dances (Figs. 2, 3).

The ritual starts on October 30, when the family works together, decorating the altar. The altar is divided into three different levels: the upper level represents heaven; the middle level – earth, and the lowest level – the underworld (Vargas del Ángel 2010). Characteristic of Xantolo altars are the arches of flowers that are made out of cane sticks and palms, and symbolize the gate leading from life to death. Small altars with small arches are prepared for deceased children. On October 31 the family surrounds the altar. There they place the offering of natural and cultural products and objects particularly symbolic of La Huasteca region: tamales, chocolate, oranges, peanuts, limes, sweet potatoes, guavas, bananas, lemons, clay candle holders with figures representing animals and flowers, especially *cempoxóchitl* and *mano de león* (*Celosia cristata* – cockscomb) in clay pots. The family members living abroad arrive on this day too. Together, they light candles, honor the deceased person in the photograph, clean the space with the smoke of copal, and set a path of petals guiding the dead spirit from the entrance door to the altar. When the altars are ready, fireworks are lighted to tell the spirits of the dead that they can come home. Outside, the community enjoys the dances of people disguised as cowboys, Comanches⁷, pregnant women, and a personification of Death, which, as part of the cycle of life, represents leadership, defense, new life, and the end of life. Their task is to distract or trap Death to allow the dead members of the family to come home and enjoy the festivity. Music accompanies dances and fills the whole town. Guitars and violins are heard during the whole journey of the dead and also on the following days. This day is dedicated to those who died a violent death, in an accident, or suicide (Vargas del Ángel 2010).

On November 1 fireworks welcome the small dead children. For them, the offering consists of small breads and tamales, chocolate, fruit, and toys. At lunchtime soup, rice, vegetables, and soft meat are served, and later on a portion of dessert. The family sits around the table to talk about life, to remember the dead members of the family, and to eat tamales. On November 2 they honor the dead adults. Altars are covered with tamales stuffed with turkey, chicken, or pork prepared with chilies and other condiments, as well as bread, rice, beer, tequila, and maybe tobacco – everything that the person enjoyed in life. Some people place clothes, shoes, and tools as offerings (Vargas del Ángel 2010). On November 3 they set a small altar outside the house and place some tamales for those who have no family to visit, for the lonely spirits (*ánima sola*). During the five days of Xantolo, members of the community meet in the churchyard to clean and decorate the graves, but for some this is too sad and they remain at home. During these days they cook and eat tamales, the main object of the

reciprocity system used these days to confirm kinship ties. They serve tamales to the family members and give them a package of tamales to take back home when they leave. In town one can see many people coming and going, carrying packages of tamales to exchange with the neighbors. They visit each other to exchange gifts, but visits are not restricted to one community; people come from different communities.

A family from a small town brought tamales to the family I was staying with, as well as venison stuffed with chilies and green beans – specialties of their hometown. The packaging is of the same importance as tamales. Since months prior to the festivity, natural fibers were woven by men to make the typical haversacks (*morral*) to transport the gifts. Women embroidered cloth napkins by hand. During the visit that lasted three or four hours, the host family served tamales, chocolate, and coffee.

The ritual gradually changed because the population of La Huasteca had started a massive migration process to the USA in the decade of 1960 due to demographic and economic pressure: the rapid population growth, the slump of the international coffee and sugar prices, crop losses, and an agrarian conflict (Schryer 1990). On their return, the migrants brought all kinds of US American influences (Halloween

masks, remittances, TV-sets, home appliances, etc.) with them, by doing so accelerating the state's modernization

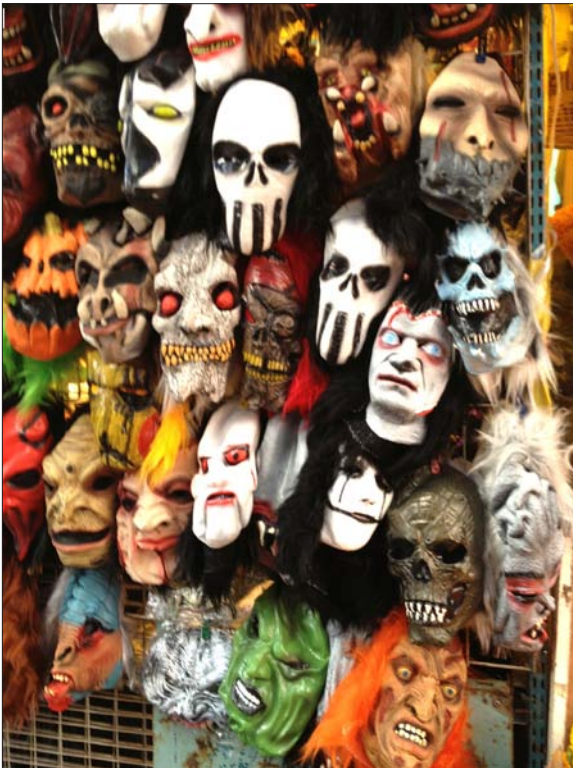


Figure 4. Plastic masks are sold in the markets around the Day of the Dead in Mexico. They attract people's attention and are less expensive than the wooden Mexican-style ones. Photograph: *Los mercados en Halloween y Día de Muertos* (<https://proyectodf.wordpress.com/2012/11/05/los-mercados-en-halloween-y-dia-de-muertos/>).

Figure 5. *It is possible to see the influence of the US American masks on the Mexican ones. San Agustín Mezquititlán, Hidalgo, Mexico. Photograph by Rosa Isela Aguilar Montes de Oca 2011.*



and electrification projects in the region. Halloween masks started to compete with and influence the traditional Day of the Dead in Huejutla and Tehuetlán (Figs. 4, 5). Grim Reapers invaded the scene of the dances, and skulls, Halloween pumpkins, and sweets started to occupy space in the offerings for the dead.

These changes did not persist in the aesthetics of the rituals as the local economy changed dramatically. Instead of producing and consuming local products, the population started to consume imported, expensive ones. Besides, the social relations inside the urban community began to fall apart; yet, they are needed as part of the informal economy within the reciprocity system. Respect for parents, old people, and the dead (one of the most appreciated values in indigenous towns) was missing. This situation was summarized in the 1980s by the parish priest of the church of San José, in Tehuetlán, as a result of losing the Xantolo tradition.

THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY: MISS CEMPOALXÓCHITL BEAUTY PAGEANT AND NEW FOLK COSTUMES

The parish priest was concerned about the potential threat of losing the meaning of symbols due to the introduction of Halloween items caused by migration and the media. He suggested that the young women of this small city could help to reinvigorate the tradition of the Day of the Dead in La Huasteca and to purify it from the influence of the Halloween. The young ladies were supposed to tell the rest of the population about the importance of the tradition for the



Figures 6, 7. Women at a Saturday market in Tehuetlán; only few of them wear the traditional costume, embroidered by themselves with the typical Huastec flowers. Tehuetlán, Hidalgo, Mexico. Photographs by Rosa Isela Aguilar Montes de Oca 2011.

community, show the symbols to be used, and explain their meaning. The Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest, started in 1989 to reinforce the Xantolo tradition, is organized by the townspeople in a community-based form called *tequio*⁸, as part of the Xantolo ritual on the eve of November 1. The rest of the Xantolo program from October 30 to November 3 has remained the same.

A local schoolteacher decided that the new tradition (the oxymoron is intentional) of the Miss Cempoalxóchitl beauty pageant should use folk costumes as cultural markers to revitalize the tradition and its symbols. This decision followed Miss Universe and Miss World contest models, used since 1962 and 1971, respectively. Traditional folk costumes in Mexico have been of lesser use because the cultural policies, since the 19th century, have insisted on assimilation and integration of the indigenous population into the mainstream culture. These efforts included modern and western clothes. The old folk costumes were taken to the anthropological museum. All around Mexico people using folk costumes were regarded as backward, and this was one of the reasons to abandon this type of clothes. Even if some people still feel comfortable using them, the majority of people living in rural areas have been modernizing their costumes, replacing folk costumes with western clothing style, introduced by modernization processes of the state and as an impact of the diaspora. The Huastec woman's costume, or Nahua costume from La Huasteca,⁹ consists of a blouse and a skirt, hand-embroidered with monochromatic local endemic types of flowers, deer, and birds, and shows the modesty of the Huastec people and their strong connection to nature. Now only old and mainly monolingual women from La Huasteca make and use them to differentiate themselves from the rest of the population (Figures 6, 7). The old folk costumes were discarded as ritual clothing for the pageant and new ritual clothing was designed for the purpose.

To revive the old tradition, the schoolteacher started to design new representative regional folk costumes, dresses extravagantly adorned with natural and cultural symbols of La Huasteca also used in altars and dances, not only inspired by them, but partially made by using dried corn leaves and flowers, and with headdresses made of natural feathers. Small straw huts, clay pots, guitars, and violins decorate some of the dresses (Fig. 8). But the designs are renewed every year. These new costumes, used only for the Miss Cempoalxóchitl catwalk on November 1, have become ritual folk costumes as they use cultural and natural products of La Huasteca in the traditional festivity on November 1. Hobsbawm (2012) acknowledges that tradition may be invented and can be a recent production. The Miss Cempoalxóchitl pageant is already an established tradition, formalized and ritualized through 26 years of repetition.

The new costumes have slender shapes that emphasize Mexican women's bodies. The dresses worn by the young ladies in Tehuetlán in 2011 were in-



Figure 8. *Miss Cempoalxóchitl 2011 Beauty Pageant, planned for months and performed in modern catwalk style. Although it is covered in the media, it remains a very local event. The US American influence is evident in the attempt to foster an authentic, old cultural identity. Tehuetlán, Hidalgo, Mexico. Photograph by Rosa Isela Aguilar Montes de Oca 2011.*

spired by the natural and cultural components of the Xantolo ritual: a dress skirt formed as a cempoalxóchitl flower, dresses in the color of cempoalxóchitl or with many flowers, traditional black and white shawls around the waistline and the wrists, colorful ribbons holding hair, clay and golden earrings and colorful golden or flowered necklaces, and a hand-painted skirt depicting the production of clay pots and Huastecos in traditional costumes making corn tortillas, the traditional Mexican food. One of the dresses was hand-embroidered with red, pink, and blue flowers. The most impressive decorations of the dresses were the pre-Hispanic symbols, used by the Toltecs and Aztecs at important ceremonies, such as different kinds of crests (*tocado*): a corn crest with flowers, a palm crest with clay candle holders and small clay pottery, and a feathered crest (*penacho*) with golden decorations. Rattles of shell-like seeds were worn round the ankles.¹⁰ An arrow with small guitars, violins, and masks and flowers attached to it; another with corn leaves, flowers and pottery; and excelling over all, an arrow with an abstract representation of Quetzalcóatl, one of the most important Mesoamerican gods, the feathered serpent, the morning star, the founder of the Toltec Empire (Florescano 2002). Quetzalcóatl dominated the scene with a necklace of cempoalxóchitl and different kinds of feathers. The stage was also decorated with flowers, candles, and clay pots.

THE ROLES OF THE NEW FOLK COSTUMES: AN OLD CULTURAL IDENTITY

The Quetzalcóatl myth is strongly related to agriculture, the cultivation of corn, because serpent and bird attributes together indicate the germinating powers of the Earth and creativity of Heaven. Serpents and rain are related in indigenous mythology. Birds are related to the creative powers of Heaven and the feathers of the feathered serpent are from the most beautiful bird in the rainforest, the quetzal, and imply magnificence, splendor, and wealth of Mesoamerican villages. They represent the regeneration of vegetation (Florescano 2002). The Nahua mythology created a legendary Toltecan civilization, guided by their god Quetzalcóatl – the inventors of the calendar, astronomy, writing, agriculture, sciences, and arts, who were the ancestors of the Aztecs and the Chichimecas, those who inherited the great knowledge of Quetzalcóatl (Florescano 1990). Quetzalcóatl appears on the stage of the Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest together with goddesses of the pre-Hispanic era to teach, exactly on the Day of the Dead, the life cycle (which implies death). The god teaches his wisdom, mainly the cyclic calendar and the secrets of agriculture. The Day of the Dead is a harvest festivity, the end of the agricultural cycle. If the wisdom of Quetzalcóatl is adopted, the probability to have a rich harvest increases. It is important for the young generation to learn from these historic lessons, to know how to use the calendar and agricultural knowledge of the region. Then Miss Cempoalxóchitl delineates the relationship with the Huastec ancestors – the Toltecs. The Huastecos draw a non-interrupted history, a connection with the Toltecs up to the settlement of the Huastecos on the territory of La Huasteca. Cyclical time – past, present, and future – in La Huasteca is a real form of existence and not just a *Blut und Boden* primordialism (not only kinship and territorial primordialism), as Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro (2014) assert about some ontologies.

This cultural heritage allows the Huastecos to use feather headdresses, arrows, and rattles; to speak Náhuatl; to follow the life cycle to plant, harvest, and consume Huastec products; to protect the endemic fauna and appreciate the beauty of local flowers; to keep alive the modeling of clay pots and figures; to create and perform Huastec lyrics and Huastec music played by violins and small guitars. The renewed Huastec identity defines them as a population living in perfect harmony with nature. The Huastecos perform and hand down their oral tradition and cultural heritage to the next, younger generation, within a limited geographical space, La Huasteca region. And to accomplish these tasks, they use traditional costumes, in this case both old and new, a combination of tradition and modernity.

Identity construction serves to differentiate oneself from other cultural groups, such as the Huastecos or Nahuas in other states. This differentiation can be of use when receiving economic resources from the state or to distinguish themselves from mestizos. In recent decades, indigenous identity has become important to receive scholarships from the Mexican Educational Institution (SEP) and support for the project of rural development. But it has been of use due to the indigenous empowerment from the state in the agrarian policies pursued in the decade of 1970 (Gabbert 2001).

XANTOLO: CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MISS CEMPOALXÓCHITL BEAUTY PAGEANT

When fostering the Xantolo ritual, the Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest reinvigorates local economy and the social networks in Tehuetlán. Geographically well located, it connects the cities of Huazalingo, Huejutla, and Tlanchinol, and is an important way to Veracruz and San Luis Potosí (Vargas del Ángel 2010). The community works for the ritual for several months ahead and some of the outcomes represent the reactivation of local economy, such as the production of symbolic items needed to decorate *ofrendas* and altars and to perform dances. The Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest starts on June 24, the day of Saint John, which marks the beginning of the sowing season, extends to the harvest season in October, and ends on November 3, when the last dead leave. Small and big towns of the entire La Huasteca region profit from this celebration. Some communities are specialized in the manufacturing of pottery; others make masks, candles, guitars, violins, fireworks, and costumes. Some people are hired as musicians, many as dancers, some offer their workforce to build arches for the altars, and some others to light the fireworks. From other cities come vendors who bring (US American) hamburgers, Spanish *churros* (snack of fried sweet dough), and Mexican fried bananas. The locals sell their corn specialties: *enchiladas*, *tostadas*, and *morelianas*.¹¹ Funfairs come to town because the Xantolo is also a fair for children. Not only the usual products are needed for the Xantolo; new products also have to be manufactured for the Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest: the stage, the dresses, the headdresses. Camera men, stage managers, and photographers are hired for the contest, even if it remains a local event. There are no tourists, but the families want to record the moments in videos and photographs as memories. After the pageant, a community dance event and a semi-formal dinner party are announced. Informal vendors are also there to offer local specialties.

The Xantolo serves to reunite families and to reinforce kinship ties; it is much more important than Christmas in La Huasteca. The organization of the contest that starts months before is also an opportunity to reinforce networks, to work together with the community in this cultural project. Community members meet on three previous Saturday market days, in the center of the town, where they go to buy special products for the festivity. On the last Saturday they go to bakeries to get the appreciated sweet bread from Tehuetlán, which is served to the members of the family who visit. The family members in town work together. Children meet several times when they go to mills to grind corn to make dough for making tortillas and tamales. And the family members together prepare tamales and handmade chocolate bars.

The Miss Cempoalxóchitl pageant has introduced a new form of networking within the town. Many girls visit homes months before to introduce themselves, to tell about their connections with their culture and their hometown. They are looking for sponsors and distribute gifts to gain people's approval for the pageant. Only five girls are selected for the final round. In the afternoon, the community gathers in the center of the town to encourage and cheer the young participants. The spectators are all excited and enthusiastically talk about their feelings, the girls, and the dresses. On the catwalk the young women in magnificent dresses talk about their experiences with people from La Huasteca region, the tradition of Xantolo, and its symbols. One of them is declared Señorita Cempoalxóchitl, the other four acting as her princesses. After the contest, the happy community enjoys the local food and music.

The community has no economic resources to organize the Xantolo project with music, dances, and the Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest independently. The investment is an agreement between the community, the bigger shops (*grandes negocios*) in town, and the municipality. In 2011 the Xantolo investment amounted to about 150,000 pesos (8900 US dollars, currency exchange rate of 13.09.2015). It means an annual investment of about 2 US dollars per person. The municipality's participation was 25,000 pesos (1485 US dollars). The rest was mainly the contribution of the big shops in town. The shops contribute and expect as compensation the continuation of the political party voting machine. The negative outcome is the reinforcement of the *cacicazgo*¹² system in the region. The population accepts this asymmetrical agreement with shops and institutions (which normally are the same families) in order to perform the Xantolo ritual and to reinvigorate their local mixed economy. The Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest increases the dependency of the population on big shops, yet they use this opportunity to allure the members of the family in the diaspora by the attractive American, urban, modern discourse, to foster the cultural identity in the diaspora, and to show them that it is possible to be part

of Huasteco diaspora, and urban and rural, modern and traditional Huastecos at the same time. The remembrance of dead family members touches the deeper sense of being, bringing the members of the diaspora home once a year.

The Miss Cempoalxóchitl beauty pageant serves to modernize the representation of gender and gender roles in town. The new ritual folk costumes promote the Huastec identity, but they are not related to monolingual women. Miss Cempoalxóchitl embodies the US American ideal of womanhood: modern, stylized, beautiful, tall, thin, and white-skinned. Its dresses are adjusted to the bodies of more modern, western young women. But at the same time old attributes of a good woman are reinforced: her role as the custodian of the culture, femininity, gracefulness, and orientation to family and housewifeliness. Both traditional and modern gender representations can be found in town. Most of the women decorate the altars and cook for the festivity, but some of them present themselves as Toltecan goddesses on the catwalk.

CONCLUSIONS

This example shows that the revitalization of an old tradition can be done through the construction of a new one. The Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest is a new tradition with new costumes to revitalize an old tradition, Xantolo, and an old identity, Huasteco. Since 1989, Xantolo rituals have had three components in Tehuetlán: altars, dances, and the Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest. Together, they foster the cultural heritage. The new costumes open up possibilities for shaping an original identity, directly related to the Toltecs, in which time and space coincide and permit a real connection with La Huasteca territory. Hence, all this reinforces the Huasteco identity. The cultural authenticity of this annual reunion with the dead works against the effects of US American influence and revitalizes the sense of community and regional economy.

The Xantolo ritual instigates the creativity of the community; every year new folk dresses are designed with natural and cultural symbols from La Huasteca. It helps to renew kinship and community ties through a well-established reciprocity system, and to bring families together. It brings jobs to smaller and bigger communities during half a year period, when different towns in the region are busy preparing products for the ritual.

The paradox in this story is that the cultural influence from abroad, which was supposed to be undesirable for the local tradition of Xantolo, has actually fostered the tradition. This example shows that culture is a continuous transcultural process. Even if on the outside the ritual seems to be unchangeable, except for the Miss Cempoalxóchitl pageant, changes are constantly taking

place. Based on their experiences, the inhabitants of Tehuetlán have introduced some cultural characteristics of the United States into their town, and so has the media. The Mexican masks and costumes are charged with Halloween and everyday costumes from abroad, such as cowboys and Comanches, and even the representation of death. Women's daily dresses have also changed. The change of women's folk costumes for the representation of Miss Cempoalxóchitl, as well as modern gender representations and gender roles, is the result of transcultural processes, mainly that of Miss Universe and Miss World contests. This process of modernization through the Miss Cempoalxóchitl contest is by no means accepted by the entire community. For some – mainly those living outside Tehuetlán – this is not the right way to reinforce the traditions which should be purged from alien influence.

NOTES

- ¹ This paper is still in research phase and its findings are not yet conclusive.
- ² The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 ended the U.S. war with Mexico, when Mexico ceded a large part of its territory to the United States. Mexico needed then a national identity to prevent further invasions.
- ³ Marchi (2005) finds that the Mexican diaspora in the United States uses the Day of the Dead for political purposes in some other ways. The ritual is a form of communication for populations with restricted access to conventional media production. It is an opportunity for identity construction, education, or protest. It creates a sense of community and belonging, and increases opportunities for political communication to transmit information, to exchange ideas, and even to inspire community activism.
- ⁴ Those who died in water or were killed by lightning went to the paradise of Tláloc (the ruler of the heavens). They were not burned but buried and honored in the Tepeilhuitl festivity. The special dead and the god of fire, Xiutecuhtli, were honored during the month of Izcalli, the last month in the Aztec calendar. In this ritual five tamales were offered in five different graves. Afterwards, the tamales had to be eaten.
- ⁵ Aztecs prepare *tamalli* (the Náhuatl word for tamales): steaming corn meal wrapped in corn leaves. Tamales are stuffed with different stews around Latin America (Pradeau 1974).
- ⁶ Náhuatl is the language of the Aztecs, the direct descendant of Toltecs. In La Huasteca the local variation is called Náhuatl de la Huasteca (Valle Esquivel 2003).
- ⁷ This conflict between Comanches and cowboys originates from the United States, but the relationship with the Xantolo ritual in Tehuetlán has not been analyzed.
- ⁸ *Tequio* (*kwatekwitl* in Náhuatl, also called *faena*, *faina*, or *fagina*, depending on the ethnical group) is work without economic compensation under the supervision of local authorities in order to improve the community (De la Fuente 1944).

- ⁹ Nahua de la Huasteca is another name to refer to Huastecos, who speak the Huastec version of the Náhuatl language (Valle Esquivel 2003).
- ¹⁰ Rattles from chalchahuite or ayoyote shells (*conchas o cascabeles*) produce a kind of pre-Columbian music that complements the steps of the Aztec concheros dances. But according to Vento (1994) these dances started after the Spanish conquest, when natives were allowed to perform their dances in the courtyards of churches to honor saints and virgins.
- ¹¹ Corn specialties in a variation of forms that usually combine corn dough, beans paste, chili sauce, cheese, and vegetables.
- ¹² *Cacicazgo* is defined as a Mexican informal political leadership of a *cacique*, parallel to the state, which holds an arbitrary control of a group of individuals. Historically, some indigenous peoples in Mexico were organized in cacicazgos due to the agrarian policies of the 19th century (Friedrich 1965). Caciques originally held a position within the Aztec aristocracy, along with local chiefs, military officers, tribute collectors, priests, judicial authorities, and miscellaneous state officials. The local community chief was called *Tlatohuani* (plural *Tlatoque*). These leaders were recognized by the Spanish politicians, during the colonial era, as caciques (Gibson 1960). During the revolution, some servicemen regarded themselves as caciques, and more recently caciques have been affiliated to political parties and hold formal or informal control of small towns (Falcón 1983).

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WEAVING THE PAST IN A FABRIC: OLD BELIEVERS' TRADITIONAL COSTUME

Cristina Clopot

Abstract: Costume plays an important part in expressing ethnic identity. This article develops an analysis of the Old Believers' traditional costume in its current usage. To differentiate between various uses for such material items, the article considers their active use, embedded in rituals and ceremonial life, and a passive use, as exhibits in a museum. The ethnic costume is still preserved in the community for religious rituals. Older cuts and materials are used for costumes worn by choir groups in their performances at social and cultural events to represent their identity. The evolution and modernisation of the different costume pieces today are considered through examples drawn from my ethnographic research with Old Believers' communities in Romania.

Keywords: costume, ethnicity, heritage, identity, meta-cultural productions, Old Believers, Romania

INTRODUCTION

It was January 7, 2015, and Old Believers across Romania were celebrating Christmas according to the Julian calendar. My partner and I were in the northern part of Romania, sitting at the Christmas table with representatives of three generations of Old Believers. While enjoying traditional Russian dishes customary for this celebration, we were discussing different topics, sharing memories and experiences. Prolonged discussions were encouraged by the fact that this holy day, like all holy days, came with a prohibition to work – a rule usually respected in the community. Among talk about suitable recipes, traditions, and the future of the community, the discussion then took a turn back to the 1989 revolution and the changes it had brought about. The revolution marked the end of the 45 years of communist rule and the beginning of democracy in Romania, a process which generated significant changes in all walks of life. Anton¹, one of my informants, started telling a story about an Old Believer living in the northern side of the country. Lake Fälticeni, now at the border of the homonymous city, was created artificially during the communist period. Some time after the revolution, an Old Believer from a nearby village, who

had a piece of land near the lake, came to work on his land and saw people sunbathing, in skimpy bathing suits. He was dressed in a traditional manner, with a *rubashka* (long-sleeved shirt without a collar) and a *poias* (handmade belt), in the sizzling 40-degree summer sun. People were standing there in swimsuits. Anton said: “He crossed himself – the apocalypse had arrived; he had never seen such a thing”. We all laughed. As Anton further explained, Old Believers lived in secluded villages and they rarely met other people. It was thus quite a shock for this conservative Old Believer to see these people, especially in such a state of undress.

This is just a glimpse into the numerous discussions I have had with different Old Believers during my fieldwork, but it helps to set the tone for this article. The mismatch between globalised mainstream population and the conservative Old Believers’ imaginary speaks for some of the ideas discussed here. As Daniel Miller writes in his book *Stuff*, “the concept of the person, the sense of the self, the experience of being an individual, are radically different at different times and in different places, partly in relation to differences in clothing” (Miller 2010: 40).

The analysis presents some of the findings from an extensive doctoral research conducted in Romania as a multi-sited ethnographic study. The fieldwork was carried out during 2014–2015, following the ‘yo-yo’ method (Wulff 2002), which included participant observation and interviews as main research methods. The sites covered in my research included villages in Moldavia (Focuri, Manolea, Fălticeni, Târgu Frumos) and Dobruja (Jurilovca, Slava Rusa, Tulcea).

Before starting the analysis of these material expressions, a short review of this ethnic group’s history is necessary to set the context of this discussion and understand the current living circumstances and the attitudes of Old Believers towards materiality.

THE HISTORY OF THE OLD BELIEF

The timeline of events relevant to Old Believers starts somewhere at the end of the 16th century, a time historians refer to as the Time of Troubles (Pascal 1963). It was the era when the developing Russia got into a systemic crisis followed by several waves of invasion of Polish and Sweden forces as well as internal rebellions, famine, and mass death. A movement for religious and moral redemption of the once glorious Russian state was started, with an aim of establishing Russia as the ‘Third Rome’ (Druzhelyubov 2007). Discrepancies appeared between the way people saw Christianity and the manner in which the Church understood it. At a political level, a movement of political centrali-

sation and subordination of the Church to the Monarchy was the primary aim of the monarchs. The aim of religious and administrative leaders was to align church books and Orthodox practices with the Byzantine ones.

Later, in 1654, the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church convened, and Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich and Patriarch Nikon of Moscow and all the Rus' formally presented the changes proposed. Apart from revisions of the liturgical books, Nikon's reforms included ritual changes (Druzhelyubov 2007). These efforts were resisted by the conservative opposition, who considered that these changes altered the 'pure' form of Orthodoxy that had been practised in Russia since the introduction of Christianity in the 10th century.

A countermovement was thus set in motion whilst the authorities pushed forward the reforms. Key years in this timeline were 1666–1667, when the old books were formally interdicted, and after this moment the Old Believers were considered heretics (Meyendorff 1991). A system of punishments and fines was imposed on those who continued to practise the former beliefs. In an effort to preserve their old way of life, the Old Believers moved towards the periphery of the Russian land and beyond.

Old Believers' response to these innovations was not unanimous, however. Different views on reforms drove people to form several groups. Although they adopted diverse stances, they all shared the ground belief that these innovations were not welcome. The two major groups that appeared are called *Popovtsy* and *Bespopovtsy*. The groups in the former category recognised priests as leaders of their community, while the latter were priestless. Among the priestless communities, some took a radical stance against innovation. Believing that the world was taken over by Antichrist and no order can be recognised any longer, they engaged in mass suicide, believing fire would purify their soul. The *Bespopovtsy* branch was not uniform though; these people were separated into different small communities such as *Pomortsy*, *Fedoseevtsy*, *Filippovtsy*, and others.

As a result of these turbulent times, and in an effort to carry on their way of life and observe their religious beliefs, Old Believers migrated to the periphery of the Russian Empire, or left Russia altogether, spreading across the world. Today Old Believer communities can be found in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Bulgaria, but also outside Europe in countries such as Canada, the United States, and Australia.

Old Belief was not accepted officially for a long time. It was only in 1905 that the last Russian tsar issued an edict of toleration, which included Old Belief.

Throughout the 18th century into the beginning of the 19th century, Old Believers migrated to the current territory of Romania, which at that time was divided between the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires (Prygarine 2004). A discerning note needs to be made here for the Nekrasov Cossacks from

the Don area, which researchers place in the Dobruja area (Fenoghen 1998; Fenoghen & Fenoghen 2004). Prygarine (2004) mentions Vetka and Starodub surroundings as a starting and transfer point of migrations, with 1820–1830 marked as a peak in migration. Ipatiov (2001) also indicates Vetka, Don, and Kuban as centres gathering Old Believers from a wider area that includes Moscow and its surroundings (Kostroma, Vladimir) as well as Orel, Voronezh, and Saratov.

According to the latest census, there are about 23,000 Old Believers today in Romania, which is one of the smaller ethnic groups in this multicultural country. The Hungarian ethnic community, by comparison, is formed by 1,238,000 people, who live throughout the country. The largest communities of Old Believers are concentrated in Moldavia (north-eastern area of the country) and the Danube Delta (the south-east).

CLOTHING AND IDENTITY

Researchers have often signalled a link between clothing, ethnic identity, and heritage. As reflected in the short historical overview, strong links are drawn between identity and religion for Old Believers, echoing Bhikhu Parekh's argument that "their religious identity constitutes the axis of their lives and provides the overarching framework within which they define and relate their other identities" (Parekh 2007: 133). Old Believers' spirituality also guides their appreciation of style. Style, as Webb Keane argues, "allows one to recognize, across indefinitely many further occasions, instances of 'the same thing'" (Keane 2005: 196).

Intricate, multi-layered, at times fragmented heritage processes are accommodated within a community. As Kristin Kuutma (2013: 6–7) argues, "This reflects the complexities of how communities define and negotiate memory and identity, how they communicate and engage with each other".

Consequently, it does not come as a surprise that the costume is also entangled in different processes at the same time. Firstly, I would note there is a passive use of costume: it stands to represent ethnic identity as tangible cultural heritage. Clothing items are presented as artefacts included in museums across Romania or in other countries with Old Believers' communities such as Estonia (the Old Believers' museum in Kolkja). They stand, as Antonio Arantes describes them, as "meta-cultural realities; in other words, they become official representations of current representations and practices" (Arantes 2013: 40). As representations of Old Believer identity they are disengaged from the social

Figure 1. Lestovka, Old Believer rosary. Photograph by Cristina Clopot, Moldavia area, June 2014.



life. They come to represent what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes as “the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 369). “Exhibition endows heritage thus conceived with a second life” (ibid.).

Costumes serve an active role within the community, when they are embedded in existing social practices. In this sense, they represent a tradition being carried forward along the lines of the definition of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). As Article 2 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention mentions, “this intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity” (UNESCO 2003).

The different elements of costumes, both for men and women, are usually handmade. An example is the *poias*, the woven belt worn by Old Believers after they are baptised. Artisans in different communities crochet or weave these belts on improvised looms, then sell them at church or in their village. Sometimes, skilled artisans become known throughout Romania and can receive orders from across the country.

A further element to be considered here, linked with traditional crafts understood under the umbrella of the ICH, is the *lestovka*, the rosary. This ethno-

confessional symbol has powerful symbolic properties and Old Believers take it with them for church masses (Fig. 1). Every element of this object, from the larger triangles to the smaller beads, is symbolic. Each corner of the triangles stands for an evangelist, the first larger node on the string counts the time that Christ has spent in the Virgin's womb, the next thirty-three for the number of years spent on earth, while the last seventeen stand for the seventeen prophets that announced his coming. There are two varieties of *lestovka* currently available, one made from artificial crocheted beads, another made of genuine or faux leather. In the main, the former seems to be the one preferred in Romania; the genuine leather ones found during fieldwork were either gifts from outside the country, or kept from long ago.

In the next section I will mainly focus on the active role of costume within the Old Believers' community, although parallels with museum displays will be drawn from time to time to illustrate shifts in meaning or representation.

SEMIOTICS AND CLOTHING

The ideas in this paper draw, partially, from Webb Keane's development of Charles Peirce's semiotics (Keane 2003, 2005a). As Keane argues, interpretation depends on the context, linked with the social imaginary, to categorise what is deemed an appropriate feature for an object. Keane uses the idea of a 'semiotic ideology', which he describes as "people's background assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world" (Keane 2003: 419). Old Believers' semiotic ideologies are rooted in their inheritance – the rules and regulations their ancestors observed in Russia.

Yet, such systems are not stable, unchanging constructs. The openness of significations means that, as Keane (2005a: 190) argues, "objects bring the potential for new realizations into new historical contexts". While this openness represents a threat to existing semiotic ideologies, Keane emphasises the relative stability of the former. Moreover, he argues for a social analysis of objects, not only objects themselves. "We must be attentive to the ways in which they are (for the time being) regimented and brought into relation to other things – much of this being the task of social power" (Keane 2005a: 193). Old Believers' current semiotic ideologies are also in transformation in Romania today and, as outlined further later in the essay, new realisations appear. Can these be interpreted as shifts in acceptable norms or are they more likely to be interpreted as 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm 1992)?

RELIGIOUS COSTUME

Costume is acknowledged here as a semiotic channel between the material and spiritual self. Materiality is not a simple matter of describing the object; for instance, it offers glimpses into Old Believers' religious imaginary, bringing to light the value of purity. As such it offers insights into the "particular associations between visible and invisible, presence and absence, and making people's relationship with the divine immanent and intimate" (Naumescu 2011: 11). Clothing is linked with moral norms; following Keane's ideas, "the ways in which people handle and value material goods may be implicated in how they interpret words, and vice versa... Their treatment of things and words both reflect certain underlying assumptions about the world and the beings that inhabit it" (Keane 2005b: 4). The cautious examples he offers in changing of clothes as signifying more than changes of identity might be reflected for Old Believers too, as changes in clothing are sometimes associated with innovations in rituals and seen as problematic to continuity. Following Keane, again "this cluster of habits, expectations, and constrained possibilities is the outcome of several operations of semiotic regimentation and stabilization" (ibid.: 11).

The elements of an Old Believer woman's religious costume encountered during fieldwork varied, based on the area in which they originated. In Dobruja area, I encountered both two-piece suits, with a shirt and a skirt, *iubka*, as well as long dresses with or without straps, which they addressed as *shubka*. The dresses with straps, seen in villages in Dobruja, have a high waist, resembling the *Dunaiki shubka* or *talichka* models described by Patricia Johnson (1983) in her study of American Old Believers. Costumes are often crafted with bright colours and elaborate patterns for both the shirt and kerchief. Ipatiov (2001) notes that the use of vivid colours relates to life's joys. At times, the skirt would have one or two lines of lace sewn across the lower part. Some informants from the southern part of the country indicated the number was different for married and unmarried women, but informants from the northern side of the country had no knowledge thereof (see Fig. 2).²

In other villages there was a preference for a custom-made long wide skirt and a blouse. For head coverings, the two main elements encountered during fieldwork included the *kichka* and *sbornik*, which act as signs that a woman is married. The manner in which the *sbornik* is made differs from one side of the country to the other. The models observed from Dobruja resembled a small cap, to be placed over a loop of hair at the back. The models observed in the northern side of the country covered a greater proportion of a woman's head,



Figure 2. Old Believers during the Easter service when the priest blesses the Easter bread pasca and dyed eggs. Photograph by Cristina Clopot, Moldavia area, May 2015.



Figure 3. Old Believers in religious costumes gathered for St. Mary's celebration. Photograph by Cristina Clopot, Tulcea County, August 2015.

resembling a bonnet. These elements can be stitched or adorned with different beads, based on the capacities of the artisans. The *kichka* is an additional bonnet, simpler in conformation, placed on a woman's head at the marriage ceremony for the first time.

A special type of kerchief mentioned during fieldwork was the *kosynka*, described by Johnson (1983) as *kasyak*. Similar to the data she presents, my informants have indicated that the three folds of this plain scarf symbolise the Holy Trinity. However, most often, Old Believers would wear a colourful kerchief to cover their head, often coordinated with the colour of the costume. Such kerchiefs are usually part of a woman's inheritance, and women informants indicate that they own even 50–100 kerchiefs, once worn by their mothers or grandmothers.

For men, the specific elements are the *rubashka*, the long sleeved shirt with a low collar, the woven belt, and pants. Men are not allowed to cover their head in church. During fieldwork I noticed that some people in certain situations do not wear these types of clothes, which need to be custom-made (Fig. 3), but dress in modern clothes as long as they respect the length rules, pointing to some shifts in what is deemed appropriate attire in the Old Believers' semiotic ideology. In terms of geographic differences, informants indicated that while in the northern part of the country the *rubashka* can be embroidered anywhere on the fabric, in Dobruja it would only have embroidery elements on the collar or the cuffs.

A further element mentioned during research was the *poddevka*, a long black coat resembling the *kaftan*. This is rarely used by common people today, but still worn to church by people who read during the services, as well as deacons and priests.

Yet, while skirts and shirts and trousers might not follow the old patterns, the presence of the woven belt, *poias*, is a constant (Fig. 4). Linked with the symbolic separation of good and bad within the body in the Old Believers' imaginary, it is considered an essential marker of the Old Believer identity. The *poias* is the only clothing item which I was not allowed to wear, as I was not christened in the Old Belief tradition. These belts are handmade by local artisans, usually with the help of an improvised loom. Colours vary upon preference; usually the colours chosen are very bright. In the northern part of the country, in villages in Suceava and Iasi counties, informants indicated that, for weddings, the *poias* needed to be white.

An interesting discovery during fieldwork was that for a person's death, a long white shirt was prepared. The cloth that would cover a dead person's body used to be hand-sewn, without any knots (Liashchenko & Khriukina 2006). My informants resembled this burial item with a shroud. The semiotics



Figure 4. The traditional belt, *poias*, worn both by women and men.
Photograph by Cristina Clopot, Moldavia area, June 2014.

of death for Old Believers is a complicated subject and its consideration is not possible in this limited space. The key idea that bears relevance to my analysis here is the consideration given not only to the objects themselves but also to their production to reflect spiritual processes.

As Juha Pentikäinen (1999: 25) argued about Old Believers in Estonia, “a costume is as sacred as one’s soul, which cannot be sold or given to another person outside the family”. In this sense the close link between a person and their clothes was revealed by the ritual of burning their clothes after their death, a practice which seems to be less popular today as clothes are instead offered as alms to other persons.

Moreover, the artisans I have spoken with have also emphasised the link with spirituality in the fabrication of both the *poias* and the *lestovka*. These objects are considered religious items, and during their production the craftspeople is supposed to continuously pray. The diminishing numbers of craftspeople in Old Believers’ communities result in difficulties in procuring these religious objects, and people sometimes order them from hundreds of kilometres away. At bigger celebrations, such as the one portrayed in Figure 3, women brought such objects to sell at dedicated tables set in the church courtyard. Other people

also informed me that the church would be an appropriate site to order such an item or simply buy one.

To this day, Old Believers hold clothes designated for going to church separate from the rest of their wardrobe. Clearly delimitating the secular from the sacred, an Old Believer would wear selected items only to church. Other sets of similar clothes can be worn in everyday lives, but they become impure and are not deemed appropriate to be worn to church. A person's purity of the soul should be mirrored in materiality as well.

WEDDING COSTUME

An important rite of passage, in the sense documented by Arnold van Gennep (1996) and Victor Turner (1969), is the wedding. Materiality in this case plays an important role to signify the status change for the female Old Believer through accessories (Figs. 5–6). During the religious wedding ceremony, the service is stopped, the bride is unveiled, her hair is braided and a *kichka* (a white bonnet, symbol of a married woman) (Fig. 7) and a *sbornik* (a second bonnet) are placed on her head, followed by a white kerchief. The kerchief with its three corners symbolises the Holy Trinity. From this moment on the woman is supposed to cover her head at all times. In reality, however, such accessories are noticed only when going to church in the northern part of the country and more regularly for celebrations in the southern part of the country. The only women who seem to diligently follow these principles are priests' wives, who cover their heads both in public and private spaces.

As portrayed in Figure 5, Old Believers have come a long way from the old wedding costumes. This was the case with the wedding I attended in Manolea, a small Old Believers' village in the northern part of Romania, in the summer of 2014. The bride's attire did not conform to Old Believers' traditional costume with a skirt and a long-sleeved coat; it was a modern wedding dress and following the above-mentioned rules she covered her arms with a silky bolero. Yet, the traditional accessories were also present here – the *poias* and the *lestovka*, the rosary. Her attire did not meet consensus, however, and an older Old Believer woman asked her prior to leaving home whether such innovations were acceptable. The bride jokingly resolved the situation saying that “if [the priest] says something I'll tell him I couldn't afford more material”.

This example adds another thread to the debate between modernity and tradition. How are such issues settled? Before going into these arguments I will briefly look at a third example of costume use.



Figures 5–6. *Wedding costumes old and new. Photographs by Cristina Clopot, Moldavia area, July 2015.*





Figure 7. *Putting the kichka on during a wedding ceremony.*
Photograph by Cristina Clopot, Moldavia area, July 2015.

SECULAR COSTUMES AND INVENTED TRADITIONS

Ipatiov (2001) indicates the traditional secular celebration costume for Old Believers included a *sarafan* type of dress. With some variations in cut across the country, this long dress was commonplace. Such costumes, however, are rarely seen in Old Believers' communities today. Yet, with the efforts made to reclaim their heritage following the post-communist period, Old Believers have revived a costume which they refer to as *sarafan* for choirs or dancing groups across the country. Putting forward claims to authenticity, such groups use these items as markers of Old Believer identities. These costumes, however, are made on the basis of a stereotypical version of the Russian costume generalising and simplifying different elements and as such are reconstructions of dresses perceived as Russian to display ethnic identity on stage (Figs. 8–9). At times, choir groups opt to have two-piece costumes, with a long skirt and a blouse, sometimes made of taffeta or velvet. When asked about these elements, informants' narratives often argue that as these costumes were designed in the style of original models, they could be considered traditional. They are also used to reflect Russian ethnic identity when such groups are called to entertain tourists or promote their ethnic heritage in minority groups' special events,



Figure 8. Choir performing in traditional costumes at a festival in Romania.
Photograph by Cristina Clopot, Tulcea County, August 2015.



Figure 9. Singer performing on stage, wearing a reconstructed Russian costume with a long dress and a kokoshnik. Photograph by Cristina Clopot, Tulcea County, August 2015.

such as the National Minorities' Day each December. To the uninformed eye, these elements might as well be traditional, yet other 'innovations' in terms of clothing indicate towards redefinitions of what is traditional. Often performing groups wear large shawls to cover their shoulders, usually models with large flowers, vividly coloured, with tassels. Informants mentioned at times that such objects have traditional Russian models, albeit their labels often mark 'Made in Turkey'. What further elements of constructing a Russian image can be accommodated here?

As Hobsbawm argues, "Traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" (Hobsbawm 1992: 1). One 'traditional' item that drew my attention was the head accessory known as the *kokoshnik*, an elaborate beaded piece. Such headdresses are also used by performers to express their Russianness. These elements, together with the costumes, are handmade by skilled craftspeople. These pointed items have, at times, elaborate beaded embroidery elements on the rigid arch, while in the front of the item a pattern of crocheted beads covers the forehead, sometimes a couple of beaded threads fall down the sides. The headdress is tied at the back with a lace. Colours vary from monochrome to multicoloured elements. According to available sources, there is little indication such elements were part of the traditional costume of Old Believers originating from the southern part of the Russian Empire, yet fieldwork has shown they have become rather popular. During fieldwork I have seen these elements used in performances in different secular events across the country, either organised by the community or by other institutions.

Can these innovations, especially the last example, be interpreted under the umbrella of Hobsbawm's ideas about the 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm 1992)?

Ullrich Kockel (2007: 21) argues that "the defining elements of tradition are not that it is old and unchanged, but that it consists of skills and knowledge handed down in a continuous process and for a continuously meaningful purpose". Moreover, going back to Webb Keane's ideas, semiotic ideologies are contingent on their particular contexts and, as contexts shift, existing repertoires of usage can get changed due to the openness of significations (Keane 2005a).

Problems appear, in my view, when favour shifts from original social use and centuries-old semiotic ideologies to metacultural productions and staging of heritage to suggest Russian ethnicity.

How easily can we differentiate between modern reconstructions and authentic traditions? Maybe the following example from my fieldwork will provide further layers to this argument. When speaking with a female Old Believer about traditional clothing during a secular celebration in a city, she pondered

on how the religious costume could be perceived as out of place in a cosmopolitan city: “Do you imagine us going around in the city with the kerchiefs on our heads, in our long skirts? I did not know what streets to go on to hide when I went to church in my hometown, let alone here.” In such urban places the kerchief is more fashionably worn as a scarf rather than on the head, or as converted into a modern skirt. Commodification brings a new layer to this discussion. Following Nezar AlSayyad, a question is well placed here of what happens when “the image of the thing replaces the thing itself” (AlSayyad 2007: 163). Is that the end of tradition? For him, this should not be equalled to an actual disappearance but “the end of our valuation and perception of it as a reservoir for a meaningful ‘authentic past’” (AlSayyad 2007: 165). But that stands in stark contrast to discourses which claim centuries-old continuity. Different layers of innovation, as exemplified earlier, seem to echo what Robert Crummey noted: “Old Belief was a complex combination of groups, institutions and tendencies that changed continually under a rubric of changelessness” (Crummey 1993: 710).

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NOTES

¹ Name changed to protect the identity of the informant.

² In the northern part of the country, in the villages that I visited, people name the skirt which has lace ribbon applications as *lenta*. Although the name stands to represent the lace only originally, in these areas it has become part of the local vernacular language to mark the skirt itself.

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NEKRASOV COSSACKS' FESTIVE CLOTHES: HISTORICAL CHANGES AND MODERN FUNCTIONS

Nina Vlaskina

Abstract: The Nekrasov Cossacks (or Nekrasovites) are an ethno-religious group remarkable for preserving their ancestors' heritage, especially the traditional costume, cuisine, and songs. Led by their ataman Ignat Nekrasov, in the 18th century, a group of the Cossack Old Believers left Russia to escape from religious and political persecution. For 250 years, they lived outside of their historical homeland and maintained limited contact with other ethnic groups. They returned to Russia in the 20th century.

This paper will study the transformation of Nekrasov Cossacks' costumes through the last two centuries, analyzing the contemporary use of the Cossack national costume on festive occasions, and interpreting the role of the Cossack national costume in heritage preservation processes. I will analyze the data derived from ethnographic and dialectological studies as well as my own ethno-linguistic field research in the Krasnodar and Stavropol krays (regions) in Russia.

The paper will focus on a depiction of the typical Nekrasov Cossack costume and the functional hierarchy of its elements; the declared immutability of the traditional costume vs. its actual transformations and reasons for those transformations; the modern functions of the Nekrasovites' costume as a symbol of identity for the members of the group, as well as a mass media stereotype.

Keywords: cultural dynamics, heritage, identity, Nekrasov Cossacks, Old Believers, traditional costume

INTRODUCTION

The Nekrasov Cossacks are an ethno-religious group remarkable for preserving their ancestors' heritage, especially traditional costume, food, and songs. Led by their ataman Ignat Nekrasov, in the 18th century, a group of the Cossack Old Believers left Russia, escaping from religious and political persecution. For 250 years, they lived outside of their historical homeland – primarily in Turkey and Romania – and maintained limited contacts with other ethnic groups. In the 20th century, they returned to Russia in several waves of migration.

The Nekrasov Cossacks' costume is connected with the history of this ethno-religious group. The formation of Cossack society began in the Don region in

the south of Russia. In the 16th and 17th centuries, this area was populated by groups from different provinces of southern Russia. A variety of factors led to the emergence of a specific regional variant of culture, combining ethnic peculiarities (the southern Russian and Ukrainian elements with some traits of the steppe nomadic Turkic cultures) and social ones (the Cossacks were, first and foremost, warriors). These factors included: life on the frontier, constant participation in military campaigns, emphasizing the value system of the male community, and the long-term coexistence of different ethnic groups in the same territory. While emigrating to Turkey in the late 18th century, after the rebellion of Kondraty Bulavin and his supporters, Cossack Old Believers, followers of Ignat Nekrasov, were already carriers of this specific type of culture. Accordingly, this group of Cossacks had clothes with elements peculiar to the southern Russian and Ukrainian costume.

In this article, I will briefly characterize the festive (worn primarily on weekends, calendrical festivals, for church services and weddings) and everyday traditional clothing of the Nekrasov Cossacks. I will focus on the main aspects of the transformation of traditional and festive clothing in the Turkish period, and after the Nekrasov Cossacks' return to the USSR (in the 1910s–1920s and in 1962); I will also show how the clothes (festive clothes mainly) became the spokesperson of the ideas of national identity and cultural heritage. I will show this process within the group, at the level of the members of the community, at the level of local institutions, and groups from outside.

The description of the costume and its use is based on the analysis of the ethnographic and dialectological publications, and expedition data collected by the researchers of the Southern Federal University and the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Humanities of the Southern Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 2007–2016 among the Nekrasov Cossacks in two regions of Russia: Krasnodar kray and Stavropol kray. I also used descriptions of 19th-century travelers and historical and ethnographic studies of the subject.

THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF NEKRASOV COSSACKS' COSTUME AND PARALLELS IN THE NEIGHBORING CULTURES

The first descriptions of Nekrasov Cossack clothes come from the English travelers William Hamilton (1842: 105–106) and Charles Mac Farlane (1850: 292), and were written in the middle of the 19th century. In the second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries, several Slavic travelers and ethnographers wrote about the Nekrasovites' everyday and festive costumes. They were Vasily Kelsiev (Ivanov-Zheludkov) (1866: 414, 424, 429, 437), V. Shchepotiev (1895:

562–583), Iakov Smirnov (1896: 9, 12, 29), Mikhail Ganko (*Mainosskie kazaki* 1899: 106), and Vladimir Minorsky (1902: 57–58).

Even a century ago, from the point of view of the authors mentioned above, the traditional dress was a representation of the Nekrasovites' identity and an evidence of their Russian origin. William Hamilton wrote, "The inhabitants still preserve their language and their dress" (Hamilton 1842: 105). In a similar homeward-looking vein, Ivanov-Zheludkov said, "The embroidery pattern of these shirts reminded me a lot of the drawings on our jars, on the old manuscript miniatures and the details of the Saint Basil's Cathedral" (Ivanov-Zheludkov 1866: 429). In a comment that well represents this viewpoint, the author of *Mainosskie kazaki* wrote, "All of them preserved their Cossack type and their folk dress" (*Mainosskie kazaki* 1899: 105).

Soviet and recent ethnographic expeditions to the Nekrasovites – who returned to Russia and settled in Krasnodar kray starting in 1920 and later, and in Stavropol kray in 1962 and later – made a detailed scientific description of the Nekrasovites' clothes possible. The most complete information about it can be found in the articles of Lydia Zhukova and Svetlana Bandurina (1986), Tatiana Abramova (1997; 2009), and Viktoria Lipinskaya (2011). Patricia White Johnson carried out a study of dress and acculturation among the Russian Old Believers in Oregon with several pages about the costume of the Nekrasovites (Johnson 1983: 49–51), a small party of whom went from Turkey to the USA at the same time that the majority moved to the USSR.

I supplemented this source base with my field materials and lexical data from the *Dictionary of the Dialect of the Nekrasov Cossacks* (Serdiukova 2005) to highlight the dynamic processes in the development of the festive and everyday clothes of this Russian ethno-confessional enclave.

The traditional complex of male clothes in the 19th century consisted of a shirt and pants, made of homespun cloth. The cut of the shirt was of tunic type with a straight cut in the front, without a collar, with long straight sleeves gathered at the wrists. The upper part of the shirt had an inner layer and rectangular pieces of cloth inserted under the arms. The cuffs and hem had a red border. Festive shirts were richly embroidered round the neck and down the breast and sometimes on the sleeves (in case of the so-called *round shirt – krugovnaia rubakha* (Serdiukova 2005: 248)).

The abundance and importance of the embroidery traditions for the Nekrasovites can be proved by their special lexicon of this handicraft: there are about ten dialectal words naming the types of stitches and embroidery patterns (Serdiukova 2005: 42, 118, 121, etc.). The embroidered elements were distinctive features of the festive clothes. The blue or red-colored pants were made of unbleached linen in summer and of wool cloth in winter. The wearing style of



Figure 1. Nekrasov Cossack in the traditional embroidered shirt and beshmet on the patronal feast (the Assumption) in the Novokumskii village, Stavropol kray, Russia. Photograph by Nina Vlaskina 2010.

these shirts was similar to the Russian fashion, with the shirt hanging over the trousers. In order to spare expensive material, Cossacks could make the upper part of the pants of cheaper white material. The cut of the pants was Russian, but the pants had expanding inserts, similar to the Don Cossacks' ones (Lipinskaya 2011: 396). The headgear of men was a high lambs-wool hat and, at the end of the 19th century, a straw hat.

The Nekrasovites had three types of male overdress. In the wintertime the Cossacks wore a fur coat. Another type of male overdress was *beshmet* (it had a straight cut with a stand-up collar, long narrow sleeves, and a lining made of fur or cloth, sometimes with cuts on the hips, and was made of silk or half-silk of red and yellow color or with black stripes). This type of clothing has equivalents both in Russian and in Turkic traditions. The last type of male overdress was *chekmen'* (an overcoat made of homemade cloth); the same type was characteristic of the Don Cossack costume and even became a part of the Cossack military uniform in the 19th century (Fradkina & Novak 1986: 35).

Apart from festive and everyday clothes, the Nekrasovites had a few variants of workwear, all fit for fishing, which was the main occupation of the Cossacks, especially in the early period. The workwear included a special shirt convenient for the work in reeds (*kamysheika*), a cloth jacket (*karapan*), a leather apron (*zapon*), a fur coat covered with cloth (*katlama*), and also fishing footwear that consisted of high boots and plain shoes (*chiriki*).

A belt is a special part of the Old Believers' costume.¹ Nekrasov Cossacks had different types of belts, which may have had several possible origins. At the early stage of their history, the Don Cossacks' costumes had multiple variants (Sukhorukov 1892: 33), because they wore costumes obtained in the campaigns against the Turks, Circassians, and others. For example, a Don historian, Vasily Sukhorukov, mentioned the Turkish silk sashes used by the Don Cossacks. The Nekrasov Cossacks who emigrated from the Don area to Turkey wore the same type of belt with a peculiar name, *trubulus*, which Alexander Novik and Andrey Sobolev derive from Turkish *Tarabulos* – the city of Tripoli, a well-known textile center in that period of time.² They also note the existence of this belt in the Balkans with a word of that origin in Serbian and Bulgarian. Apart from it, the Nekrasovites wore two other types of belt: *vushkar* (a lace or a fabric belt which may be used to keep the trousers up), and *cheres* (a special fabric belt with a pocket to keep money). Both of these belts were used by the Don Cossacks and had respective designations in the Don dialect (BTS 2003: 548–549, 574). These belts have different functions, and that may be one more reason for them to exist in parallel.

The women's costume consisted of a shirt (*rubakha*), a kind of an overcoat (*balakhon*), and an apron (*zaveska*). The shirt had the cut of a Russian type but the distribution of materials was different. The Nekrasov Cossacks made the upper part of the shirt of a cheaper material, because it was covered by an overcoat. The bottom of it was made of two rectangular pieces of material with gores on the sides (Lipinskaya 2011: 398). The women's shirt also had a red border (like the men's shirt). The cut of the burial dress differed from the everyday shirt because it was made of only one piece of fabric, without the division into upper and lower parts (*sutsel'naiia rubakha*) (Arkhipenko & Kalinichenko 2012: 431–432). The sleeves were of two different variants. The older type of shirt was sewn with long dangling sleeves, which women wrapped around the wrist or rolled up while working. These sleeves were characteristic of the Russian fashion of the 15th–17th centuries (Maslova 1956: 614). The sleeves of the newer cut were shorter but also wide, made of one, two, or three strips of fabric of contrasting colors, with the cuffs on the wrists.

An overgarment *balakhon* had a tunic cut and could be made of silk (festive clothes) or cotton (everyday clothes) of different shades of red, orange, and yel-



Figure 2. Different kinds of balakhon belonging to Evdokia Aralova. Brinkovskaya village, Krasnodar kray, Russia. Photograph by Nina Vlaskina 2016.

low, with black or white stripes or floral design. The sleeves were short, above the elbow, and decorated with multicolored silk ribbons (*nastavochki*). This is a type of decoration one can see on the shirt sleeves from the Ryazan Province in Russia (Maslova 1956: inset, Fig. 33). In the Nekrasovites' clothes, it became a part of the overgarment.

Women wore aprons made of a piece of material tucked in the belt. So the apron was an incomplete piece of the costume (Lipinskaya 2011: 398–399). From the back, the Nekrasovites tied long laces sewn from patches of contrasting colors (*mutoziki*) to the belt. The length of these laces differed between married women and maidens. Contrast in colors is what is considered a good combination in the costume. For example, a favorable combination could include a yellow

shirt, an overcoat with a dominance of black, and a crimson apron. Another favorable combination could include yellow sleeves, a blue apron, a yellow or green skirt, and an overcoat with black or white stripes. As with the men's costume, women's belts have names and form similar to those of Turkish and Bulgarian origin. The wide woven Nekrasov Cossack's belt *kulan* matches the Ottoman belt *kolan*.

In the cold season, women wore warm quilted coats of the *balakhon* cut named *sarafan*; the same word is widely used in many Russian local traditions to designate a kind of dress without sleeves. Winter outerwear of Nekrasov Cossack women was flared overcoats with a stand-up collar and short sleeves, quilted with woolen or wadding fill, usually of black color (*kukhaika*, *kukhaenka*, *kukhaenochka*), and fur coats.

The Nekrasov Cossack women's headdress consisted of several elements and was different for festive (wedding) and everyday occasions, worn by girls and women. Girls wore fabric strips (*sviazka*). A headdress of a married woman consisted of several elements: they put a cloth roller (*kauk*) on the back of the head up to the ears, then fixed it by a long lace with a rectangular piece of cloth sewn to it (*shlychka*); then put a fabric strip (*sviazka*) over the head and covered it all with a kerchief. The latter were of bright colors (primarily red or orange), with different floral designs named by special dialectal words. There were at least two types of kerchiefs of square and rectangular form. In the latter case, the Nekrasovites sewed together two or three square kerchiefs. A woman would wrap this long shawl around her head and tuck it near her ear. The form of the resulting headdress and a dialectal designation of its part – *nametka* – allow drawing a parallel with the old kind of Russian towel-type headdress dating back to the 11th century and widespread in different Russian territories for a long period of time since then (Maslova 1956: 660).

Festive Nekrasov Cossack's headwear used during a wedding ceremony is analogous to the southern Russian type and consists of a cap with horns made of fabric (*kichka*), a hoop to be put on over the *kichka*, and a rectangular textile frill attached from the back (*pozatyl'nik*). Along with these elements, there are mentions of another type of festive headwear – *kokoshnik* (Serdiukova 2005: 107, 125, 173, 272). The *kokoshnik* had a cap form and also had direct analogues in Russian tradition.

The children's costume of the Nekrasov Cossacks was quite similar to adult examples, but it lacked some details: there were no *balakhons* in the case of girls and *beshmets* in the case of small boys.

The everyday clothes of the Nekrasovites differed from the festive clothes by virtue of the material and colors used for construction. Festive clothes were made of monochromatic silk and everyday garments were made of cotton with



Figure 3. A girl in the traditional Nekrasovites' costume on the patronal feast (the Assumption) of the Novokumskii village, Stavropol kray, Russia. Photograph by Nataly Kalinicheva 2011.

floral pattern. The Cossacks bought fabric for their clothes in different textile centers of Asia Minor. Some of the sources for the fabrics could be figured out by analyzing the names of elements of the garments. For example, *trubulus*, as mentioned above, indicates purchasing textiles from Tripoli. The type of the kerchief *urumenskii / urumil'skii* may testify to the contacts with the European part of the Ottoman Empire – Rumelia. Mac Farlane suggested that the Nekrasovites bought fabrics in Balik Hissar (Balıkesir), which is a place where “cotton stuff [was] manufactured or sold”, and “a fair of much importance in this part of Anatolia is held annually” (Mac Farlane 1850: 292). Other origins

of textiles used by the Nekrasov Cossacks may be revealed through comparison of fabrics. Kemal Ibrahimzade and Irina Gusach showed that the Nekrasovites bought textiles produced in Tokat, a famous Turkish textile center where the hand printed textiles were produced (Ibrahimzade & Gusach 2015). This information is indirectly confirmed by the interviews with the Nekrasovites who remember the Turks coming to the Cossack village at Lake Manyas (Kuş) to copy and then reproduce the prints of their kerchiefs and other garments.³ Also the Cossacks designate the *balakhons* made of Tokat fabric as old ones. As comparison showed, the fabric of the newer examples may be bought in Gaziantep, where “a woven textile with a shiny surface and colourful vertical stripes, made with silk warps (lengthwise yarns) and cotton wefts (crosswise yarns)” named Kutnu was produced.⁴

In spite of the Turkish influence on the Nekrasovites' clothes, which one can see through the replacement of Russian fabrics with the Turkish ones during their life in the Ottoman Empire and further on in the Turkish Republic, the design of the garments remained close to Russian types. Viktoria Lipinskaya has written about the traditional basis of the Nekrasov Cossack female costume, and has pointed out that it did not completely correlate with any known stable set of Russian women's clothing. Its characteristic features involve an unfinished, unpolished quality, including patchwork cut, non-sewed aprons, and only semi-structured everyday headdresses (Lipinskaya 2011: 401).

Explicit influences of the contacts with the Turkish and Balkan population may be seen in footwear and jewelry. Various types of the Nekrasovites' shoes have Turkish names or are spoken of as being of Turkish or Bulgarian origin. There are *kalevry* (sandals, Bulg. *kalevra*), *kotyry* (female shoes of rude leather, Turk. *katur*), *kundry* (male and female shoes, Turk. *kundura*), *nadvizhki* or *papychi* (shoes without backcloth of Turkish style, Turk. *pabuç*, *papuç*), and *iarymbutiny* (boots, Turk *yarım*).⁵

Metal costume decorations and jewelry put the Nekrasovites' tradition in a wider context of different cultures united in the 18th and 19th centuries under the rule of the Ottoman Empire and beyond – in the Middle East. For example, the belt with double buckles, which the Cossacks name *kataur*, is characteristic of the vast eastern area, including Iraq, Syria, Turkey (Taş 2015), Bulgaria (Veleva 1950: Figs. 26, 43, 46, 50), and probably other countries of the region. Metal coins (*ploshchi*) attached to the breast part of the Nekrasovites' female costume and elements of a headgear are present in the local variants of the national costume of Croatia (Kašpar 1987), Bulgaria (Neikova n.d.: 9; Naslednikova 1969: 95) and Montenegro.⁶ Different types of head jewelry made from beads or coins, which girls and women would fasten to their kerchiefs, have direct analogues in Turkish (Öğuz 2008: 137, 144, 145) and Bulgarian



Figure 4. Nekrasov Cossacks in wedding costumes. The bride wears the traditional attire decorated with coins, a belt with round buckles, and a wedding headdress *kichka*. Manyas (Kocagöl) village, Turkey, 1950s. Photograph from the family archive of Domna Shkodrina.

traditions. The latter is clear from the lexical examples: in the dialect of the Nekrasov Cossacks, a word *dvukhlevnichek* (a coin of two Bulgarian levs) stands for a decoration of a headgear; *dubla* (from Bulg. *duble* ‘rolled gold’) designates a golden coin used as a decoration; the Nekrasovites’ *triapki* (‘ear-rings with small hanging elements’) is derived from Bulgarian *trepka*, standing for “a needle with flickering and tinkling decorations” (Naslednikova 1969: 96).

While the types of metal decoration and jewelry mentioned above were adopted probably during the Nekrasovites’ life in the Ottoman Empire, the decoration of the overcoat edges with big buttons may have been borrowed

from Turkish culture earlier, most likely in the early period of the Don Cossack history, before the Cossack Old Believers emigrated to Turkey. This is proved by the fact that buttons of the same type are to be found in the descriptions of the Don Cossack costume (Sukhorukov 1892: 33).

THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE NEKRASOVITES' COSTUME IN THE 20TH CENTURY

During the 20th century, male, female, and children's versions of the traditional Nekrasovites' costumes were preserved to different extents. Nekrasov Cossack women lived in their village most of the time, while the men left to work (fishing primarily) in different countries, and they often visited cities. This departure from home was one of the reasons for the men to abandon traditional dress and adopt urban-style clothing, starting in the 1930s–1940s. The sorrowful decision of men to cease wearing traditional garments was reflected by the Cossacks and became a part of a manuscript chronicle written on the margins of Psalter: “In the year of 7442 (1934), the Cossacks changed the clothes of Ignat and began to shave beards, and women kept the clothes” (Denisov 2015: 168).

In the Turkish period of the Nekrasov Cossack history, children had no opportunity to wear traditional clothes all the time either. At school, they had to wear a special uniform. The girls wore the uniform over the traditional shirt. Occasionally, girls could wear pants underneath their shirts in wintertime, which was not typical of traditional Cossack female costume.

During this time, both regular and irregular innovations emerged in the costume of this ethno-confessional group even before their return to Russia. But the Cossack culture changed much more radically after their homecoming. The last group returned to the Soviet Union in 1962.

In a short time, the Nekrasovites' traditional costume was no longer part of everyday existence. The traditional costume remained in use only as a festive or ritual dress. There were several reasons for this shift.

When the Nekrasov Cossacks were in an environment surrounded by people of many other cultures and religions, they made efforts to keep their cultural traditions. Costumes and aspects of cultural performance took on the weight of law as a way of maintaining their unique identity. Once the Nekrasov Cossacks returned to Russia, they did not preserve their traditions with as much care. Consequently, much of their traditional practices and costumes gave way to the processes of assimilation in a relatively short time.

Secondly, the respondents reported that the climate in Russia was different from that in Turkey: Russian winters were colder and summers were hotter. The respondents said that they abandoned traditional clothes because of the differences in climate.

Partly, changes were caused by the very fact of migration: the Turks forbade the Nekrasov Cossacks to transport the jewelry and coin decorations across the border. They had to sell them or just leave all of them in Turkey. Later in Russia, they never renewed the tradition to decorate their costumes with coins.

And, finally, up to the time of the Cossacks return to Russia, the Russian traditional costume had been completely lost in the south of Russia. It was replaced by a unified urban costume. The bright costumes of the Nekrasov Cossacks were completely different from the local ones. The newcomers were perceived as strangers. The respondents said that the locals called them Turks. This perception of the Nekrasov costume as an alien one resulted in an interesting ritual practice. In the first year after moving to Russia, the Nekrasov Cossacks wore the traditional wedding costume with the original headdress (*kichka*) during Christmas guising; the locals thought it was ridiculous.⁷ Thus, the rejection of the traditional costume happened gradually, partially through the pressure of the new social environment.

Other elements of the Nekrasov Cossack culture also disappeared to a certain extent.

The changing economy transformed traditional workways: fishermen became trained as planters, and the new life according to the collective farm laws influenced changes in the rhythm of life. Marriages outside the group made the society less monolithic than before. As it happened in other parts of Russia, in the regions of the new Cossack habitat – namely in Krasnodar and Stavropol krays – young people left their homeland to study and work in other cities and other regions of the country. All these factors contributed to the rapid transformation of the culture of the Nekrasov Cossacks. As one of my interviewees put it, “There we followed all the customs. It is here, in Russia, where everything is lost.”⁸

In the sphere of family rituals, traditional clothing gradually became of secondary importance. In the 1970s–1990s, the Nekrasovites (mostly women) wore the traditional costume for the wedding ceremony in the church, and urban-style dresses for a secular registration of the marriage. At the same time, female headgear was simplified. Photographs from the Soviet period, kept in the Nekrasovites’ archive, show that in the mentioned period a bride would simply cover her head with a kerchief and would not use the elaborate headdress of *kichka*, *soroka*, and *pozatyl’nik*.

Considerable differences existed in the notions of dress appropriate for funeral ceremonies in southern Russian and Nekrasovites' societies. In Stavropol villages, there was a tradition for visitors to dress in dark colors. While the Cossacks wore everyday (but not festive) clothes on these days, these clothes had the same bright colors as the festive dress. Under the influence of the local 'dress code', the Nekrasovites gradually ceased to wear the traditional costume at funerals. A ban was imposed on the traditional costume dress for widows during the three years following the death of the husband. Among the funeral customs connected with costumes today, only the tradition of dressing the deceased in traditional clothes and covering him or her with a special white shroud (*savan*) have remained unchanged.

Calendrical festivals constitute the part of the tradition where the traditional costume is preserved better than at any other time, particularly involving Easter and the patronal feasts in the Nekrasovites' villages.

NEKRASOVITES' FESTIVE CLOTHES AS A HERITAGE OBJECT

Despite the narrowing of the scope of the traditional costume use in the natural context, it has become a symbol of the whole Nekrasov Cossack culture in newly emerging contexts.

It appears that researchers and media representatives, such as journalists, have had a significant effect on the form in which the Cossack culture exists today. Since the time of the Cossack return to their homeland and up through the present day, researchers and media people have frequently visited the villages. During the Soviet period, studies of certain aspects of culture, such as folk religion, were banned. Therefore, scholars focused on those forms of culture that were not in dissonance with the ideological program of the Soviet state. There were studies on the legends and songs, describing the rebellion under the leadership of Ignat Nekrasov and Kondraty Bulavin, and studies on fairy tales. Costume was the part of the material culture that attracted the most attention of ethnographers and the mass media. Journalists were interested, primarily, in its exoticism. The texts that emerged from these studies and contacts often emphasized that Nekrasov Cossack traditional clothes had been preserved without changes since the 18th century. Images of the Cossack women often appeared, and still do, on the covers of magazines and journals, in case the articles within describe Nekrasov Cossack culture and traditions.

There is one more interesting practice dealing with the traditional costume. There is a widespread practice of dressing guests – members of the ethnographic, folk, and ethno-musicological expeditions and journalists – in the Nekrasovites'



Figure 5. Photograph of a Nekrasov Cossack woman in the national costume on a gravestone at the cemetery of Novokumskii village, Stavropol kray, Russia. Photograph by Nina Vlaskina 2010.

clothes, which can be regarded as a way to overcome the boundaries between ‘our’ and ‘alien’.⁹

Having been excluded from the sphere of everyday life, the traditional costume started to play an active role in the memorial sphere. Making costumes for store-bought dolls became one of the forms of transmitting the traditional knowledge about dressing.

This becomes relevant in a situation when children live apart from their parents and grandparents, and far away from their homeland. These kinds of dolls are primarily made by the older generation of the Nekrasov Cossack women. They used, and still do, their old costumes and parts of the garments for that purpose. The parts were available because the Nekrasovites preserved not only complete sets of costumes, but also their components, such as sleeves or hems of shirts. Such costumed dolls are not only gifts for children, but can also be left in the homes of their makers. Today dolls decorate the interiors of a number of Nekrasovites’ houses.

To my mind, the actualization of the memorial function can be seen in some innovations in the funeral ceremony. I discussed these rituals above, and would like to return to them in another context. While earlier on the Nekrasov Cossacks did not care for the grave after the funeral – neither by putting gravestones nor by decorating the grave – today, according to our informants, the Nekrasovites

have come to accept Russian practices. Today one can see crosses and monuments on the Nekrasovites' graves, similar to the graves of other residents of the Stavropol kray. In this case, it is important that they are often decorated with photographs in which the deceased are depicted in their traditional dress. It seems that this new custom can be interpreted as a means of emphasizing the national identity or the national self-reflection.

Another context in which the Nekrasov costume acquires the memorial function is the activity of official institutions. Today in Russia the traditional clothing of the analyzed group is widely used in the public heritage policy. It is an obligatory element of museum exhibitions devoted to the culture of the Cossacks. The Nekrasov Cossack costume is exhibited in museums of those areas where they resettled, in the Novokumskii village of Stavropol kray, and it is also part of the museum exhibitions in the Rostov region (museums of Rostov-on-Don, Novocherkassk, Starocherkasskaya, and Taganrog) and in Krasnodar. I should mention here that the Cossack costume is exhibited in museums only partially. For example, the workwear of a Nekrasovite is absolutely absent in the museum text and would not be preserved by the Cossacks themselves. Parts of female headgear, such as *kokoshnik*, as well as certain winter out-



Figure 6. Painted clay dolls given to the author as a souvenir from the Stavropol Regional Museum of Fine Arts in 2012.

erwear, were also just mentioned by respondents, but were never shown in any official or private context. These facts draw the observer to the conclusion that, gradually, the image of the costume is constructed where the elements of everyday clothes are vanishing and the main elements most abundant in various collections will survive.

This image of the Nekrasov Cossack costume is actively used in creating souvenirs. The manufacturing of souvenir dolls based on traditional designs has been recently established in the area. The Stavropol artists make stylized clay dolls depicting the Nekrasov Cossacks. Cossack dolls and Cossacks themselves wearing traditional costumes are also painted on souvenir badges.

After returning to Russia, the Nekrasovites were faced with another phenomenon of the Soviet cultural life. There were houses and palaces of culture, cultural workers and folk groups. In the 1980s, a folk ensemble was organized in the Nekrasov Cossack community, too. The Moscow Conservatory and Vera Medvedeva (Nikitina) did their best to organize international and Russian tours for this folk group. The ensemble still exists; it was, and still is, very popular. Through its performances, the costume of the Nekrasov Cossacks has become well known far beyond the habitat of this ethnic and religious group, in many regions of Russia (from Novosibirsk and Yekaterinburg to Moscow and St. Petersburg), and in other countries (for example, the USA). The consequence of this fame is the fact that the Nekrasovites' costume begins to be perceived as a symbol of an authentic tradition. As a result, members of folklore groups from other regions choose these Nekrasov Cossack clothes for their own performances, because for them it represents an authentic Russian costume, which was preserved without changes since the 18th century when the Nekrasovites left the Don region.

CONCLUSIONS

Today the national costume is the best preserved one among all the cultural expressions of the Nekrasov Cossacks. During the existence of this ethnic group, it underwent several stages of changes. Firstly, the costume of this ethno-confessional society absorbed different ethnic elements of both Slavic and Turkic cultures during the late 17th – early 18th centuries; then, the eastern influence was enhanced during the Turkish period of the Cossack life, though the core elements of the costume remained unchanged. Finally, after the Nekrasovites' return to their homeland, the composition of the traditional garments was simplified and changed its functions.

In the USSR, at first, brightness and exotic appearance were the reasons to oppose the Nekrasovites and other inhabitants of the Stavropol and Krasnodar krais, and this prevented integration. But later on the costume of the Nekrasov Cossacks was met with admiration by journalists, researchers, and museum specialists. The important point was the fact that, unlike other artifacts, costumes, especially the female ones, were kept in Nekrasov families in large numbers. The dowry of each girl could contain up to 30 full costume sets, a significant part of which the Nekrasovites managed to bring to Russia.

The constant academic enquiries about these elements of culture produced unexpected consequences. With each new arrival of scientists and journalists, the tradition bearers more and more readily reproduced their knowledge about the costume in a detailed way. The respondents of middle and older age provided profound descriptions of the costume details, told their names and depicted their characteristics. The interviews often included self-reflection by the informants about the importance of preserving their traditional clothing.



Figure 7. *Evdokia Aralova and her national costumes. Brinkovskaya village, Krasnodar kray, Russia. Photograph by Nina Vlaskina 2016.*

Through the promotional activity of many scientific, educational, and governmental institutions, the Nekrasovites' costume became widely known both in its original variants and in the images, copies, and stylization, functioning as a souvenir. As a result, the festive costume of the Nekrasov Cossacks became a symbol of the heritage of the group and has continued to live its life, both inside and outside the Cossack community.

This case can serve as an example of the transformation of ethno-religious tradition into a heritage object. It is the type of transformation in which one element of culture comes to the fore, the one that has been preserved better or is more in demand for whatever reasons. Values and meanings are reaffirmed, and one element of culture begins to speak as an advocate of culture in general, while other elements of culture, omitted and irrelevant in the context of the changed circumstances, are doomed to oblivion.

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NOTES

- ¹ See further the article by Cristina Clopot, *Weaving the Past in a Fabric: Old Believers' Traditional Costume* in the present volume.
- ² See further the article by Alexander Novik and Andrey Sobolev, *Traditional Wedding Costume of the Mrkovići in Montenegro: Between Real Heritage and Folk Construction (Materials of the Russian Expeditions in 2012–2014)* in the present volume.
- ³ Interview of Natalya Bondarenko and Lidia Siparova with Iakov Pushechkin, born in 1933, recorded in Novokumskii village, Stavropol kray, in 2010.
- ⁴ *The History of "Kutnu" Fabric Weaving* 2011. Available at http://www.ipekyolununustalari.org.tr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=89&Itemid=227&lang=en, last accessed on October 20, 2016.

- ⁵ Most of these etymologies were identified by Olga Serdiukova (2005).
- ⁶ See the article by Alexander Novik and Andrey Sobolev in the present volume.
- ⁷ Interview of Nina Vlaskina and Natalia Arkhipenko with Domna Shkodrina, born in 1931, recorded in Novokumskii village, Stavropol kray, in 2010.
- ⁸ Interview of Nina Vlaskina with Nikon Banderovsky, born in 1940, recorded in Ma-losadovyi village, Stavropol kray, in 2010.
- ⁹ Irina Sedakova mentioned the same situation in her Bulgarian expeditions while giving her presentation, *Clothes as Symbolic Objects and Signs in the Ritual Time of the Slavic Childbirth Customs*, at the SIEF Congress in 2015. Also, Anamaria Iuga describes the mentioned behavioral pattern in her article “Contemporary Traditional Clothing in Maramureș” in the present volume.

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DISCUSSION

FOLK COSTUMES DURING THE RITUAL YEAR AND CHANGES IN LIFE, IN A PARISH IN DALECARLIA, SWEDEN: CONTINUITY, VALUES, REVITALISATION

Britt Eklund, Katarina Ek-Nilsson

Abstract: In the parish of Boda, like in many other parishes in the county of Dalecarlia, there used to be a kind of dressing that was thoroughly local and homogeneous. This dressing tradition was still alive until far into the 20th century. We hesitate to call the dressing folk costume as there were no other clothes besides these locally peculiar garments. Everyone followed the same rules of dressing as well as the variations throughout the year (dressing calendar) and in different stages of life. There were hundreds of rules for how to dress on Christmas Day, during Lent, on Easter Day, on a 'normal' Sunday in the summer and in the winter, on Prayer Days – always with differences depending on one's life status: married or not, confirmed or not – and of course on different occasions like weddings and Holy Communion, not to mention everyday and working clothes. It was not possible to break the rules, in which every garment had its own meaning and symbol. This very homogeneous dressing has its demographic, social, and economic explanations. The population was extremely homogeneous, every family being land-owners and nobody poorer or richer than anyone else. In the last decades there has been an increasing interest in old clothing traditions, from before the 20th century. The paper will discuss the nature of this growing interest on the basis of rich archival material and a collection of authentic garments from the 19th century.

Keywords: Boda, Dalecarlia, local culture, national garments

INTRODUCTION

The parish of Boda, like some other parishes in the county of Dalarna (English exonym Dalecarlia), used to have a kind of clothing that was entirely local and homogeneous. Dalecarlia and especially its northern part has, throughout its history, been a province with old and living traditions, as concerns dressing, dialects, music, buildings, working organisations, and other kinds of cultural expressions.

There are always reasons for such a traditional local culture to arise. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the population living here was homogeneous, consisting of land-owning farmer families. If there were labourers on farms, they were farmers' daughters and sons, waiting to get married and have a farm of their own, so they worked there for just a short period. Due to local traditions of inheritance, all people were equal. The farms were built very closely to each other, in small villages surrounded by fields and forests. The reform concerned with parcelling the fields, which affected most villages in Sweden in the 19th century, never reached this area, which can explain why the farms remained so close to each other. The social community was strong, and so was social control (Erixon 1945: 40).

The farms were not big, but rather of average size. There was a paradoxical old tradition, originating in the Middle Ages, of the so-called *herrarbete* (migrant labour). This meant that periodically, often every year, men and women would go to the cities, such as Stockholm, Helsinki, or even St. Petersburg, to work in parks, building enterprises, and breweries, but also selling homemade products like wood carvings or ornaments made of hair. We call it a paradox because one would perhaps presume that these migrations might have weakened the local traditions. Instead, the traditions, including the local dress code, were strengthened. People from small villages kept together both at work and leisure. The costume was like a trade mark, since the people from Dalarna were looked upon as reliable and hardworking people. The collective identity was strongly connected to the clothes and the dialect, the apparent signs of "people from Dalarna" (Rosander 1967: 146).

LOCAL DRESSING TRADITION IN DALARNA

The social and economic homogeneity, negligible social differences, and the migration – constant departing and returning – upheld the traditional way of life, including a homogeneous, but still rich and varying, dressing culture. This dressing tradition was still alive far into the 20th century. We hesitate to call these clothes *folk costumes*, as there were no other clothes than the locally characteristic garments, i.e. these were not merely 'folk costumes' to be used at special festivals, but clothes that were part of everyday life.

Every parish in northern Dalarna had their own locally distinctive dressing tradition. Everyone followed the same rules of dressing, including the variations throughout the year and due to shifts in life status. We would like to stress that this was not the case in other parts of Sweden but rather quite unique



Figure 1. A married couple dressed for church on Christmas Day, one of the most important festivals of the year. The apron is made of imported cloth, probably bought at a fair. The imported textiles were more appreciated than the homemade ones. Photograph by Jon Holmén 2015.

and characteristic of northern Dalarna. There was traditional dressing in other parts of Sweden as well, but never as elaborated as in this region. The set of rules here is called *dräktalmanacka* (dressing calendar). Along with different garments these rules are very well described in our archives.¹

The dressing calendar was based on the period of the year, the individual's civil status, and the ecclesiastical year – that is, the calendar of the Lutheran church. This means that the type of dressing follows different church festivals, as well as special occasions like baptism, wedding, and funeral, as well as different kinds of work. The social control over proper dressing was extremely strong. In the records there is, for example, a story of a woman who came to church and found she was wearing an unsuitable apron. As she was not allowed to enter the church dressed that way, she went home, crying bitterly.²



Figure 2. A Crown bride³ and her groom. The bride is wearing a white apron (like on the second day of confirmation). A German artist and ethnologist, Kiesewetter, who travelled in Dalarna in 1851, wrote that the brides reminded him of Asian princesses, though the pearls were made of glass and the flowers of paper.⁴ Photograph by Jon Holmén 2015.

There were specific rules of dressing on the first Sunday of Advent, on an ordinary Sunday in wintertime, at Lent, at Whitsun, at Midsummer, on an ordinary Sunday in the summertime, on Judgement Sunday, at Confirmation (the first and the second days), wedding, funeral day, the Sunday after the funeral day, and of course for weekdays and travelling days.⁵

Towards the end of the 19th century the rules began to be dissolved, and around 1900 modern garments were mixed with the traditional costume – which is something very natural as we are talking about a living tradition.



Figure 3. *A couple on a Sunday afternoon. The red piece of cloth is not an apron but a gore sewed on the skirt. This is the most common variation used today. Photograph by Jon Holmén 2015.*

Today, the traditional dressing is being used at special occasions like confirmation, wedding, Midsummer, family festivals, and official representation. There are many old garments from the 19th century to be found and bought at auctions or on the Internet. The last person who used traditional dressing as part of their everyday life in Boda died as late as 1984.

The traditional and locally characteristic garments were also used on working days. The locals also made alterations in their clothing when they left the farm; for example, on such occasions a woman put on a red apron.⁶



Figure 4. *A herding girl in shabby clothes. The axe is used both to clear a path and to chop branches for the cattle. She is carrying a birch bark satchel with some food on her back. A small bag contains flour and salt for the cows, another small bag is for the knitting work. She is carrying a horn to make music and to communicate with other herding girls, for example, to warn them of bears or wolves. She is wearing a man's hat, to frighten the bears and make them think it is a man coming! She has no socks on. Photograph by Jon Holmén 2015.*

In the summer it was mainly young women's task to take the cattle to the summer pastures in the mountains to graze, and to take care of them there (Fig. 4). This meant that women had to protect the cattle from wild animals, keep the herd together, milk the animals, and make cheese, butter, and whey cheese.



Figure 5. *A small girl going to church in the winter.*
Photograph by Jon Holmén 2015.

The children's costumes were no less traditional than the adults' ones. Both boys and girls wore a frock until they began school at the age of seven.⁷ The only item different in boys' and girls' clothing was their caps.



Figure 6. *A boy going to church in the summer.
Photograph by Jon Holmén 2015.*

RENAISSANCE OF FOLK COSTUMES AFTER THE 1970S

Around 1900, modern garments were mixed with older traditional clothes even in conservative areas such as the parish of Boda. However, in the 1970s a so-called 'green wave' swept over Sweden. Quite many, especially young, people moved from the big cities to the countryside, trying to cultivate their own food and to live as close to nature as they could. Cultural heritage also became more important to many of them, and they started to show a growing interest in folk music and folk costumes. Thus, the green wave gave way to the renaissance of the folk costumes as well as other folk traditions. Many people started to search for their roots, and they bought or made for themselves a folk costume typical

of the region from which their parents or grandparents originated. A problem could be, however, that many – or even most – parishes or areas in Sweden had never had traditional and locally peculiar clothing like that worn in Boda and the other parishes in northern Dalarna. The northern part of Dalarna is, as stated before, quite unique. Therefore many people simply bought or made a costume that they thought was beautiful.

What was the reason for the growing interest in folk traditions in the seventies? We maintain that one of the many reasons might have been tiredness of modernity, and a very strong reaction against the pollution of the environment. There was also a political discussion about the use of nuclear power in Sweden at the time. Many people were against it, and, on the whole, there was a distrust of engineering and science as symbols of modernity.

In Boda, the young generation in the seventies took into use the older variations of the traditional dressing, that is, the clothing from the 19th century, and *not* the modernised clothing from the 20th century.

Extensive research has been done to learn more about the 19th century traditions and rules, with a kind of musealisation as a result. In this way the clothing traditions are still kept alive.

NOTES

¹ Andersson, Fräs Erik 1945. ULMA 17600 Kyrkohistoriska arkivets i Lund frågelista 1 rörande kyrklig folksed Boda Dalarna. [The Uppsala Archive of Dialectology 17600, Questionnaire 1 of the Church History Archive in Lund Concerning Folk Religion of the Boda Parish, Dalarna.]

² Andersson, Fräs Erik 1938. NM E.U. 12061, Boda Dalarna. [The Nordic Museum. Ethnological Archive 12061, Boda, Dalarna.]

³ A Crown bride ('kronbrud') is a bride who is allowed to wear a crown on her head. Only girls who were – or were supposed to be – virgins were considered worthy to wear the crown at the wedding.

⁴ Ellner, Anna (Grop Anna Olsdotter) 1923. NM E.U. 15534, Dräktskick, Dalarna, Boda socken. [The Nordic Museum. Ethnological Archive 15534, Costume, Dalarna, Boda Parish.]

⁵ For details see Eklund 2016.

⁶ Nord, Erik H 1933. ULMA 5567 Frågelista M67 rörande klädedräkt och nakenhet Boda Dalarna. [The Uppsala Archive of Dialectology 5567, Questionnaire M67 on costume and nudity in Boda, Dalarna.]

⁷ In 1842, compulsory school attendance was inaugurated in all parishes in Sweden.

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CLOTHES AS SYMBOLIC AND MAGIC OBJECTS IN SLAVIC CHILDBIRTH CUSTOMS¹

Irina Sedakova

Abstract: The paper analyzes the practical, symbolic, and magic functions of female, male, and babies' clothes in Slavic childbirth-lore. Traditional clothes and their parts are seen as "objects and signs" (see, e.g., Bogatyrev 2007), and their cultural semantics and symbolism depend on the ritual situation, its performers, and magic goals. Each item of clothing has its own practical significance and acquires symbolic qualities which can be interpreted in terms of semiotic oppositions (life/death, lucky/unlucky, healthy/unhealthy, male/female, old/young). Special attention is paid to swaddles as the baby's first item of clothing. In the conclusion, the modern shift in attitudes to pregnancy clothing is analyzed, though it is noted that some authentic beliefs regarding clothes are still observed.

Keywords: childbirth customs, rituals, semiotic oppositions, Slavic folklore, traditional clothes

INTRODUCTION

This paper scrutinizes a number of topics regarding traditional folk costumes, and differs in its focus from the other articles in this thematic issue of *Folklore: EJF*. Central to this investigation are the symbolic and magic functions of traditional clothing, which are typical for rural societies across childbirth customs, magic acts, and Slavic beliefs. Childbirth-lore provides the researcher with a richly varied range of ways in which to study these questions. Besides other important reasons, it is due to the fact that the childbirth complex is regarded as a long period beginning with conception and lasting up to the age of one year. Thus there are many ritual situations, various actors and performers, and obstacles involved, which in their turn call for various clothing to be used. The key periods and temporal moments of crucial importance are: conception, pregnancy, delivery, first actions with the newborn, and the first 40 days of its life. They call for special attention regarding the choice of clothing (the color, cuts, fabric, way of preparation, etc.) and rituals involving them, as they are supposed to symbolize positive qualities and are thought to possess preventive

and protective powers. These practices fit into the whole traditional childbirth ritual complex (Sedakova 2013).

The clothing in childbirth-lore demonstrates the semiotic essence of the costumes; items of clothing are seen as objects and signs in the terminology coined by Nina Gagen-Torn (1933), Galina Maslova (1984), and Piotr Bogatyrev (2007). Bogatyrev discusses the traditional everyday, festive, and ritual costumes (*ibid.*: 223) and constructs the hierarchy of the functions, which is different in every type of clothing. **The everyday costume** has the following functions: practical (to protect from the cold and heat); belonging (to demonstrate class and region); and esthetic. **The festive costume** reflects festive or solemn functions: esthetic; ritual; belonging (nation, region, class); practical. Finally, **the ritual costume** depicts ritual, festive, esthetic, national/regional/class belonging (to a negligible extent), and practical function (little or none) (Bogatyrev 2007: 232). In childbirth rituals and everyday care for the baby one can find elements of all the three groups, but they mainly reveal practical, ritual, esthetic, and occasionally also festive functions; they also demonstrate the gender and age differentiation. In some regions and religious groups (like among Old Believers) they include religious characteristics, which are of utmost significance.

A most important point concerning clothing at childbirth is that each item is seen not as a thing, but as having a magic function for various purposes. Everyday items of clothing like men's hats, trousers, and shirts, and women's aprons and skirts obtain magic power, whether similar to other life rituals or the calendrical circle, folk medical acts, etc., or develop a specific meaning. Some items of clothing which have acquired sacred power in one of the ritual complexes (Tolstoy & Tolstaya 1994), for example, at a wedding, are frequently used for medical purposes at childbirth, both for the mother and the baby. A baby's shirt once used for christening is used for all the younger offspring in the family so that the sisters and brothers would love each other dearly. In Russia (Ryazan region), the wedding shirt of the father or even grandfather is used for these acts. The major ritual and magic characteristics are connected to the swaddling clothes and the belt – the baby's first clothes. They are used for a temporary period which is very important for the further development of the child.

SEMIOTIC ASPECTS AND ARCHAIC SYMBOLISM OF CLOTHES IN CHILDBIRTH-LORE

In childbirth customs rituals, clothes and parts thereof are often used as pure signs. Occasionally they do not have any practical value, apart from the fact that they belong to a particular person. So the owner's characteristics, qualities, and special status (pregnancy) are of great importance here. Frequently clothes can stand in for the person, like in the Russian North; when the baby is delivered (traditionally in a sauna), an item of the mother's clothing is put outside the window. This means that the secret time of when the delivery takes place is over, and the mother and baby can now accept guests.

Such characteristics like **gender**, **family relation** to the baby (sisters and brothers, mother and father, grandmother and grandfather), **age** (old people's clothes are valuable), **color**, and **size** play a significant role in the ritual childbirth complex.

A well-known Slavic belief is that to conceive a baby of certain sex, male or female items of clothes should be worn during sexual contact. If a couple wants a girl, the man puts on a women's shawl, if they want a boy, the woman wears a man's hat. Through the clothes some traces of *couvade* can be revealed – during the delivery the husband puts on his wife's clothes, even a shawl on his head, and groans. The woman in birth is made to walk over the pants of her husband, so as to make the delivery easier (Vlasova 2001: 585). The newborn is wrapped in its father's shirt – so as to be healthy and live long years, be brave, etc. If in a family babies have died one after another, when the next baby is delivered, the midwife will take it with the father's pants to make it strong. The pants also have an apotropaic, guarding function by substituting the strong man guarding the baby: usually the father's trousers or another male garment is hung on the door of the room in which the baby sleeps, or on its bed (Ukraintsy 2000: 310). Occasionally the gender of the newborn is taken into consideration: the girl is put into her mother's shirt, while a boy is put in his father's shirt (Ukraintsy 2000: 619; Kabakova 2001: 97).

The age and the opposition old/young correspond to the length of the baby's adult life. One interpretation for using old items of clothing (not definitely worn by relatives) for the first swaddle is that they are old, so the baby will live a long life until his or her old age, and will not die young in an accident or because of an illness. It alludes to the core of childbirth and reflects the important life/death opposition. In the archaic worldview, early death is explained by the evil eye, the activity of demons and evil spirits, and the wrong behavior of the mother-to-be and other people around. The pregnant woman should hide her abdomen, which is why traditionally they wear dresses with a special cut, which do not



Figure 1. Baby's cap with many protective amulets. Village of Podvis, Karnobat region, Bulgaria. Museum of Ethnography, Sofia, Bulgaria. Photograph by Irina Sedakova 2015.

show the size and the shape of the growing belly. She wears a pair of each items of clothing, like two aprons, two shawls, and two skirts, so as to keep the baby alive (compare: she also uses two spoons while eating (SD 1995: 161)). From the moment the baby is born up to the 40th day the mother should not wear bright colors or jewelry, so as to avoid attention of the evil eye. Meanwhile the baby's clothes, especially for going out, are decorated with protective amulets (a cross, silver coins, pearls, shells, 'blue eyes' made of glass, and other). Special baby's caps with many amulets can still be discovered in rural areas (see, for example, the cap decorated with protective amulets (Fig. 1) from the Museum of Ethnography in Sofia).²

While showing me the collection of the headwear, one of the museum workers told me an interesting story. When her grandson was born in Sofia in 2010, her daughter wanted to use only modern brand items for the baby. The great-grandmother objected and made a special cap with amulets for her great-grandson. So the protective symbolism of amulets is still being observed even in big cities.

Babies' items of underwear are put on inside out, and a safety pin pierced into a swaddle is also used against the evil eye and illnesses.

Protective, apotropaic, and productive magic measures are taken during the whole period of the childbirth ritual complex, and are often linked to the color of the clothes or a part thereof. Main semiotic oppositions here are white/black (as life/death, lucky/unlucky) and blue/pink (as male/female). The color black alludes to death, mourning, and funerals – the swaddles and the ribbons are never made of black or dark (dark blue) cloth. The black color also alludes to an unlucky life. A Bulgarian dialectal expression goes: “Why are you so unlucky? Probably your mother wrapped you in black clothes with not a single white thread” (Rks 336). The color black is used only for burial wraps in the case of a baby's death (Rks 102, 103).

Apart from symbolic meaning, the color white has a very practical purpose which, as it is typical for traditional rural culture, is achieved with magic acts. Traditionally, the mother's wish is that the clothes of the baby would be clean and white like snow. Usually after the christening, on her way home, the mother visits several houses where she is given white objects and food – an egg, sugar, etc. The egg is used for washing and bathing the baby. The same rituals are found to be spread over almost all of Europe.

Another color opposition is blue/pink (as male/female), correspondingly boys' swaddles and clothes are blue, while those of girls are pink. This color division is documented by P. Bogatyrev in the Carpathian villages in the 1930s, especially for the christening dresses (Bogatyrev 2007: 249–250). This symbolic color denoting gender has eventually become more and more popular and has today spread far from just childbirth customs and costumes.

An interesting development of gender restrictions in the usage of color can be found in Sakar (Bulgaria), where there are documented restrictions with the embroidery for the christening costume. It is forbidden to use plenty of red in a girl's dress, so that in her adult life her menses would not last for too many days (Popov & Grebenarova 2002: 261).

SWADDLES

Swaddles are the baby's traditional items of clothing and come in various types: light, warm, everyday, and festive (for christening, for going out after the 40th day). They have practical, ritual, gender denoting, and esthetic functions. One of the main characteristics of swaddles is as the baby's first item of clothing, and it is this which gives us the Slavic words for the newborn: Russian *pelenishnyi*, Bulgarian *pelenache*, *pelenak* ('the one with swaddles'). Formerly, midwives

used to swaddle the baby tightly, covering its body, legs, and hands. Nowadays it is rare in modern cities to find babies wrapped this way; they are dressed so as to move freely.

The swaddles are in the focus of attention of the mother and other family members regarding the fabric, temporal preparation of the wraps, washing of and contact with them, etc.

The fabric lies in direct contact with the body, so much attention is paid to it in terms of the possibility of contagious magic effects. It is believed that via swaddles many important qualities can be passed to the newborn: features of the swaddle (color, fabric, size, etc.) can influence the development of the baby and its future adult life. It is believed that via swaddles illnesses can be passed on, and evil spirits can harm the babies. This is why they are rubbed with onions, and occasionally garlic; red threads, small iron bits, salt, or bread is put into the swaddles to prevent the evil spirits or the evil eye from harming the baby. To bring wealth, the Polish put a coin into the baby's swaddles.

Each bride should have swaddles in her dowry, but during pregnancy the woman is not allowed to make them; usually her mother or mother-in-law does this. Some swaddles should be brought by the midwife when she comes to deliver the baby (Mikhailova & Popov 1999: 209). The first wraps are often made of old fabric or pieces of clothing, e.g. of mother's apron (Khadzhinikolov 1980: 245), or from pieces of a garment of a good-natured relative (Mikhailova & Popov 1999: 209). The first swaddles are not torn, but usually cut with scissors; otherwise the baby will talk in the night. In Serbia, the first swaddling act is performed on the earth; a sieve as a symbol of prosperous life is held above the baby. Each time when the baby's swaddles are changed, the mother or any other person blesses it, reads prayers, and makes a cross on it; occasionally they spit to the left (Naumenko 1998: 31).

Swaddles are often used in folk medical rituals, where they substitute the baby, being its most important item of clothing. In some countries, it is customary to leave swaddles of an ill baby on the icon of saints and the Virgin Mary for the night (SD 2004: 659). Leaving the swaddle of a baby who suffers from insomnia and cries a lot in the woods is a typical Balkan and South Slavic folk medical practice. The swaddles of a baby whose mother does not have enough milk are dowsed with holy water, or are put into a fast-flowing river, so the milk will flow rapidly and in large amounts (Sedakova 2011). In Serbia, there is a belief that if a mother has only daughters and she wants a son, she should steal a swaddle from a mother who gives birth to only boys, and then she will have a son (Trebjeshanin 2000 [1991]: 45).

There are other recommendations and strict rules regarding swaddles. The mother should not sit on swaddles, since she is seen as 'impure', so the skin of

the baby will be unclean. For 40 days they are never washed or dried outside, and nobody should see them (Vlasova 2001: 619). They are never left outside after the sunset, because in the dark evil spirits can harm the babies through their swaddles, make them sleepless and weepy (Mikhailova & Popov 1999: 209). In Bulgaria washed swaddles are put on fruit trees, so the baby will have children in his adult life (Popov & Grebenarova 1994: 129).

Another item of the baby's clothing is the belt. This is a long piece of fabric put over the swaddle, occasionally making a cross. There are some accounts that claim this is for the baby to have a strong back, and straight hands and legs. In Bulgaria, it should not be too long, otherwise the wedding in the future will be a late one. In Russia, the belt should be long enough, so that the life of the baby will be long.

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the clothing used in the period of childbirth we have found further confirmation of Bogatyrev's ideas on traditional clothing, in which he suggests treating items of clothing not as things but as signs. Furthermore, the complex interrelatedness of the artifacts as they are understood in traditional folk culture becomes evident. Thus childbirth clothing is connected specifically with that of weddings and funerals. Babies' wraps bear a resemblance to funeral veils and clothing for the dead. The family festival of childbirth with a show of many clothes given as gifts by the guests is like the wedding show of the bride's dowry.

Nowadays rural practices have changed as a result of medical and technical developments, changes in mentality, and urbanization. It is my firm belief that studies of modern culture and change are much more fruitful when based on a profound knowledge of authentic rural tradition. That is why this article examines practices which are seen as, so to say, remnants, superstitions. To a certain extent this field data can be registered in rural and even urban areas, as a memory rather than a practice.

My final remarks consider changes in the very sacred meaning of childbirth customs. Modern fashion clothing does not hide but rather demonstrates pregnancy, because nowadays the mother-to-be shows that she is proud of her state.

There are almost no bans on the mother-to-be from openly preparing the baby's first clothes before it is born. This has become a part of family planning. The sex of the baby is learnt early on in the pregnancy, so the color of the clothes and other things being prepared beforehand can correspond to its gender.



Figure 2. T-shirt “Waiting for a miracle” for pregnant women. (<http://dbkids.ru/products/futbolka-dlya-beremennyhTDPG044>).

The families who are waiting for a baby to be born organize special parties (baby showers). This idea and practice originate in the USA. Today the tradition of celebrating a baby shower has spread all over the world (Ekrem 2013). In Russia, these parties are known as ‘pre-birthday party’, ‘minus birthday party’, ‘the stork holiday’, etc. Many details of these parties are contrary to traditional views on pregnancy and childbirth, but some of them are still based on rural practices.

NOTES

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***EL TRAJE FALLERO:* A CARRIER OF TRADITION?**

Urszula Wilk

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to present and briefly analyze *el traje fallero*, the attire used by *los falleros*, the participants in the festivity of *las Fallas*, which takes place every year in March, in the Spanish city of Valencia. The costume, considered traditional by the administration of the festivity in an attempt to preserve Valencian heritage, is in fact a collection of different elements, not always related to the Valencian festive dressing customs that are constantly undergoing evolution. Nevertheless, it is an interesting example of the emanation of Valencian culture in the contemporary times.

Keywords: attire, dress, *el traje fallero*, fiesta, festival, heritage, *las Fallas*, tradition, Valencia

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents and analyzes the use of *el traje fallero* – a costume of *los falleros* – people who celebrate the festivity of *las Fallas* in Valencia, Spain. Although considered ‘traditional’ and frequently dated back to centuries ago, the current aspect of this attire was introduced in the 20th century. First created from a mixture of traditional farmers’ celebratory garments, it was used to underline the special character of the fiesta. Later on it underwent a process of codification with the purpose of attracting attention to the feast, and nowadays, if not combined properly, it can even be a cause of exclusion from the festivity. Today it is worn not only during *las Fallas*, but used by *los falleros* throughout the whole year to highlight the special time of celebration of any fiesta that they are invited to. This sometimes causes controversy, as *los falleros* – because of their special attire – tend to attract attention that should be directed at the principal actors of a given fiesta. *El traje fallero*, creating a community within its wearers, also frequently causes an ‘us – them’ division in the Valencian society. It creates a discussion between those who consider it a traditional garment and a transmitter of cultural heritage, and those who state that this custom was only introduced to promulgate tourism, and that it is an invented tradition. Altogether, *el traje fallero* remains an important element

of the Valencian cultural landscape and the analysis of its history and current form is a good example to present the complexity of the Valencian society.

THE FESTIVAL OF LAS FALLAS

Every year in the Spanish city of Valencia a festival of *las Fallas* has its finale on March 19, the feast of Saint Joseph. On that day, giant structures called *fallas* are reduced to ashes on the streets. This moment ends *la semana fallera*, the time when the city is taken over by the fiesta. During this time the community of each *falla* must build and present to the public their flammable monument. This event is the culmination of a yearlong preparation and finishes with *la cremà*, the burning of the statues. The festivity is organized by the city and its official organ directly responsible for the fiesta, *Junta Central Fallera*. Nevertheless, it is thousands of *falleros* who are the actors truly responsible for the festival. They are inhabitants of every part of the region's capital (and its surrounding cities), gathered into groups called *comisiones de fallas*. Members of each group partake in year-round activities in their *casal faller*, a place designated to be the 'home' for a *falla*. Their attention is centered on gathering sufficient means for the collective to participate in the festivity, as the obligation of each group, according to the set of rules that regulate the festivity, is *la plantà* (erecting of a *falla*) (Reglamento Fallero 2002: part I, art. 2.1). On an individual level, however, the *falleros* need to take care also of their private budget, since the attire of a member of each *falla* is an element of utmost importance, being a symbol of belonging to the group.

EL TRAJE FALLERO

We cannot pinpoint the exact origin of the attire considered traditionally Valencian, but its beginnings can be traced back to the 18th century and the surge of silk production in the region (Olmedo de Cerda 2014 [2003]: 122). The intense codification of the attire worn during *las Fallas* can be noticed especially after the Spanish Civil War. People celebrating the festivity want to mark a clear break from everyday life with several elements of the fiesta. The wearing of certain clothing, *vestidura sagrada* (sacred attire), as Antonio Ariño Villarroya (1992: 348) calls it, has had a meaning of interrupting the daily routine (ibid.: 347–349).

The female dress used by *falleras* is currently made from silk produced in one of the many Valencian workshops. The dress has a voluminous, full length skirt and a corset. It is worn with an ornamental scarf and an apron, and handmade shoes. The *falleras* are obliged to wear an official emblem over their dresses during the fiesta, which indicates their rank and to which *falla* they belong. Women are required to wear a special hairdo with three buns, adorned with appropriate jewelry.

The official male attire was established in 1954. It is simpler, but also more diverse, as there are fewer rules that men have to follow regarding their clothing. Usually they wear a scarf (or a hat) on their head, a white shirt, a vest, pantaloons (*saragüells*), and rope-soled sandals on their feet (Fernández Montes 1996: 613). The obligatory element is a *faja* (a sash worn as a belt), which indicates the rank of the person wearing it. Sometimes they also wear a *manta* (a piece of coarse cloth that was formerly used as a blanket and was transformed into an ornamental piece of clothing) (Fig. 1) (more on male historic Valencian attire see, e.g., Ferrandis Mas 1983).



Figure 1. Recreation of three types of male 18th-century attire.
Photograph by Urszula Wilk 2015.

The *falleros* also use a work suit called *blusón* (a shirt with an emblem of the *falla*), which is officially considered male attire, although it is worn during unofficial occasions by both sexes.

The rules regarding the attire of the *falleros* are stated in an official document. The second chapter of article 64 in the current official regulations of *el traje fallero* for the festivity states:

1. *With the purpose of giving the highest splendor to the acts and parades related to las Fallas, the commissions will watch over the attire used during las Fallas, as it should be a traditional Valencian attire fallero, with differentiation between that used by a man and a Valencian fallera woman:*

a) *the fallero will use an attire instituted during the IV Congreso General Fallero or any other Valencian traditional garment;*

b) *the fallera should wear a traditional Valencian garment.*

2. *The use of any attire that does not follow the rules of the traditional dress code fallero mentioned above is strictly prohibited, as is using the male attire by falleras, during official acts, regardless of the position they occupy. To specify, el blusón or blusa is considered male attire.¹ (Reglamento Fallero 2002)*

Nowadays, these rules cause certain discussion. The first issue is the meaning of the word ‘traditional’, especially with the female attire, as it could be seen as an element of invented tradition that “inculcates certain... norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies a continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992 [1983]: 1). The current fashion of wearing dresses by the *falleras* blends together different epochs, as stated by María Victoria Licerias Ferreres (2011). This expert on clothing highlights that the two different styles of dress – the official and the historic – should be differentiated, to avoid the *falleras* getting excluded from the festivities for wearing ‘inappropriate’ garments only because they wear a historic dress or hairstyle. Licerias Ferreres points to several differences. For example, the *falleras* tend to overuse embroidery in their ‘traditional’ attire, while the earlier designs were simpler, as silk was already luxurious enough. The neckline of the dress currently shows more cleavage, which earlier on was concealed with a scarf that now has only ornamental meaning (as does the apron, used before simply to avoid tarnishing the dress). The skirt extended only to the ankles and had a natural flow because of the layers. It underwent numerous changes throughout history; for example, in the 1960s it was shortened to knee length (with the mini dress in fashion), and today it is back to full length, and it is much more voluminous than the historic one. The hairdo with three buns is of romantic origin; before

that women used to wear only one. As a whole, the current dresses, made of luxurious silk, are reminiscent of the attires of the 18th and 19th centuries, but at the moment, for example, one bun is considered inappropriate (for more on the historic Valencian attire see, e.g., Licerias Ferreres 2011; Puerta Escribano 2002). Another clash pointed out by Licerias Ferreres is caused by frequent pairing of a *fallero*, whose clothes resemble more those historically worn by the Valencian farmers, and a *fallera*, whose dress, although popularly called *la labradora*, has little to do with that of a farmer and has more in common with that of the higher class (Figs. 2, 3).



Figure 2. Recreation of female 18th-century attire.
Photograph by Urszula Wilk 2015.



Figure 3. Modern fallera attire. Photograph by Urszula Wilk 2013.

WOMEN IN *FALLAS*

An interesting subject is the role of women in their *comisiones de fallas*. Although earlier it was not possible, nowadays a woman can be an active member in charge of a *comisión de falla*, taking on a position of *la presidenta* (the president). Nevertheless, as already mentioned above, the regulations of the attire still divide the clothing clearly between the male and female, prohibiting women to wear *el blusón* on official occasions. At the same time, this item of clothing is most frequently used by the *falleros*, both male and female, during all occasions considered unofficial.

With the possibility of acting as a president of their *falla*, most women still prefer to act as *falleras*, although this part does not imply any active role in the festivity. In the 1930s there was an important change imposed on the organization of *las Fallas* festival, and a figure of *la Fallera Mayor* was created. The unification of the festivity in that time was directly related to the opportunity of

bringing tourists into the city by showing the folkloric presentation of the local culture to the public. However, the part of *la Fallera Mayor* has been mainly ornamental; it does not possess any real power except for being a representation or even a personification of the festivity.

The creation of this figure with an honorific part as an emanation of a symbol of a *comisión fallera*, was first carried out in 1931, with the election of the first woman to be the *Reina de las Fallas* (the Queen of *las Fallas*) won by Angeles Algarra. She was, as highlighted by Ariño Villarroya (1990: 756), not *la Fallera Mayor*, and was not dressed as *la Valenciana* for the occasion. From that moment on, the associations started to elect their beauty queens and that led to the creation of the role of *la Fallera Mayor*.

Nowadays, the official regulations state:

*La Fallera Mayor will be the only woman who will execute the honorary representation part of the Comisión de Falla during internal and official acts. She will be appointed exclusively by Junta Central, and will be given preferential treatment established by the protocol during all actions of la Comisión. She will use a distinction of the traditional sash made in the colors of the national flag, while the rest of the female members will create el Corte de Honor, having as a distinction a tricolor sash with the colors of the Valencian flag.*² (Reglamento Fallero 2002: art. 28.2)

Each year women select their representatives and among these one is appointed as *la Fallera Mayor*, to be the maximum representative of the festivity, together with a group that is considered her court of honor. She receives the keys of the city during the inauguration of *las Fallas (la Crida)*, as a symbol of the *falleros* taking charge of the city during *las Fallas* period.

The election of *la Fallera Mayor* poses another important issue – the economic reality of the festivity, and the exclusion of those without financial capacity. The participation in the festival, in which the community of *los falleros* repeats the squandering so heavily criticized by them in their sculptures (Lisón Tolosana 2004: 119), is directly related to the financial means possessed both by the *comisión fallera*, and the *falleros* or *falleras* themselves. A woman who decides to participate in the contest must be aware of the necessity of having several dresses, the cost of which is very high, as female attire is worth several thousands of euros (the price varies depending on the fabric and the jewelry). This simple fact impedes the possibility of participation in the contest by all *falleras*.

The economic reality is important not only in the context of the attire, but also in participating in the community, as there are quotas that permit to finance the events related to the activities of the group that should be paid all year long

by every member of a *falla*. Nevertheless, regardless of the financial burden, whole families participate in the agenda of *las Fallas*. It is an important part of the Valencian identity and the participation in the festivities is a crucial agent in the process of shaping social relationships within their community.

CONCLUSION

El traje fallero was standardized as a symbol of Valencian identity in the 20th century. Further on it underwent several changes in agreement with temporary fashion, and nowadays the collection of historic elements from different epochs and different social groups mixed with contemporary necessities has created a garment that is considered traditional and is required to be worn during the festivities. This creates curious situations when participants wearing attires based on historically accurate recreations are excluded as not wearing the appropriately traditional costume. The necessity of recognizing two different types of garments – *el traje fallero* and *el traje histórico* – by the fiesta administration has arisen, as *el traje fallero* is a part of invented and still changing codification. Nevertheless, the *las Fallas* garments, however not traditional with their historic and contemporary elements, should be considered an important part of contemporary Valencian culture, presenting the complexity of the evolution of festive attire.

NOTES

- ¹ Original text: 1. Con el fin de dar el mayor realce y esplendor a los actos y desfiles falleros, las Comisiones velarán porque en la fiesta de las Fallas se utilice la indumentaria fallera y valenciana tradicional, diferenciando la utilizada por el hombre de la usada por la mujer valenciana y fallera: a) El fallero utilizará el traje instituido en el IV Congreso General Fallero o cualquier traje tradicional valenciano. b) La fallera deberá lucir el tradicional traje de valenciana. 2. Queda terminantemente prohibida la utilización de prendas que no sean acordes a la indumentaria tradicional fallera expresada anteriormente, asimismo no se permitirá la utilización de prendas masculinas por falleras, en actos oficiales, con independencia del cargo que ocupen. A estos efectos, se considera el blusón o blusa prenda masculina.
- ² Original text: La Fallera Mayor será la única mujer que ejercerá la representación honorífica de la Comisión de Falla en los actos propios y oficiales. Su designación será de competencia exclusiva de la Junta General, correspondiéndole ocupar el lugar protocolario preferente en toda actividad de la Comisión. Usará como distintivo propio la banda tradicional confeccionada en cinta con los colores de la bandera nacional, mientras que el resto de componentes femeninas formarán la Corte de Honor, siendo su banda distintiva confeccionada con cinta tricolor de la Señera valenciana.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

TRADITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE RITUAL YEAR

The 11th Annual International Conference¹ of the SIEF (Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore) Working Group on the Ritual Year, Traditions and Transformations, took place at the Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, in Kazan, on June 4–7, 2015. 38 scholars from 11 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) participated in the event.

For the first time the Working Group organised its conference in Russia, in the Republic of Tatarstan. One of the reasons was that the numbers of the participants from Russia and especially from Tatarstan and the Volga region had increased significantly. Therefore, rituals and feasts of ethno-local groups of the Volga region were discussed in more detail, and considerable space was given to Islamic rituals and rites in their present form. Another noticeable and important difference from previous conferences of the Working Group was the precise following of the theme of the conference; there were actually no presentations that would not fit into calendric and life cycle customs.

At the official opening ceremony, after the welcoming words of the conference organisers and the members of the Ritual Year Working Group, the audience was invited to a 'musical offering'. In this way the members of the Tatar folk musical group *Zhomga koen* ('Friday'), with Alsou Yenikeyeva as the director, designated their brief performance, which consisted of Tatar folk prayer-songs.

After this kind of symbolic blessing, the plenary session was opened by **Terry Gunnell** (Iceland). He presented the paper titled *The Origin and Evolution of the "Mountain Woman" (Fjallkonan) as a National Emblem in the Icelandic National Day Ceremonies and Other Contexts*, in which he suggested his version of the origin of this image. The so-called "Mountain Woman" (*Fjallkonan*), dressed in Icelandic national costume, gives a speech every year, on the Icelandic National Day (17th June). One may assume that this tradition has a long history, but in fact it was invented in the late 19th century. The image of *Fjallkonan* has its roots in the legends about powerful female spirits of the Old Norse poetry and romantic depictions of the Icelandic nature; it also corresponds with the folktales collected two centuries ago. The author considered the theatrical background of the female figure and the process of formation of this personification of Iceland, which embodies old traditions of the country on the National Day.²

Helena Ruotsala (Finland) continued with the issues of the modern development of tradition and presented a paper titled *The Role and Meaning of Fictive Rituals in Cultural Tourism*, in which she shared her experience as a researcher and a participant in the rituals performed by the ethnic minorities of the Far North for cruise tourists. **Ildikó Lehtinen** (Finland) in her paper *Ritual Practices as Representations* shared her ideas on the metamorphosis of the contemporary feasts as elements of continuous tradition. While analysing the case of the spring commemorative rituals of Mari people, the author showed how the ritual meaning moves far away from authentic models, and the very festival develops into an attractive cultural and ethnographic event.

Plenary lectures outlined the main directions in the study of various festive traditions which were presented during the sessions. The presentation *Midwinter Masking: Place and Identity in an Ironwork Community* by **Marlene Hugoson** (Sweden), who used archival as well as field data of her own, demonstrated, on the one hand, the preservation and conservatism of the carnival in the village of Gimo (central Sweden), and, on the other hand, the evolution of new components in it, for instance, images of Swedish or foreign politicians. All the costumes for the event are traditionally made of materials at hand; they are never bought. The gender division is respected during the preparatory process: women and girls sew and knit costumes for themselves and men with their sons use 'male' materials such as iron and boards, and make different masks, mechanisms, and creatures. Thus, the tradition is passed on from one generation to the next and the carnival is still very popular.

Žilvytis Šaknys (Lithuania) aimed his paper titled *Ethnic and/or Confessional Aspects of a Holiday? The Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian New Year in Vilnius* at revealing the main characteristics in the perception of this state holiday, which is a day off even in the post-Soviet period. Although the author mentions some peculiarities of the New Year party held by Russians in Lithuania (celebration according to the Moscow time, a greater interest in the very New Year festivity compared to other feasts), there are no pivotal confessional differences of the celebration between three ethnic groups.

Ksenija Klimova (Russia) also touched upon New Year and other celebrations. In her paper *Transformations in Traditional Modern Greek Calendar Rites* she focused on a few festivities of the modern Greek ritual year and their contemporary transformations. According to her observations, New Year celebrations have preserved the obligatory St. Basil's cake baking with a coin and fortune telling, and this rite has its roots in the earlier times. Meanwhile, girls' fortune-telling (the prominent 'klidon', performed in several Balkan countries) during the summer solstice is intentionally reconstructed. Today folk holidays include commercial components often aimed at attracting tourists.

The beginning of the year was investigated by **Maria Vyatchina** (Russia), who presented a paper titled *Holiday without Holiday: Deconstruction of New Year in Modern Islamic Culture*, in which she analysed the transformation of the New Year holiday in the Muslim community. According to the author, during the last two decades, religious people consciously avoid celebration of this holiday because of its strong associations with Soviet and secular calendar.

Nina Vlaskina (Russia) in her paper *The Calendar Holiday System in Southern Russia in Motion: The Late 19th – Early 21st Centuries* scrutinised the process of formation and change of the local feasts in the south of Russia, with special attention paid to the inventing of the ritual year customs during the Soviet period and the last two decades.

Elena Uzeneva (Russia) (*The Calendar Rites of the Bulgarian Muslims: At the Crossroads of Cultures*) continued the discussion of Islamic traditions and described the specific features of the calendrical circle in an Islamic Bulgarian village located in the Central Rhodopes, with the neighbouring Muslim and Christian population. The analysis of the interrelations between people of two confessions and their tolerant attitude toward differences in celebrations was based on the field data collected by the author.

Tatiana Titova and **Vadim Kozlov** (Russia) (*Holiday Framing as Reality: The Case of Pitrau (The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul)*) referred to the rituals of the Kryashens, who are an ethno-religious Christian group of the Tatars. They analysed the process

of creating festivals with the assistance of governmental and other institutions. The presenters took the case of Pitrau (the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul), which is a patronal feast in one of the Tatar villages, to illustrate its transformation into the national holiday celebrated by the whole Kryashen group.

Nailja Almeeva (Russia) had also put the Kryashen tradition into the centre of her study, *Pentecost Ritual Activity of the Kryashens (Based on Ethnomusicological Field Research in 2013 in the Almetyevsk Region of Tatarstan)*. The author analysed archaic pagan rituals that are performed after the church service; these practices include mostly singing calendric songs which are aimed at magic rainmaking.

Alsu Enikeeva and **Guzel Stolyarova** (Russia) in their presentation *Modern Folk Festivals: Paths of Development and Their Specific Features* outlined the diversity of the pagan rituals performed by elderly women in Chuvash villages. Part of the rituals had previously been carried out by men, but later on, due to the lack of elderly men in the villages, went to women's competence. Still, male presence is being supported symbolically – women keep men's headwear under the arm. This is a typical way to substitute a person in folk culture, when a part of the clothes symbolises somebody (in healing, life cycle rituals, etc.).

Sergey Rychkov (Russia) presented a paper *Transformation of the Festive Culture of the Russian Rural Population: The Regional Dimension*, describing the celebration of *Karavon*, which is now the official festival in Tatarstan and is limited mostly to musical performances and a market presenting folk crafts. A set of funny touristic souvenirs was demonstrated, so as to make the audience acquainted with the local creativity.

Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (Austria) made a presentation *Sacred and Calendrical Rituals in the Annual Cycle: A Comparative Study*. Using her personal observations of the calendric festivities of Udmurts, she showed the importance for rituals to be performed in the process of their preservation. In the Soviet period, ideological prohibitions, change of the traditional places and time for the rituals led to the transformation of the traditional meaning, resulting in its full oblivion.

Svetlana Suslova and **Larisa Donina** (Russia) in their paper *Folk Costume Traditions in the Modern Festive Culture of the Volga-Ural Tatars* outlined the main trends in the folk costume making for performing authentic rituals, staged dance performances, fashion industry, and symbolic (identification) purposes. The researchers stressed the point that people who pretend they are making clothes resembling the authentic ones do not often ask the opinions of ethnographers. As a result, in their works, elements of different times and places appear together.

Rozalinda Musina (Russia) spoke on *The "Religious" and the "Secular" in Contemporary Family Ceremonies of the Tatars in Conditions of Islamic Renaissance*. She characterised the specifics of the Tatar spiritual revival, which she introduced as "rites and belief" (*obryadoverie*). She said that the naming ceremonies, circumcision (*sunnat*), and *Nikah* (marriage with the participation of the mullahs), which were mandatory in the Tatar villages during the Soviet period, are now even more widespread. The changes the author has investigated are both quantitative (the percentage increase in the performing of such ceremonies) and structural (the system of offering gifts changes, as well as the tradition of inviting guests, and the place for performing rituals, which moves from houses into mosques and other Muslim religious buildings or into public places – cafes and restaurants).

Matteo Benussi (United Kingdom) in his paper *From Ritualism to Self-Restraint: Halal Lifestyles and Business among Muslims in Tatarstan* raised the issue of the Muslims' food as one of the most notable characteristics of religious identity. The author analysed the ways in which the concept of 'halal' is being rapidly commercialised: it has been picked up not only by food manufacturers but also advertisers, and 'halal' as a notion now characterises all the positive properties (such as 'pure', 'right', 'own'), extending its lexical compatibility very widely (up to the 'halal' bank).

Irina Sedakova (Russia) spoke on the traditional for the conferences of the Ritual Year Working Group topics, which reveal the parallels between annual and family ritual cycles. The scholar presented a paper titled *Sacred Time in Slavic Childbirth Rituals: Traditions and Transformations*, in which she outlined the main trends of the sacred 'ritual year' of pregnancy, and also showed how today the most traditional ideas and practices (concealment of pregnancy, prohibitions and recommendations) change and convert to the open, public sphere. Pregnant women wear tight clothes; on Facebook they announce their pregnancy, etc. They even organise a party (baby shower) with many guests who come with presents for the baby. This custom originates in the USA and has become very popular. In Russia, it is known as minus birthday, before birthday, or stork day.

Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė (Lithuania) in her paper *Family and the Ritual Year in a Contemporary Lithuanian City* reported the results of her study enquiring into the citizens' perception of traditional customs. According to her field research, people regard as traditional those phenomena and rites that have been transmitted from one generation to another, and they also designate as traditional the festivals they celebrate together with their family rather than with friends.

Elena Iugai (Russia) in her presentation "*Therefrom You Cannot Hear Speech. Therefrom You Cannot Receive a Letter*": *The Letter-Message in Russian Funeral Lamentation* carried out a textological analysis of the lamentations performed at funerals and on the days of annual commemoration of the dead.

Lina Gergova (Bulgaria) in her paper *Russia and the USSR in the Bulgarian National Calendar* touched upon the complicated problem of celebrating the historical events associated with Russia and the ambiguous attitude towards them in the Bulgarian society. Even the central historical event of the official ritual year, which is the 3rd of March (Day of Liberation from the Ottoman rule), is thoroughly revised today, and is negatively evaluated by some Bulgarians.

Liisa Vesik (Estonia) in her presentation *The Evolution of Valentine's Day in Socialist and Post-Socialist Times* investigated the gradual shifts in the meaning and function of this holiday from the day of friendship and close ones to the day of love and romance.

Arūnas Vaicekauskas (Lithuania) presented the paper *Aesthetics and Invention of Rituals: Visual Aspects of the Folkloric Ritual Year in Contemporary Lithuania*. He showed that nowadays the trend is not to invent a whole ritual complex, but rather certain elements designed to correspond with the tradition recovery, on the one hand, and the need of society for vibrant festivities, on the other.

Skaidrė Urbonienė (Lithuania) (*The Visual Aspect of Sacral Monuments' Consecration Festivals in the 20th – 21st Centuries*) described in detail the main stages of consecration of new Christian monuments and their decoration with flowers. The lecturer paid special attention to the recent aesthetic innovations in Lithuanian culture of veneration.

Bożena Gierek (Poland) (*Transformation in the Polish Festival of Harvest*) examined harvest celebrations in towns, where the event may acquire a religious (Catholic) or secular (institutional) accent. She stressed that these events do not receive decent responsiveness from the mass media, except for the local newspapers.

A number of presentations demonstrated new directions in the studies of the Ritual Year Working Group participants.

Andres Kuperjanov (Estonia) in his paper *The Relationship between the Folk Calendar and the Folk Astronomy Heritage* used vast archive material to talk about the role of stars in the vernacular time definition and weather forecasting.

Alexandra Ippolitova (Russia) in her paper *Rituals of Herb-Gathering in M. Veljiakov's Manuscript of the 1890s: Transformation of Tradition* characterised her valuable archival findings. She interpreted the detailed instructions of when, who, and how can approach the herbs, how to dig and pick them up, and indicated prayers and charms that follow these actions.

Mare Kõiva (Estonia) gave her presentation on *The Ritual Year of Domestic Pets: Zoo-Folkloristics*. The scholar revealed the significant role of pets in modern society. People treat them equally to their family members, and congratulate their pets on calendar and family holidays, giving them special presents.

Nadezhda Rychkova (Russia) in her presentation *The Festive Component in Work-Related Activities of the Russians and the Tatars* made an attempt to compare her research materials of the traditional working customs and practices in the Russian villages of the Volga region and the new data on the modern corporate professional holidays. The comparison of these materials showed obvious change in perceiving the notions of labour and holiday, and, correspondingly, the whole system of values.

Svetlana Amosova (Russia) presented a paper titled *Narratives about Blood Libel in Latgale: Traditions and Transformations*. She introduced new field data and showed the spatial distribution of the narratives, describing the idea of furnishing blood for baking the unleavened bread (matzo) and other accusations against Jews for the ritual murder mainly for medical purposes.

For the first time, the conference on the Ritual Year arranged a Skype-session, so that those who did not come to Kazan could deliver papers and partake in the discussions. The session included two presentations on the Muslim folk traditions in Bulgaria: **Evgenia Troeva's** *The Tyurbe (Tomb) of Enihan Baba – Ritual Locus of Muslim Bulgarians in the Central Rhodopes*, and **Margarita Karamihova's** *Dynamics of the Muslim Ritual Year in Post-Socialist Bulgaria*.

Petko Hristov (Bulgaria) presented a paper *Celebrating the Deserted Village: The Constructing of Local Identity and the Ritual Process in Post-Socialist Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia*, in which he analysed the most recent data on the performing of the typical Balkan rite of Kurban. **Ekaterina Anastasova** (*“Return” to the “Traditions”: Identity and The Ritual Year in Bulgaria*) spoke on the complicated construction and modern modification of certain annual festivities such as March 8, Annunciation, and Mother's Day.

In the same Skype-session, **Morgana Sythove** (Netherlands), who presents herself as a practising priestess of Wicca, shared her views of *Neo-Paganism as a Cultural Phenomenon in Europe*. She provided the participants with the data on the distribution and variety of Neo-Paganism in contemporary Europe.

All the presentations were followed by lively discussions. The participants were particularly interested in the research methodologies (usage of Internet data, importance of virtual communication for the research purposes, etc.). At the closing ceremony of the conference, Terry Gunnell summarised the basic theoretical assumptions of the papers presented. The renaissance of the traditional ritual year is closely connected with the designation of identity, which is often implemented through the reconstructed (or even invented) costumes, performances, singing and dancing. Commercialisation and ethno-cultural tourism support the revitalisation and spreading of folk culture and often take the form of officially organised festivals. Professor Gunnell particularly stressed that at the same time, unfortunately, the knowledge of experts in different fields (historians, ethnographers, folklorists, linguists, musicologists, museum workers, etc.) often remains unexploited.

In addition to discussing a wide range of topics related to the innovation, change, adaption, and adoption, with regard to the traditional and modern ritual year, the participants of the conference gained some valuable insights into the unique customs of the Tatars and other ethnic groups who live near Volga. Scholars also learned the ways in which different religious groups manage to live together peacefully, with mutual respect for each others' world views and cultural backgrounds. Besides the conference itself, they participated in a memorable excursion to Russian Orthodox churches and monasteries (one of them a former Gulag labour camp) on Volga and an authentic Sabantuy festival, which took place in a Tatar village in the countryside.

The conference papers will be published in the 11th volume of the Working Group series, *The Ritual Year*.

The conference in Kazan was followed by the next one in Findhorn (Scotland) in January 2016.³ The forthcoming academic meeting of the SIEF Working Group on The Ritual Year is included in the programme of the 13th SIEF Congress, *Ways of Dwelling: Crisis, Craft, Creativity*, expected to be held in Göttingen, Germany, in March 2017.

Irina Sedakova

Notes

¹ Participation in the conference and this review have been financially supported by the Russian Humanitarian Foundation (project № 14–04–00546a, *Lingua-cultural situation in Russia and Bulgaria and transformation of the Russian-Bulgarian language interrelations: 21st century*).

² The presentation was very interesting and full of inspiring ideas. It has been translated into Russian and will appear in *Zhivaya Starina*, Vol. 4, 2016.

³ See the review: McKean, Thomas & Sedakova, Irina 2016. Regulating Customs: The 12th Annual International Conference of the SIEF Working Group “The Ritual Year”, Findhorn (Scotland), 8–12 January 2016. *Revista română de sociologie*, serie nouă, anul XXVII, Nos. 1–2, pp. 151–154.

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION EMITTING POSITIVE ENERGY

Kristel Kivari's dissertation *Dowsing as a link between natural and supernatural: Folkloristic reflections on water veins, Earth radiation and dowsing practice*

On June 10, 2016, Kristel Kivari defended her doctoral dissertation titled *Dowsing as a link between natural and supernatural: Folkloristic reflections on water veins, Earth radiation and dowsing practice* at the University of Tartu.

The dissertation includes five studies from the period 2012–2016. The first two introductory chapters explain the structure and objectives of the dissertation, give an overview of the practice of dowsing, and refer to research done so far. The structure of the dissertation is well organised and logical and the introductory part unites the following five research articles into a consistent whole.

The author gives an overview of dowsing for mining purposes and for discovering water veins. A relevant question is asked about to what extent this topic could be placed in the context of religious tradition. In this respect a special role is given to legends as carriers of this tradition. It is positive that the author has noticed the role of legends in spreading knowledge. This offers a possibility to continue studies, as stories related to dowsing keep emerging, and besides, such stories themselves also deserve examining, either within scientific or folk religious discourse.

This subject is highly topical at the moment. Kivari has discussed today's practices reverberating in people's activities, as well as attention from the media. Besides, detecting energies and using the dowsing rod and the pendulum are popular also in the sphere of business: tourism, training courses (identifying positive and negative energies, quests for improving personal welfare, etc.). Today the observation of water veins and earth radiation – as many other spheres – is a hybrid phenomenon, attracting the knowledge and performance of several levels of different fields. The author has noted and highlighted in the dissertation how peculiar approach complexes emerge simultaneously: folkloric, vernacular, and deliberately science-based. This is intervened by people's knowledge of folklore, their self-perceptions, and subjective interpretations, which people try to market through their authority or charm or promote otherwise. Their activity always finds response and followers, but also opponents and sceptics. These discussions, performances, and stories deserve an analytical approach and examination. It is explicable that the author emphasises that her research focuses mainly on verbal expressions – most probably due to her respect for folkloristic research tradition. And yet the dissertation clearly reveals a competent approach to the research object as a specific practice.

Kivari has also questioned the analytic distinction between the outsider's and insider's point of view. The author defines the etic and emic perspectives, drawing on the book *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice* by religion researcher James Kapalo, published in 2011. However, these approaches can boast a long history. After these terms had been coined by Kenneth Pike, a behavioural psychologist and linguist (Chapman & Routledge 2005: 206–207), distinguishing between the emic and etic perspectives has been part of cultural studies to a smaller or larger extent. In folkloristics these types of research models took root in the 1970s–



*Kristel Kivari.
Photograph from private collection.*

1980s, above all, through the works of Lauri Honko and Dan Ben-Amos.

Highlighting this aspect means, among other things, also self-positioning of the researcher. The reader can easily find an answer to the question about how Kivari in the role of a researcher is related to the scholars interested in the topic as well as practitioners. Both the opponents of the dissertation had also prepared relevant questions, which were answered by Kivari in an honest yet academic vein.

I am of the opinion that the researcher's personal engagement in the material under study enlivens and even animates the writing. The advantage of the dissertation for the reader is that the author has been able to express in academic language the perception and body-related feelings experienced by people while dowsing or coming into contact with Earth energies, etc.

Kivari's approach is likable, emphatic towards her informants and respectful, yet objective towards the studied material. In places, however, she seems to turn into an advocate of described events: the third article in the dissertation, titled "Esoteric lore in Kirna Manor and magical epistemologies" seems to be nearing the borderline.

The dissertation presents an observation significant in terms of folkloristics (and also of vital importance), concerned with the developments and changes in legend content. Kivari maintains that "the need to interpret and re-interpret one's environment" (in the second article of the dissertation, titled "Water veins, energy columns and health issues: Expressions of vernacular religion") creates new stories associated with the places charged with special energies. While speaking about water veins and bringing examples of their impact on human beings, discussing the possible effect of Earth radiation and the use of the dowsing rod and pendulum both by specialists and laymen, the environment is made meaningful in various ways. When creating local stories people want to include significant places and events in the narratives they tell. Finding and experiencing water veins and energies provides new material for it. The fact that the explored processes have been placed in vernacular religion instead of coherent religious ideology yields conceptual sustainability to folk belief studies.

Opponents are always tempted to speak about things missing in the dissertation, not those dealt with. Maybe the materials in the Estonian Folklore Archives would have deserved more detailed discussion? And although the significant works in the European tradition, for instance, in the context of the 17th century, are presented in detail, the older tradition of dowsing with its own peculiarities has been left rather invisible. Some of the treatments of Estonian material from the past would have deserved a synopsis of at least a few sentences but Kivari has only mentioned them passingly. Although special literature has been thoroughly and probably sufficiently elaborated, diligent browsing of bibliographies (not only those of folklore) would have yielded salient addition namely in terms of local tradition.

The dissertation published as the 24th issue of *Dissertationes Folkloristicae* is a salient research enriching folkloristic analysis. Due to the approach considering different aspects, the use of suitable analytical tools, and the unique interaction of the researcher and the research object, the dissertation *Dowsing as a link between natural and supernatural: Folkloristic reflections on water veins, Earth radiation and dowsing practice* has added essential and necessary new knowledge to cultural studies.

Mare Kalda

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CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH, Tallinn, June 28 – July 2, 2016

Amsterdam in 2010, Harrisburg in 2011, Gottingen in 2012, Lexington in 2013, Prague in 2014, San Antonio in 2015, and Tallinn in 2016 – these are the cities that have recently hosted researchers of contemporary legends, who persistently continue the tradition of annual meetings. This year researchers in this field from the Estonian Literary Museum were given the honour of organising the 34th conference of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research (ISCLR). Eda Kalmre and Mare Kalda along with an efficient conference team had chosen as the venue to discuss contemporary legends a place in Pühavaimu Street, in the Old Town of Tallinn.

Year in, year out, the first call for papers has been similar in form: Proposals for papers on all aspects of legend research are sought, as are those on any legend-like tradition that circulates actively at present or has circulated in an earlier historical period. Extensive understanding of the sphere and its resulting interpretation have

taken shape during the years the society has operated. Some thirty years have passed since the innovative Sheffield meetings in the 1980s; during these years group identity and disciplinary history have been established. One of the founder members of the society, Sandy Hobbs, was also supposed to come to the conference, yet had to give up his plans. His and David Main's co-authored presentation, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker: Then and Now", was read by Véronique Campion-Vincent. The versatile and buoyant French colleague herself discussed how Native Americans serve as a source of wisdom in the context of alternative spiritual beliefs (New Age). Bill Ellis joined the conference via Skype, to be informed about his nomination as a recipient of the Linda Dégh Lifetime Achievement Award for Legend Scholarship.¹ The nominee greeted the conference participants in his characteristic witty style. The award has been handed out since 2015, and the first one was given to Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith, who were also involved in the establishment of the society and the Sheffield seminars. So far all the laureates, as well as Linda Dégh (1920–2014) herself, were and are researchers who have made an inestimable contribution to the study of contemporary legends, and whose works serve as the basis in discussions about these legends.

As a rule, conference presentations can roughly be divided into two: some of them deal with folklore related to famous personalities or major events concerned with many people, as well as variegated fusions of folklore and media news; some others focus on the activity of marginal groups or proceed from symbolic places. Narratives channel the main human fears and emotions, which surface in urban legends and are related to human existence, ethical choices, prohibitions and punishments, pleasures and disgusts, as well as dangers emanating from their own species.

Patricia Turner and Anastasiya Astapova, researchers in the field of political folklore, talked about popular interpretations of great things and personalities. Turner introduced the image of Michelle Obama and compared it with those associated with other symbolically charged females in politics. Astapova, based on her fieldwork in Belarus and on the Belarusian mass media, showed the interplay between the genres of rumours and jokes about presidential elections in non-democratic societies. Aurore Van de Winkel from Brussels explained the construction of French popular imagination created around the disappearance of the Malaysian Airlines flight MH 370. Rosemary Hathaway's presentation was induced by personal experience narratives about protest against the Vietnam War. Power relations, images of the enemy, conspiracy theories – these were the keywords of Zuzana Panczová's presentation about utilising the "West" and "East" dichotomy in the conspiratorial discourse in Slovakia, Alexander Panchenko's presentation about organ theft legends in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, and Daria Radchenko's presentation about war folklore with a sensitive topicality in the context of the political crisis in Ukraine. Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby's observations were concerned with the relationships between power and sacredness: based on interviews, she discussed GULAG trauma narratives, in which the massacre venue became sanctified.

A number of processes viewed in the context of contemporary legend studies manifest a symbiosis between the media (especially digital media) and the physical world. Websites present material shared and consumed therein, but which has intertextual connections with pre-digital era texts. Radvilė Racėnaitė had collected Internet memes that talked about Christian saints and God. Gail de Vos examined the image of the Norse god Bragi in contemporary popular culture. Carolyn Ware introduced the sentimental 'true' story

of a dog named Tank, which had circulated on the Internet, and brought out similarities and differences between the online versions of the story. Another 'pet presentation' by Mare Kõiva and Rahel Laura Vesik discussed the well-known Japanese story about a faithful dog and its later spread in the media. David Clarke ("The Role of Soldiers, Spies and Journalists in the Dissemination of WWI Rumour-Legends") and Filip Graliński ("Fortean, Urban Legends or Journalistic Copy Paste? Weird Stories in the Interwar Polish Press") analysed fabricated or rumour-news specially transformed into legends.

Special landmarks in the development of folkloristics as a field of science were dwelt upon by Christine Shojaei Kawan (methodological innovation in the folklore research by Walter Anderson), Eda Kalmre (urban legends and their collecting process in Estonia in the 1990s), and Carme Oriol and Emili Samper in their co-authored presentation about the strategies of collecting, archiving, and studying contemporary legends in Catalonia. Mare Kalda gave an overview of the more universal ideas of giving and receiving, based on traditional Estonian treasure tales. Elena Iugai discussed Russian beliefs, legends, and practices concerning money, and showed how the balance of good and evil was established in belief stories. The presentation by Rita Repšienė and Odeta Žukauskienė dealt with visual and narrative power of cinematic legends influencing life in so-called 'dead cities'. Mikel J. Koven explored how the figure of the antiquarian scholar in the film adaptations of M. R. James's ghost stories faces the situation where the past haunts the present. Theo Meder shared his experience of having followed the narrative riddle game of kwispel during the last ten years (see also Burger & Meder 2006), which has turned into a card game called Black Stories, in which the players are given hints by which they have to guess different urban legends.

For some time already, rumours featuring fear, anxiety, and suspicion, accompanied by manifestations of ostension and peculiar behaviour, have constituted popular spheres of contemporary legends. Peter Burger analysed legends about strangers abducting children in white vans, and compared news items, discussion on the web, and statements by officials. The paper by Anna Kirzyuk, however, focused on the Soviet variation of the persistent urban legend about dangerous black cars, circulating in the Soviet Union in the 1960s–1980s, and was based on the data collected in the course of the corresponding research project. J. J. Dias Marques talked about the reappearance of a legend known as "The Grateful Terrorist" in two different occasions in Portugal in 2015, after its last circulation some ten years ago. Andrea Kitta observed the development of Slender Sickness,² spreading from its initial virtual location to the physical reality of people (teenagers). Eleanor Hasken demonstrated the narratives posted on Alien Abduction Help Forum and Unexplained Mysteries Forum – places for people who have had some experience with aliens. The board of the society recognised her presentation as the best student presentation at the Tallinn conference. Reet Hiiemäe also explored a sensitive topic: she focused on contemporary beliefs about childlessness in Estonia and showed how childless people try to overcome their personal crisis. John Bodner's paper "Pot Labourers' Communication Ecologies: Rumour, Legend and Occupational Narratives among Marijuana Growers" was based on five years' fieldwork and showed narratives in a broader judicial context. Rae Muhlstock had studied the contemporary implications of the mythological labyrinth, especially the maze built in the Catskill Mountains, and showed how local people, rather than to be interested in the myth, were interested in merely the existence of the maze. Jan Pohunek in his paper on the phenomenology



Figure 1. Urban legend researchers with historian Ott Sandrak at Tammisspea erratic boulder.
Photograph by Jan Pohunek 2016.



Figure 2. Theo Meder in the dual role of a presenter and game leader.
Photograph by Meelis Roll 2016.

of haunted places presented examples of areas frequently mentioned in supernatural stories (abandoned houses, castle ruins, haunted forests, etc.) His attention was paid to the role of sensory experiences and different kinds of interpretations of space, which help to create stories worth telling.

The conference was supported by the Estonian Literary Museum and the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, and it took place within the framework of the research funding project IUT 22-5 (Narrative and belief aspects of folklore studies) and partly the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies (CEES). The 34th conference of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research in Tallinn presented a valuable intermediate summary of the current state in this research field in the second decade of the 21st century. The abstracts of the presentations are available at <http://www.folklore.ee/rl/fo/konve/2016/legend/abstracts.pdf>.

In the late autumn of 2016, the next conference in 2017 was announced, which will take place at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, on June 6–10.

Mare Kalda

Notes

¹ See <https://contemporarylegend.org/prizes-and-awards/linda-degh-lifetime-achievement-award/receipient-1/>, last accessed on November 10, 2016.

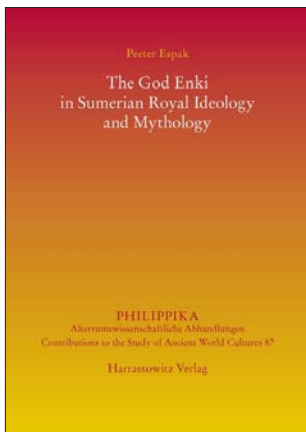
² A special issue of the society's journal, titled *The Slender Man. Contemporary Legend: The Journal of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research*, 2015, was published recently, and it includes five longer articles by Trevor Blank & Lynne McNeill, Andrew Peck, Jeffrey Tolbert, and Andrea Kitta, five shorter discussion points, and a book review.

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BOOK REVIEWS

ENKI AND THE SUMERIAN KINGSHIP



Peeter Espak. *The God Enki in Sumerian Royal Ideology and Mythology*. Philippika – Altertumswissenschaftliche Abhandlungen / Contributions to the Study of Ancient World Cultures 87. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015. 235 pp.

Dr. Peeter Espak's monograph *The God Enki in Sumerian Royal Ideology and Mythology* belongs to the field of Ancient Near Eastern studies. This monograph is a very important and profound analysis of the role and importance of the ancient Sumerian and Akkadian god Enki (Ea) in the Sumero-Akkadian religion and its royal ideology. Peeter Espak's latest study concerning Enki (2015) is based on his doctoral thesis *The God Enki in Sumerian Royal Ideology and Mythology*, which was successfully defended at the Faculty of Theology, University of Tartu,

on the 14th of December 2010 (Espak 2010). This doctoral thesis continued the research that he had already started in his master's studies (Espak 2006).

The time frame of Peeter Espak's research covers several historical periods from the Early Dynastic III period (Sumer) until the end of the Old Babylonian era, and partially also some later periods (e.g. Middle Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian). The author scrupulously analyses all significant written sources (royal inscriptions, myths, epics, royal hymns) from the Ancient Near Eastern region in the Sumerian and Akkadian languages from the period ca. 2500 to 1500 BCE (Sumerian and Akkadian royal inscriptions from Ur-Nanše until Ammi-saduqa) and also other types of texts dating from the 3rd millennium BCE until later periods – the end of the 2nd millennium and also from the 1st millennium BCE (e.g. *Enuma Eliš* and *Genesis*). So, besides the royal inscriptions from Mesopotamia, Espak also analyses mythological and epic texts from the Ancient Near East. He has paid particular attention to Enki (Ea) in Sumero-Akkadian mythology such as Sumerian and Akkadian creation myths (e.g. *Enki and Ninmah*, *Atra-hasis*, *Enuma eliš*, etc.) and also considers parallels with *Genesis* from the Old Testament.

Espak's research deals with numerous hypotheses and some complicated questions concerning the cult of Enki (Ea), his role and position in Mesopotamian royal ideology, pantheon, rituals, and mythology, which are either dedicated to Enki (Ea) or in which Enki (Ea) is at least mentioned. Many of Espak's ideas, hypotheses and suggestions are, in my opinion, well-argued and interesting and I agree with almost all of them. For example, I agree with the following opinion proposed by Espak (2015: 205):

There is no basis for suggestions that Enki or Enlil had to be foreign deities imported to Mesopotamia. In the first preserved texts, they both are definitely Sumerian gods. There is no scope for proving or suggesting that they had to be

pre-Sumerian or Semitic gods. It seems possible to analyse both concepts in parallel with the development of the overall Sumerian society and culture.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned here that Espak's study concerning Enki (Ea) in Sumero-Akkadian Royal Ideology and Mythology is not the first among such in-depth works in Ancient Near Eastern studies, leaving aside articles concerning the question of the very important god Enki. It is at least the third monograph dedicated to this subject. The first profound study concerning Enki (Ea) was published by Margaret W. Green more than forty years ago (Green 1975). Eight years later this study was followed by Assyriologist Hannes D. Galter, who published his dissertation on Ea/Enki in the Akkadian tradition in 1983 (Galter 1983).

Obviously, the quantity of articles or other studies that in some way are dedicated to or connected with questions about the god Enki (Ea) are quite remarkable; it is essential, however, to bear in mind that these papers only deal with certain aspects connected to the cult of Enki (Ea), and his role in religion and mythology (Steible 1967; Farber-Flügge 1973; Galter 1999 [1995]; Emelianov 2004; Dietrich 2007). Prior to the publishing of Espak's research in 2015, representing a new, authentic, and solid approach concerning this Sumerian deity, discussion of Enki's role and position in Mesopotamian religion and royal ideology was conspicuous by its absence in specialised Assyriological literature.

So, the current book consists of the following nine chapters: Early Dynastic Period; The Dynasty of Akkad; The Second Dynasty of Lagaš; Ur III Period; The Dynasty of Isin; The Dynasty of Larsa; The First Dynasty of Babylon; Enki (Ea) in the Mythology of Creation; Enki and the Archaic Sumerian Religion: The Question of Rivalry between the Theologies of Enki and Enlil.

This study is concluded by a General Conclusion, Bibliography, and Index of Royal Inscriptions and Mythological Texts.

The first seven chapters form one large section (pp. 7–138) with a clear logical and chronological structure. These chapters (from the Early Dynastic period until the First Dynasty of Babylon) give a detailed view concerning the development of the history of the cult of Enki (Ea) during the Late Early Dynastic period (ED III), the Sargonic epoch, the period of Gutian domination, the Neo-Sumerian epoch, and the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian periods.

The 8th chapter of Espak's monograph (pp. 139–188), "Enki (Ea) in the Mythology of Creation", deals with the role of the god Enki (Ea) in Sumerian and Akkadian mythology. First of all, of course, regarding the cosmogonies, the author scrupulously analyses all existing myths and texts within the mythological background in which Enki (Ea) was either mentioned or which were dedicated to this very significant Ancient Mesopotamian god.

The present work really shines in its final comparative chapter (chapter 9, pp. 189–207): "Enki and the Archaic Sumerian Religion: the Question of Rivalry between the Theologies of Enki and Enlil". It is notable that the question of the so-called contest between the two most important Sumerian theological systems – the system of Enlil with its main residence in Nippur and the system of Enki (whose main centre was Eridu) – was not so deeply considered or analysed in the earliest Ancient Near Eastern studies. So what is especially notable here is the fact that, in Peeter Espak's opinion, this rivalry between Enki and Enlil (Eridu and Nippur) might not even have existed at all.

But here I will also present some critical remarks on this great study. Although Espak's monograph is a very good and profound analysis, some small but still quite important things are missing; for example, the book contains no indices of rulers, deities, geographical places or other important names and terms. The other critical remark is related to the title of Peeter Espak's monograph: *The God Enki in Sumerian Royal Ideology and Mythology*. I think this title is not ideal and would look better if it also contained the word 'Akkadian', for example, *The God Enki in Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Ideology and Mythology* or, at least, perhaps *The God Enki in Sumero-Akkadian Royal Ideology and Mythology*. Peeter Espak's study concentrates not only on Sumerian periods using Sumerian material; he analyses material from Akkadian, Isin-Larsa, and Old Babylonian periods as well, also dealing with evidence from the Akkadian language (e.g. *Atrahasis*, *Enuma Eliš*, etc.).

In summary, I think it was necessary and very useful to carry out such a new study dedicated to the cult of Enki (Ea) in Ancient Mesopotamia. As a final comment I would add that I believe Peeter Espak has been very successful in analysing Enki's cult in Ancient Mesopotamia, a cult which strongly influenced the formation of the religious and ideological worldview of the people of the Ancient Near Eastern cultural space.

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INDIGENOUS GROUPS AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARCTIC



Valery Tishkov (ed.). *Rossiiskaia Arktika: korennyye narody i promyshlennoe osvoenie*. Moscow & Saint Petersburg: Nestor-Istoria, 2016. 272 pp. In Russian.

Over the last years, the interaction between indigenous groups of population and mining companies has increasingly become the focus of attention on the part of anthropologists. The processes currently taking place in the Russian Arctic and the adjacent territories, which have been considered in a number of important works in the past decade and a half (see, e.g., some recent works: Stammer & Wilson 2006; Sirina & Iarlykapov & Funk 2008; Behrends et al. 2011; Novikova & Funk 2012; Wiget & Balalaeva 2014; Novikova 2014; Golovnev et al. 2014; Funk 2015; and others), are no exception either.

The book titled *Rossiiskaia Arktika: korennyye narody i promyshlennoe osvoenie* (Russian Arctic: Indigenous Peoples and Industrial Development)¹ is written by a group of ethnologists from the RAS Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (Natalia Novikova, Elena Pivneva, and Valery Tishkov), Tula State Pedagogical University (Elena Martynova), N.A. Shilo North-Eastern Scientific Research Institute of the RAS Far East Branch (Oksana Kolomiets), and one independent researcher (Aleksandra Terekhina). The authors set themselves a threefold task: to study the interaction between indigenous ('korennyye') peoples of the Russian North and industrial companies in the context of law, and to "look into current economic and socio-cultural aboriginal practices" as well as to identify risks which industrial development entails, and "suggest ways of mitigating those" (p. 4). And here a rather specific

approach has been chosen to deal with the task. Of the five book chapters two are dedicated to regions, namely the Yamal-Nenets autonomous region (ch. 3, pp. 50–150) and the Chukotka autonomous region (ch. 4, pp. 151–209); two more chapters discuss problems, e.g. “The Arctic as an Area of Responsibility” (ch. 2, pp. 21–49), and “Modern Education in Arctic Regions” (ch. 5, pp. 210–237); and one more is a general introductory text about the history, status, and prospects of indigenous peoples of the entire region (ch. 1, pp. 21–49).

Despite the reservations made by the authors concerning the logic behind their choice of Yamal and Chukotka for research (p. 5), it is this choice, or rather this limitation, that seems quite contestable. Firstly, this is essential in terms of contemporary administrative borders of the Russian Arctic: the book does not consider either the Murmansk region or the Nenets autonomous region or a number of districts in the regions of Arkhangelsk, Krasnoyarsk, and Yakutia. Secondly, the general chapters of the book either go beyond the geographical limits of Yamal and Chukotka or do not cover one of these territories at all; for example, chapter 2 discusses the Russian Arctic issues in general, in some cases making comparisons with Canada², whereas chapter 5 draws on field material from Yamal, Taymyr, Evenkia, and the Republic of Sakha (p. 6).

Yet, the book as a whole and each of the chapters are an important contribution as they provide a thorough picture of the federal and regional legislation, new field material, interesting observations and estimates. The dry statement of individual facts, tables with statistical data and somewhat lengthy quotes here and there are enlivened with vivid excerpts from conversations with informants. Speaking of pluses, the unified structure of presenting the regional material is worth being noted. Apart from general information, both chapter 3 and chapter 4 contain essays: “Indigenous Peoples and Industrial Development”, “Economic Activities and Social Affairs”, and “Ethno-Cultural Sphere”. Each of the essays, in turn, includes thematically rather similar paragraphs, although their structure sometimes differs. Thus, if a paragraph from “Social Affairs” concerning Yamal tells about unemployment, housing provision, and social policies (pp. 109–124), an analogous paragraph on Chukotka offers a look at the issues of excessive drinking and alcoholism only (pp. 192–194), whereas employment is briefly discussed in a separate paragraph (in the text on pp. 185–186 and a few tables). Social problems considered in the book do not represent all the issues out there in Yamal and Chukotka (some of those being crime, youth maladjustment, and health care issues – drug addiction and suicide among the population, to name a few). We believe that continued research will allow collecting material on a wider range of social problems and will enrich our knowledge of the current state of affairs as it is.

Undoubtedly, the book’s advantage is the description of activity of socially-oriented companies, often a detailed one revealing all the complexity of the situation. In our view, some of the foundations and companies the authors draw attention to could constitute the subject of stand-alone anthropological research.

It is difficult to conclude why education is discussed in a separate chapter, and why this matter is at all included in a book about the interaction of indigenous peoples and industrial companies, but it should be said it was this very chapter that left probably the most positive impression of all from reading the book. It provides a detailed review of problems facing boarding schools, of the phenomenon of ‘ethno-cultural’ education and

nomadic and vocational education in several regions of the Russian Arctic. Not only have the authors managed to determine certain problems within the education system, which were repeatedly discussed elsewhere; they have indeed identified a systemic mistake that is the widespread perception about ethnic culture supposedly being translated through traditional crafts that results in the decisiveness of those implementing education policy to make children 'return' to tundra and taiga (p. 237).

The book under review, as has already been said, is by far not the first one of a series of similar research works published, but it will surely be of interest to all those involved in studying the Circumpolar North cultures and in applied anthropology research, despite some controversial approaches we have touched upon in the above.

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Notes

¹ E-version is available at http://static.iea.ras.ru/books/Ros_arctica.pdf.

² The choice of Canada rather than of the US or Scandinavia is not explained. The authors of the chapter simply point out that Canada is a country that belongs to the Arctic region and is "similar to Russia based on many parameters" (p. 34).

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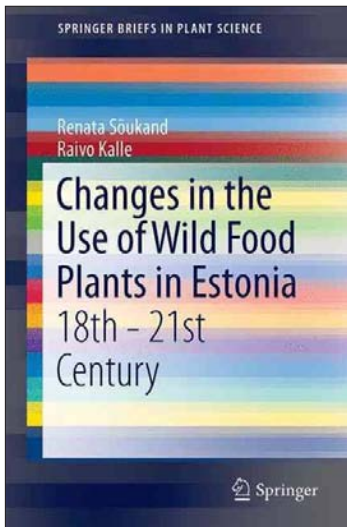
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CHANGES IN THE USE OF WILD FOOD PLANTS IN ESTONIA



Renata Sõukand and Raivo Kalle, researchers of the Estonian Literary Museum, have published a systematised overview of wild edible plants eaten in the territory of present Estonia, with a focus on the systematic changes within the field. The book is based on materials published starting from the 18th century until today, as well as archival sources of the Estonian Literary Museum and the Estonian National Museum and the authors' fieldwork materials. The presented data includes a general overview table containing all used plant taxa, parts used, and purposes of use. More details on specific food-uses are provided in separate chapters analysing dynamics of changes of the importance of wild plants within the specific food category.

The authors have combined the analysis of qualitative historical material with current quantitative research methods, which is very rare in ethnobotanical literature.

The book published by Springer is meant for international readership and gives an overview of more than 200 wild edible plants and changes in their cultural importance. The text is an extended version and compilation of articles on the subject published by the authors in research journals and includes unpublished fieldwork results.

The introduction of the book is available at <http://www.springer.com/us/book/9783319339474>.

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On the cover: A boy going to church in the summer. Photograph by Jon Holmén 2015.



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