# THE RITUAL YEAR 12

## Regulating Customs

*Regulating Customs*, the twelfth issue of the 'The Ritual Year' series, explores a range of regulatory forces that preserve, replace and revive, shape, and influence the practice and structure of calendar customs today. The eleven research articles by scholars from ten countries are based on first-hand field research and examine the age-old tensions between stasis and innovation, stability and change, and the creativity that is on display in even the most 'traditional' of practices.

'The Ritual Year' series gathers together the volumes published periodically by The Ritual Year Working Group, an international set of scholars, studying a large variety of topics in connection with ritual activities, customs and festive celebrations throughout the calendric year. The working group, which is a division of the International Society of Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF), was initiated by Dr Emily Lyle in 2003, at the Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, and was officially established in 2004, at the 8th SIEF congress in Marseille.

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**YEARBOOK OF THE SIEF WORKING GROUP**
**THE RITUAL YEAR**

THE RITUAL YEAR 12 ✦ REGULATING CUSTOMS

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## Regulating Customs

Edited by
Thomas A. McKean

**POLYMEDIA Ltd**

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## REGULATING CUSTOMS

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Thomas A. McKean

# Introduction — Regulating Customs

Calendar customs help us make sense of the passing of time. We learn them by watching, doing, and taking part, but how do we know what to do, when to do it, and what not to do? The answer is regulation, the means by which customary practices are shaped, influenced, and controlled. From bottom-up evolving practices to top-down international, national, and civic guidelines, the range of regulatory forces is remarkable, as is their creative role in mediating the tensions between conservation and innovation that are central to traditional practices.

Calendar customs have been with us for millennia, emerging out of our need to live in some kind of known relationship to the world around us, whether that be knowing when wild foodstuffs will ripen, when and where animals can be found, or in knowing when to plant and harvest to best avoid the vagaries of climate and weather. We respond to the changing seasons and cycles, learning their nuances to take advantage of experience. Such accumulated practical knowledge gives us a modicum of control over the environment as we develop appropriate practices. Such is our necessity and characteristic desire to control the world around us that our customs inevitably develop an element of magical causation, whether through diverse vernacular beliefs, or formal religious thinking. Even the most basic act of marking an astronomical or seasonal milestone gives us a sense, or at least a hope, that we know what is happening. Ultimately, our calendar customs reflect an attempt to control the uncontrollable, to predict the unpredictable, in order to improve our odds of making it through another year. In effect, we feel that, in regulating ourselves, we regulate the world around us (and vice-versa), a wildly anthropocentric view which, ultimately, might not be as naïve as it seems, as can be seen in the unfolding climate apocalypse.

Early folklorists and scholars in related disciplines thought about tradition as a kind of monolithic cultural product, portable across time and space — vertical tradition. They were fixated on age, antiquity, and, of course, primitivity, the idea that rural traditions, particularly those practised by those less educated than the scholars, were a window into humanity's distant past. They looked for practically any scrap of be-

haviour that seemed sufficiently different from their own constrained upper class mores to be considered a purer version of humanity, uncluttered by the veneer of civilisation and the cold rationality of empiricist Enlightenment thinking. To them, apparently ancient customs were a deep and stable link to the past, connecting us directly to our ancestors through what they thought was unchanging ritual practice.

In some ways, customs *are* timeless, both in terms of their ultimate origins and within their ritual timeframes. Experientially, we know that enacting them invites us into an atemporal framework, where linear, civic time is irrelevant. We know that, in the midst of Scottish Hogmanay celebrations, an Orthodox Lenten ritual, or an Islamic pilgrimage, we are outside quotidian time, just as we are during the rites of passage associated with the cycle of life.[1]

Throughout our history, however, the initiation, development, and perpetuation of customs has required constant negotiation. In 2012, I looked at the Burning of the Clavie, a Scottish New Year fire festival from this point of view: how its practitioners and community members work out the ongoing shape of the event among themselves, and how they respond to those seeking to control it, in order to create a practice that meets their needs while not conflicting *too much* with external cultural and legal authorities who seek to control it for various reasons. These include, for example, the church, historically, for its supposed idolatrous purpose; the local police, for its potential danger; and different factions in the community, regarding different concepts of what is the 'right' way to do it).[2] Negotiation, a dialogic mechanism whereby behaviours are tested and embedded or discarded, is a practical way that decisions get made, consciously or subconsciously, and the process of tradition is perpetuated through performance and repetition, maintaining enough in common with past iterations to create what we call a stable tradition: What do we keep? Everything. What do we change? Nothing. Such stability is an illusion, however, for tradition is predicated on constant change, as long as it is not so fast that its entire 'content' changes in one generation. Each time a ritual is enacted, it is slightly different, just as a rendition of a song or tune is different with each iteration, but there is enough remaining to suggest continuity.

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[1] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2019).

[2] Thomas A. McKean, 'Stewardship and Evolving Fidelity in a Scottish Fire Festival', *Traditiones*, 41, no. 1 (2012), 23–36.

*Regulating Customs* zooms out from these emic negotiations to focus on a wider, more diverse range of influences that shape how customs are practised, invented and reinvented, restored and revitalised. Communities and individuals need to know when innovation has gone too far, or not far enough, and for that they look to regulation, which constrains its compass, shaping participants' ideas of what is proper and within the bounds of acceptable change. Regulation, then, rather than being a constraining factor, is indispensable to the concept of tradition itself, mediating pathways among diverse forces from above, among, and below.

Regulatory systems have a traditionality of their own and can be found in individuals, families, communities, and in wider civic society. They include personal beliefs and belief systems, multi-valent relationships that define and control community behaviour, groups that constrain behaviour through example, policy, and practice, and systems embedded in constituted bodies such as local councils, police services, and formal legislative systems. Paradigms include historical precedent that guides or influences the practice or revival of a custom, 'insider' rules that govern behaviour, negotiation within communities, (attempted) regulation from outside, and motivations and resources germane to the revival of dormant customs. Together, these models traverse the space between innovation and ossification.

Tradition is often thought of as a noun — ritual, story, action, practice, idea — describing stable, quantifiable cultural products. But what binds them together are the *processes* that take us through liminal, threshold states of practice. Without these, ideas cannot become culture, realised in an act of performance, with each iteration constantly adapting to meet the challenges we face, from environmental knowledge tied to our past lives in close interaction with the seasons, planting, growing, and harvesting, to modern day calendrical punctuations of our sometimes featureless office-based lives. Divorced from the need to understand the environment as we once did, we look to evolving and new customs to divide the year, providing boundaries which start and finish, and measure development and change, as we navigate the dynamic relationship between the steadfastly cyclical year and our delimited linear lives.

Change is thus foundational to the notion of tradition itself, the process whereby knowledge is *practised, renewed and reshaped*, making it relevant for new times and new places. Ironically, then, it is a kind

of *in*stability that defines traditionality, one enabled by a strong mix of regulatory stimuli. Most customs that have been around for a while have this quality, a lithe ability to adapt to changing influences, pressures, and ideas, whether from within or without.

In *Regulating Tradition*, we examine the guiding forces that are brought to bear on customary practices old and new, from the authority of sometimes adversarial church calendars to the unspoken precedents of community and individual practice. I have loosely arranged the articles in order of widening scope and increasing scale, dealing first with belief and practice-oriented customs, next with tradition and innovation in rural and urban communities, and finally with socio-political modernities.

We begin on an intra-community level, where customary practices can take on a surprising degree of significance. In the close confines of a rural group, the members of which must work together, Nancy McEntire shows how Scottish Hogmanay (New Year) traditions perform a range of functions, from the practical aspects of binding people together socially to the more abstract, but equally important, desire to bring good fortune and prosperity for the coming year. Here, the regulatory urge comes from the weight of tradition, customary practice dictating that we do what has 'always been done', drawing on individual and collective reiteration of precedent. Tradition in and of itself can be curiously transient; without regular and filial enactment, the actions we take and the culture we transmit will simply not carry on. Thus, individual agency has a key role to play in the transmission, stability, and creative adaptation of cultural practices. Culture is our inheritance, but the process of enactment is what creates the next generation's legacy. This, in turn, accumulates into tradition, community, and, indeed, what we call civilisation.

My own article turns to the diverse regulatory influences on the choreography of a politico-seasonal calendar ritual in the North-East of Scotland, the Tarves Bonfire. Here, the community stakes its claim to regulatory power through the establishment of the Tarves People's Party, a counterbalance to regional and historical authorities. Today's iteration of the traditional mid-autumn bonfire is organised by a very informal committee, with a range of spoken and unspoken social goals behind it. The regulatory mission is subtle but firm, yet also provides an outlet for individualistic and almost anarchic subtexts promoted by some of the committee members.

Opening out our field of vision to intercultural regulatory influences, Irina Sedakova looks at the *Karakondzho*, pan-Balkan evil spirits that appear at Christmas and disappear at Epiphany, providing an insight into what happens when a tradition overlaps linguistic, community, and political boundaries. We have seen some of the regulatory effects of the individual and community on calendar practices, as well as wider institutional controls by states, towns, and religious groups, but here, looking at closely related examples found in neighbouring regions, Sedakova deftly unpicks ethnolinguistic evidence to reveal an unseen regulatory pattern deeply anchored in the cultural and linguistic connections of the past.

Moving on to Hristov's exploration of the *Youth Kurban* movement in post-socialist Bulgaria, we see a powerful contrast in regulatory authority between a ritual with origins deep within Orthodox tradition and its twenty-first century reinvention by young people in mid-western villages. The human need to counter personal misfortune and natural disasters with ritual finds its way to the surface in the form of community practices shaped by these wildly divergent regulatory paradigms. In the traditional *Kurban*, ancient traditions, rules, and practices are informed and enforced by the weight of tradition and by the established authority of a major hierarchical religious institution, whereas the mechanism is completely different in the modern-day rescension, with creation, adaptation, and regulation of 'new' practices guided by the participants themselves as they seek to mark the social and cultural boundaries of their ambit.

Taking our exploration into the realms of individual practice, Barmpalexis focuses on the idiolectal use of an ancient tradition in contemporary contexts: the Irish 'Wild Hunt' as enacted in contemporary North-East Scotland. Here, the regulator is Andrew Steed, a modern practitioner of shamanic healing, a syncretic ritual drawing on diverse spiritual and restorative practices from around the world. Steed plays the role of celebrant, passing on their accumulated knowledge, practices, and traditions, often, as Linda May Ballard suggests, out of respect for those from whom he learned, or with whom he experienced them.[3] Barmpalexis shows us the depth and complexity of geographic

[3] Quoted in Barbara Rieti, *Strange Terrain: The Fairy World in Newfoundland*, Social and Economic Studies, 45 (St John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1991), p. 91.

and individual localisation, as Steed moulds the ritual to his own needs and those of his clients and followers.

Not all customs are rooted in the past, of course, and tradition is as much about innovation as it is about maintaining past practices. With this in mind, James Deutsch tackles the phenomenon of a custom within a custom: Thanksgiving Day sales in the USA. Fitting these into paradigms of both ritual and 'heroic' adventure, Deutsch looks at top-down civil regulation and its complicated relationship with rapidly evolving vernacular practice, itself a regulatory force defined by practice and execution, in other words, by custom. The increasingly embedded structures and practices associated with these sales have real-time impacts on society, our community interactions, and our seemingly inexorable move towards the virtual environments of online shopping and interaction, all the more so in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has polarised these live and virtual environments to new extremes.

This brings us to a suite of papers on urban practices, some imported from rural settings, others native to their metropolitan environments. Tatiana Minniyakhmetova looks at the effects of urbanisation — an immense regulatory influence in many walks of life — on customary practices among the Udmurt. Calendar rituals are some of humanity's most enduring manifestations of the dual need to mark and to control; in addition to their quotidian purposes, Udmurt calendar customs create community, like Scottish Hogmanay practices, as well as express it. But what becomes of traditional ritual practices when they are unmoored from environmental necessity? Having been cut adrift from the applied world and brought to the virtual environment of social interaction, these practices must find new roots, at the regulatory mercy of individuals and communities, places and spaces. Answering to human need, custom, like many other aspects of tradition, finds fertile ground in the human craving for ritual and routine, the known and the familiar, augmented when it links us back to a revered past.

In any conurbation, there is a layering of cultures and experience, as exemplified in Cozette Griffin-Kremer's study of the complex situation evident in the seemingly simple lily-of-the-valley May Day ritual. Reflecting on the wide variations that have come into the custom with its move from rural France, she explores urban dimensions which range from political marches to national laws governing the gathering of the flowers, from the participants whose activities maintain the life of the

festival to the civic authorities who try to capitalise on the 'local', the 'terroir' aspect of the associated festivities. Here, diverse sources of regulation vie to shape the practices for their own purposes, personal to commercial, revealing dimensions of function and meaning far beyond the earliest job of marking the changing year and coming of Spring.

Inevitably, as customs move through space and time, there will be change. In her paper on post-Soviet Lithuanian customs, Skaidrė Urbonienė tackles the fascinating question of survival and attrition. Which traditions survive and which do not, and why? This is a question that has intrigued scholars for generations from the earliest attempts at finding the oldest, 'original' layers of human culture. But here, in Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuania, we have a compelling case study of cultural adaptation and change in our own time, with plenty of first-hand evidence brought to bear. While both Cross-days and May Devotions celebrations were highly significant events in Lithuania's ritual year practices, only the latter survived the Soviet era. Using more than ten years of field research, Urbonienė explores how family and individual agency engaged to keep the May Devotions alive, and how this new regulatory regime impacted the identity of the festival and the adaptations necessary for its survival as a living practice.

Among the most dominant regulatory influences over the last few decades — at least in the minds of local authorities and governments, less so for communities on the ground — is undoubtedly UNESCO, with its 2003 'Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage'.[4] Lidija Nikočević tackles this massive bureaucratic influence on customary practices today, looking at the Convention's impact on seasonal bell-ringing communities and traditions in Croatia. For these, the mere fact of being listed creates social dynamics far beyond the professed motivation to 'safeguard' intangible culture heritage. But, most revealing are the effects of listing on individuals within the tradition, on their behaviour, their sense of self, and their sense of community. In this case, a top-down regulation regime has, due to its international gravitas and critical mass, altered the local power balance between cultural players and stratified previously relatively democratic practices.

[4] UNESCO, '2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage', https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/15164-EN.pdf [accessed 16 October 2020].

Although the pace of change continues to accelerate in our era, customs have always been subject to influences from other areas and cultures. Bringing our look at regulating customs full circle, Suzy Harrison looks at a prominent by-product of rapid transport and communication: the growth of critical-mass immigrant communities which leads to calendar practices from one culture getting firmly embedded in another. These usually start off with domestic, family observances, which develop into small-scale public facsimiles of the 'original', and finally into full-blown community events, which put down roots and soon hybridise into something new, often of equal potency and scale as the practice in its parent culture. Harrison looks at how the festival of Diwali has become embedded in Leicester, one of the most culturally diverse cities in England, with celebrations some of the biggest outside India, and traces its development since 1983 into the spectacle of today, the product of regulatory forces from the community and civic authorities working in concert.

Together, these essays explore myriad dimensions of customary regulation — how diverse forces, micro and macro, emic and etic, bottom-up and top-down, create, sustain, alter, and stabilise calendar customs, those enduring practices with which we mark the inevitable turning of the year.

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# First-Footing in the North of Scotland, Past and Present

**Abstract.** The early hours of the first day of the New Year are significant on a number of levels for residents of the Orkney Islands. This paper draws on field research in northern Scotland to document and review customs of crossing the thresholds of nearby homes, anticipating luck and goodwill, sharing food and drink, and bringing prosperity for the coming year.

**Keywords:** rituals, New Year's customs, liminality, superstitions, reciprocity

*No one ever regarded the First of January with indifference.*
Charles Lamb, 'New Year's Eve,' 1821

The beginning of a new year is a time for spirited celebration and renewed hope for the months to come. In Scotland, the activities surrounding Hogmanay, on New Year's Eve, spill over into a tradition of going from house to house in the early hours of 1 January. This activity is known as first-footing. Although it is related to guising or mumming through the act of visiting other people's homes, first-footing is more personal and generous in spirit. It is believed that a welcome visitor who crosses your threshold at the beginning of the New Year can bring prosperity to you and your entire household. Especially in rural areas, where residences are more isolated, neighbours hasten to be the first to set foot in each other's homes and then return to their own home in time to be first-footed themselves. The movement from house to house is a jovial affair, as visitors bring and receive drams of whisky and edible treats such as cheese, oatcakes, shortbread, and a variety of fruit cakes. In that brief period of calendrical uncertainty between the end of one twelve-month period and the start of another, first-footing has at its core a desire to express goodwill within the present moment as well as hope for future good fortune.

Some of the earliest written accounts of first-footing, published in the journal *Folk-Lore* in the late 1800s, describe merrymaking and sharing of food and drink on New Year's Day, yet they also allude to less-jovial superstitions associated with the custom. According to James Crombie, author of 'First-Footing in Aberdeenshire', the following persons and things were considered to be lucky as first-footers: 'Friends, neighbours, and all well-wishers; a kind man; a good man; a sweetheart; people who spread out their feet […] a man on horseback; a man with a horse and cart; the minister; a hen.'[1] The list of unlucky first-footers is much longer: 'Thieves; persons who walked with their toes turned in; persons who were deformed, or whose senses were impaired; a stingy man; an immoral man; a false pretender to religion; the hangman; the gravedigger; the midwife; women generally; all who were suspected of being addicted to witchcraft; those whose eyebrows met; and males who had red hair.' Among animals, the cat, the pig, and the hare were unlucky. Crombie wrote that his mother recalled a preliminary first-footing custom she had witnessed as a girl in Fort William, Scotland: 'It was a regular practice,' she said, 'to go by stealth the evening before, and nail up the door of the man who performed as district-hangman, and who was regarded as a most "ill-omened first-foot"' Similarly, Crombie added that he had 'heard of a boat being drawn up against the door of a churlish individual to prevent his getting out,' presumably with the intention of visiting someone's home at the New Year.[2] This example alludes also to superstitions surrounding the occupations of fishing and sailing, especially the supposed ill-luck that will result from meeting a woman on the way to one's boat or taking a woman on board.[3] Indeed, while first-footing had a generally hospitable intention and outcome, there were, as noted, precautions regarding unlucky or unwelcome first-footers. Those individuals who were associated with ill fortune were avoided; in more extreme cases they were physically prevented from engaging in the traditional New Year's activity of visiting other people's homes.

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[1] Nancy C. McEntire, *Orkney: Land, Sea & Community*, Scottish Tradition 21 (Greentrax CDTRAX9021, 2004).

[2] James E. Crombie, 'First-Footing in Aberdeenshire', *Folk-Lore*, 5 (1893), 315–21 (p. 318).

[3] Crombie, 'First-Footing in Aberdeenshire', pp. 320–21.

Writing in the same volume of *Folk-Lore*, G. Hastie emphasised the function of courtship in first-footing rituals:

> *The first-foot, on crossing the threshold, at once announced, 'A gude New Year to ane [one] and a', and mony [many] may ye see. […] Then kissing the young woman, and shaking her by both hands, they passed into the household. If the visitor had not been seen for some time, the news of the families were gone into, and other matters of that sort; then the whisky-drinking, with health-giving toasts, eating shortbread, currant loaf, scones, oat-cakes, and cheese were all heartily consumed, then song-singing, sometimes a dance, then more drinking, and at last came the parting, in much hilarity and glee, the 'toosling' [hugging] and kissing of the young woman. […] Of course the first-footing only strengthened the courtship, the regular visiting continuing, and generally ending in marriage on a subsequent New Year's Day.*[4]

The importance of courtship is also mentioned in Chambers' famous compendium, *The Book of Days,* first published in 1879:

> *It [first-footing] was a time for some youthful friend of the family to steal to the door, in the hope of meeting there the young maiden of his fancy, and obtaining the privilege of a kiss, as her first-foot. Great was the disappointment on his part, and great joking among the family, if through accident or plan, some half-withered aunt or ancient grand-dame came to receive him instead of the blooming Jenny.*[5]

Whether or not a successful courtship began or flourished within the tradition of first-footing, the event itself conveyed a mood of well-wishing and reciprocity. Writing as early as 1851, William Grant Stewart made the following observations among the Highlanders in Scotland: On New Year's Day, families '[…] prepare themselves for […] receiving the visits of their neighbours: "My Candlemas bond upon you. You owe me a New-Year's gift." It is a point of great emulation who will salute the other first — the one who does so being considered entitled to a gift from the person so saluted.'[6] In the best of circumstances, then, the recipient

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[4] G. Hastie, 'First-Footing in Scotland', *Folk-Lore*, 5 (1893), 309–14 (p. 310).

[5] Robert Chambers (ed.), *The Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities in Connection with the Calendar*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1879), I, 29.

[6] William Grant Stewart, *The Popular Superstitions and Festive Amusements of the Highlanders of Scotland* (London: Aylott and Jones, 1851; repr. Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1974), p. 177.

of a welcome first-foot is honoured, and the person who bestowed the honour may also expect something in return.

The appearance of a first-footer at the threshold of one's home emphasises the precarious nature of the ritual, as the participants are having their initial encounter neither completely inside nor outside of the home. As a result, a threshold meeting is psychologically significant. The first-foot is seen as a harbinger of fortune, either good or bad, for the residents of the home being visited. Whereas positive or negative associations with occupations, criminal activities, physical oddities or deformities have decreased in emphasis when evaluating the presence of such a visitor, issues of gender, complexion, and hair-colour have retained strong associations. If the first-foot was dark-haired and male, this was a good omen; women, however, were generally regarded as unwelcome. Writing in the late 1800s, Sidney Addy gives the following instruction: 'The first person who comes into a house on New Year's morning must have black hair. Sometimes boys with dark hair are picked for the purpose of being the first to enter the house on New Year's morning. It is unlucky for a light-haired or red-haired man to be "let in".'[7] Decades later, I. F. Grant gave this account of first-footing in the Scottish Highlands in the early 1960s:

> *It is lucky if the first visitor in the New Year is a dark man; a red-haired one is unlucky and a woman, especially if she is fair-haired, is much worse, but fortunately for such omens, women never go first-footing alone. If they should go with men, the man is always pushed into the house in front.*[8]

Slightly over a decade after Grant's account, the Orkney writer and scholar Ernest Marwick confirmed the importance of hair colour for the early visitors: 'Strictly speaking, the "first-foot" was the first person to cross the threshold on New Year's morning, and it was considered essential to the luck of the household that he should be a dark-haired individual. Even today, in Shetland, a dark man who has proved to be a luck-bringer is expected to continue as a household's first-foot year after year.'[9] A few years later, Christian McKee confirmed the value of

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[7] Sidney Oldall Addy, *Folk Tales and Superstitions* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), p. 106.

[8] Isabel F. Grant, *Highland Folk Ways* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 361.

[9] Marwick, Ernest W., *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* (London: Batsford, 1975), p. 120.

a dark-haired male: 'If the first man to cross the threshold was dark and brought gifts, that house would have plenty in the New Year.'[10] In the early 1990s Isobel Williams described the ideal first-foot as '[…] a tall, dark, handsome man carrying gifts for the house. […] A good first-foot brings luck to the people in the house, but if something goes wrong and an unlucky person crosses the threshold first, then the occupants of the house will have bad luck for the following year. A woman, particularly if she is a red-head, is considered very unlucky.'[11] In 1997, Carol Shaw confirmed the negative association with female first-foots. 'The worst scenario,' she wrote, 'was a red-haired female first-foot. The only way to avoid the misfortune that would certainly follow this was to throw a pinch of salt into the fire immediately.'[12] A year later Sue Ellen Thompson published a similar assessment, including a reference to the practice of dark-haired men being paid to first-foot:

> *A family's fortunes in the coming year are believed to be influenced by the first guest who sets foot in the door after the New Year strikes. If it's a woman, a light-haired man, an undertaker, or anyone who walks with his toes pointing inward, it is considered a bad omen. A dark-haired man, on the other hand, brings good luck. In some villages, dark-haired men hire themselves out as professional first-footers whose job it is to go from house to house immediately after the New Year arrives. Female first-footers are considered to be such bad luck that male restaurant owners will sometimes make a point of opening the restaurant themselves before the waitresses arrive on New Year's Day.*[13]

Notwithstanding the recognition of taboos regarding first-footers, food and drink have remained essential components of a reciprocal exchange within the home that welcomes them. As McKee and Williams have mentioned, the visitor also was expected to bring gifts. Whisky was the drink of choice, and it was accompanied by popular treats such as oatcakes, shortbread, and a dense fruit cake called black bun. In the late 1800s, James Napier confirmed the necessity of food and

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[10] Mckee, Christian M., *Scottish Folklore, Legend, and Superstition* (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, 1983), p. 32.

[11] Isobel E. Williams, *Scottish Folklore* (Edinburgh and London: W. & R. Chambers, 1991), pp. 50–51.

[12] Carol P. Shaw, *Scottish Myths and Customs* (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 85.

[13] Sue Ellen Thompson, *Holiday Symbols* (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 1998), p. 321.

drink in his accounts of Hogmanay traditions in the west of Scotland: 'The first-foot was an important episode', he wrote. 'A hearty ranting merry fellow was considered the best sort of first-foot. […] To visit empty-handed on this day was tantamount to wishing a curse on the family.'[14] In some cases, symbolic gifts of coal or salt indicated the first-foot's wishes for prosperity and good health for the inhabitants of the house he was visiting. Napier offers an interesting account of a first-foot in his own home, in which an incident involving misfortune would have been considered an ill omen, yet because of the good fortune that occurred afterwards, was perceived in a positive light: 'I remember that one year our first-foot was a man who had fallen and broken his bottle, and cut and bleeding was assisted into our house. My mother made up her mind that this was a most unfortunate first-foot, and that something serious would occur in the family during that year. I believe had the whole family been cut off, she would not have been surprised. However, it was a prosperous year, and a bleeding first-foot was not afterwards considered bad. If anything extraordinary did occur throughout the year, it was remembered and referred to afterwards.'[15]

Most first-footers arrive with a variety of gifts for the home they are visiting. According to Williams, the first-foot's gifts might include 'coal — a symbol of light and warmth; something to drink; salt — for luck; and something to eat, often a tin of shortbread. Once in the house,' she writes, 'the first-foot puts his gifts on the table and receives a "nip" (a glass of whisky) and some black bun (fruit cake).'[16] Ernest Marwick writes that in the town of Kirkwall in the Orkney Islands of Scotland, 'the first-foot often brought with him a piece of coal and some bread, seeking thus to ensure a sufficiency of food and fire throughout the year'.[17] Roy Palmer confirms that the first-foot '[…] should carry a lump of coal (symbolizing warmth for the coming year), a mincepie (standing for food in general), and a coin (ensuring that money will not be lacking)'.[18] According to Carol Shaw, the ideal Scottish first-foot 'should

[14] James Napier, *Folk Lore in the West of Scotland* (East Ardsley: E. P. Publishing, 1976 [1879]), p. 160.

[15] Napier, *Folk Lore in the West of Scotland*, pp. 160–61.

[16] Williams, *Scottish Folklore*, p. 51.

[17] Ernest W. Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* (London: Batsford, 1975), p. 120.

[18] Roy Palmer, *Britain's Living Folklore* (London: David and Charles, 1991), p. 97.

bring symbolic gifts of coal, shortbread or black bun and salt as tokens of prosperity and health for the year to come. Whisky or some other alcohol is usually brought too.'[19]

Some accounts of first-footing alluded to verses or songs being performed during the ritual. Most invoked a general wish for good fortune for the New Year, as with 'A gude New Year tae you and yours, and may yere meal-poke ne'er be empty'.[20] Writing about Hogmanay in Orkney, Ernest Marwick mentions the New Year's Song, which at the time of his research in the late 1960s, was still being performed. According to Marwick, the blessings on the house included 'a benediction of the wife, husband, children, cows, mares, sheep, geese, and hens'.[21]

The men of the island of North Ronaldsay sang a version that was 50 stanzas long, each one of them blessing each occupant — including all the animals — of a neighbour's home. Below are a few lines of the song, collected by Ernest Marwick on the island of Burray, Orkney, in 1969:

*May a' your mares be weel [well] tae foal,*
*An' every een [one] a big fat foal —*
*May a' your coos be weel tae calf,*
*An' every een a big fat calf —*
*May a' your sheep be weel tae lamb,*
*An' every een a big fat lamb,*
*May a' your hens be weel tae lay,*
*An' every een a dizen [dozen] a day.*[22]

When I was living in the Orkney Islands in the 1970s, I experienced first-footing in the farming community of Finstown on Orkney's largest island, Mainland. My landlady, Mary (of Smerquoy), her young nephew Neil, and I made a point of visiting nearby farms on the first of January, on foot, with oatcakes and sweets in hand. We were greeted with whisky and tea and tins of shortbread and similar treats wherever we went. There was no mention of women bringing bad luck, although we did hear jokes and stories about longstanding preferences

[19] Carol P. Shaw, *Scottish Myths and Customs* (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 84–85.

[20] Hastie, 'First-Footing in Scotland', p. 313.

[21] Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland*, p. 102.

[22] John D. M. Robertson (ed.), *An Orkney Anthology: The Selected Works of Ernest Walker Marwick*, I (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1991), pp. 129–30.

*Fig. 1. Smerquoy, a farm near Finstown on the Mainland of Orkney, Scotland. Photo by Nancy McEntire*

for dark, handsome men. Our party of two women and a light-haired boy, Neil, was welcomed wherever we went within walking distance of Mary's farm. Here, of course, everyone knew Mary and her family, so if there had been a pre-existing taboo regarding women or light-haired males, it was not evident here. Mary is no longer living, but I recently contacted a friend of hers, Lana Fotheringhame, to ask about past and current first-footing traditions in the far north of Scotland. I am including here some of Lana's recollections of Orkney practices. Note that while she does mention the importance of a man at the doorstep, it had more value as providing a possible spark for future courtship than it did as a requirement for the traditional first-footing custom. She also recalls the performances of the New Year's Song, the sense of camaraderie when people shared stories and music in people's homes, and she gives detailed descriptions of food that were offered at this time.

> *Yes, folk in Orkney still do first-footing on Hogmanay night and take in the New Year with family and friends. It used to be a custom in the islands to take a piece of coal with you so as it kept the fire burning in the early hours of the New Year, but that does not happen anymore since everyone has electricity now.*


*Fig. 2. Lana Fotheringhame in her knitwear shop, Kirkwall, Orkney. Photo by Nancy McEntire*

*In Stronsay [Lana's family home, one of the northeast Orkney Islands] the night before the New Year there would be a dance in the community centre from 8 p.m. until 11 p.m. This gave the dancers time to go home and take in the New Year with their own family. When the clock struck midnight everyone had a glass of whisky and a piece of black currant bun and shook hands with everyone and wished them a happy New Year. Then you would go first-footing to your neighbours. Usually the older folks stayed home and kept an open door for their first-footers.*

*When I was a child it was usually the men that did the first-footing. I remember hearing that on the island of North Ronaldsay it was only the men that went and they had to sing the New Year's Song, which had fifty verses, before they got into the house. They usually went in groups.*

*There would be parties at the houses where folk had stayed up to take in the New Year. When I was young we had a gramophone and played records, but in some houses they would have a fiddler or a mouth organ. Sometimes folks played the spoons or you could hum a tune on a comb. And yes, women hoped that the first person they met after 12 o'clock on New Year's Eve would be tall, dark, and handsome!*

*First-footing is still done in Orkney, though not as much as before. Mostly now it's down to being invited to someone's house to take in the New Year, and if neighbours were still up after that you would first-foot them.*

*A special treat is the black currant bun. It is like a Christmas cake mixture with treacle [syrup] in it. You line your cake tin with sweet short crust pastry, put in the very rich mixture, and put a circle of pastry to cover the top, sealing all the edges with beaten egg. Then you poke holes (about six in a pattern) on the top with a knitting needle and you bake it in the oven for 2 to 3 hours. This is done about three months before Christmas and you cover it with tin foil. Every week you add a little whisky or brandy through the holes on top. I made my one in October.*[23]

As we have seen, first-footing is a longstanding tradition that maintains a strong emphasis on good wishes for the coming year and shared merriment with friends and neighbours. It comes at a time of transition from old to new. According to Robert Chambers, 'the day is a memorandum of the subtraction of another year from the little sum of life. Such sadness,' he writes, must be offset with merriment and a 'desire to express good wishes for the next twelvemonths' experience'.[24] Further, the drama of first-footing occurs at the threshold of the home, where the large, public outside world and the small, private interior world come together. It also is at this threshold that the appearance of the first-foot can indicate good or bad fortune for those who open the door to receive him, or her.

The fact that first-footers are received within a threshold emphasises the liminal state of their festivities. Poised as they all are in a transition from old to new, the participants, weary from the dark days of winter, are in need of good will and sustenance from welcome neighbours — yet some of the participants are shunned because of beliefs about misfortunes resulting from contact with them. These negative beliefs, which focus on persons to be avoided during the ritual of first-footing, emphasise the precarious nature of this transitional period.

Those who continue to enact the first-footing ritual, lingering at the thresholds of their neighbours' homes, are what Victor Turner has referred to as 'liminal entities'. They are, he writes, 'neither here

[23] Lana Fotheringhame, interview with Nancy C. McEntire, 11 December 2015.

[24] Chambers , *Book of Days*, I, 27.

nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial'.[25] Turner further emphasises the importance of a transitory period in a subsequent discussion of liminality:

> *This is the fact that when persons, groups, sets of ideas, etc. move from one level or style of organisation or regulation of the interdependence of their parts of elements to another level, there has to be an interfacial region or, to change the metaphor, an interval, however brief, of margin or limen, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance.*[26]

It is within this balance that ceremonial customs and beliefs thrive, even to the present day. As Turner's predecessor, Arnold Van Gennep, noted in his famous definition of the rites of passage, 'life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, and then begin acting again, but in a different way'.[27] As residents of the northern climates of Scotland celebrate the end of another year during the cold, dark days of winter, they anticipate life in a different way. They know that the New Year will bring change, not only in through the increased light and warmth of their physical surroundings, but also in their personal lives. The old year has ended. They are ready to take steps to ensure prosperity as the New Year begins.

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[25] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969; repr. 1987), p. 95.

[26] Turner, *Ritual Process*, p. 41.

[27] Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 180.

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Thomas A. McKean

# The Tarves People's Party: Fire, Planning, and Community

**Abstract.** The Tarves bonfire in North-East Scotland is a seasonal event tied to the mid-autumn calendar customs of *Samhainn*, Halloween, and Guy Fawkes Night. Established as an outgrowth of these traditions in 1999, it has grown into the biggest such regional event outside large conurbations. As a 'new' traditional event, it is subject to a wide range of regulatory pressures, from the precedents of ancient practice to the concerns of modern civic authorities such as the local council and the police. Drawing on interviews and first-hand experience, this paper looks at a range of internal and external regulatory forces germane to the annual community event.

**Keywords:** Fire festivals, Halloween, community, civic authority, vernacular calendar custom

## Introduction

*Most of the political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites.*[1]

Customary practice is driven by a huge range of regulatory influences from the personal to the civic, the 'polar opposites' noted above, and from the innovative and creative to the continuities of tradition and conservation. In this essay, I will explore how the residents of a small village in North-East Scotland negotiate the space between them in the context of an annual autumnal bonfire in the village of Tarves, Aberdeenshire. The fire, revived for the millennium, and based on traditional Halloween and Guy Fawkes Night practices, is put together by a local committee, which gathers together a huge amount of discarded wood and other burnables in a local field, to be set alight in front of a gathering of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of spectators. The evening culminates in a fireworks display, bringing cheer and a communal experience to the darkening evenings, little more than six weeks before the winter solstice.

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[1] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 136.

Inevitably, an event of this scale has both required, and drawn the attention of, regulatory influences that have shaped its growth, practice, and form. We might start by dividing these into passive and active categories. In the first, we could cite tradition and customary practice, those general assumptions, and rules, consciously or unconsciously imposed by individuals and groups on their own behaviour. In the latter category, we find explicit articulations of rules, laws, and practices, often from outside authorities such as the police or local councils, that apply to the practice in question. In the case of a public event, like the Tarves bonfire, these rules usually come into play where public safety is involved, whether with crowds, fire and explosives, or strong drink, or where there is money changing hands, as with taxation on liquor sales, parking permits, and other such revenue-generating activities for local authorities. These 'idiocultures or microcultures' of civil society, as Gary Alan Fine calls them, involve coordination, relationships and associations within the community, place, space, conflict, and control.[2] All are seen in the Tarves bonfire through its clear organic ties to the past and the dynamic interactions with explicit communal and civic forces that influence its shape today.

For this exploration of the regulatory forces that shape the Tarves bonfire, I spoke to two local men, Ian Massie and Paul Johnston, who play different roles in its enactment. But before looking at their experience, and the pertinent frameworks, it is worth placing the event in its historical and social contexts, which continue to be relevant even today.

The origins of the autumn bonfire in Scotland, and further afield in England, Wales, and Ireland, are complicated and deep, a layered mixture of pre-Christian seasonal custom, Christianised pagan practice, and political propaganda, now largely unmoored from all of those origins and firmly solidified into civic events which draw participation from across the communities, and, indeed, because of their scale, from further afield.

The Scottish customary calendar is layered, reflecting pagan and pre-Christian, Christian(ised), post-religious civic, and community input over many centuries. Its associated festival practices are loosely tied to the linear civic calendar, but are more properly thought of as examples of what Clifford Geertz calls 'permutational' time, where the calendar

[2] Gary Alan Fine, *The Hinge: Civil Society, Group Cultures, and the Power of Local Commitments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

cycles, 'don't tell you what time it is; they tell you what kind of time it is',[3] in this case, transitional time marking the turning of the year. Celebrations at this time of year have their origins in the old Scottish Quarter Days — *Samhainn*, *Imbolc*, *Là Bealltainn*, and *Lughnasadh* — the turning points of the Celtic year at which time people would make 'neid fires' to protect against calamity and ensure success for the coming season.[4] Later, these seasonal practices coalesced around *Samhainn* and its Christianised equivalent, Halloween, with the festival retaining its association with fire, while the other Quarter Days did not.[5] Halloween, like Scotland's Hogmanay (New Year), retained its association with fire and with the tradition of extinguishing and relighting fires as a means of purification and renewal.[6]

Into this mix comes Guy Fawkes Night, 5 November, a now-traditional community event celebrated across Britain with bonfires and fireworks, originally commemorating the failure, in 1605, of a Catholic plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament in London and re-establish Catholic rule in these isles. Commemoration of the day was made into a national day of thanksgiving by the government in 1606, with the passing of the 'Observance of 5th November Act', institutionalising anti-Catholic sentiment with the power of law, though the aggressively Protestant nature of the event has declined dramatically since the middle of the nineteenth century.[7] With the passing of the law, making cel-

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[3] Clifford Geertz, 'Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali', in *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 360–411 (p. 393).

[4] Mary Macleod Banks, *British Calendar Customs: Scotland*, 3 vols (London: Glaisher for the Folklore Society, 1927), vol. 2, p. 21. The quarter days are still significant points in the Scottish calendar, whether in the academic year, or as civic dates of leases commencing, people moving house, etc. For more details on the quarter days, see Emily Lyle, *The Four Quarters of the Scottish Year*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: School of Scottish Studies [University of Edinburgh], 1997).

[5] Banks, 3, p. 111–21.

[6] Banks, 3, p. 111. For more on Halloween, see F. Marian McNeill, *Hallowe'en: Its Origin, Rites and Ceremonies in the Scottish Tradition* (Edinburgh: Albyn Press, [1970]) and *The Silver Bough: A Four Volume Study of the Traditional and Local Festivals of Scotland*, vol. 3, A Calendar of Scottish National Festivals, Hallowe'en to Yule (Glasgow: MacLellan, 1961), pp. 11–30; Jack Santino, *Halloween and other Festivals of Death and Life* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000) and *The Hallowed Eve: Dimensions of Culture in a Calendar Festival in Northern Ireland*, Irish Literature, History, and Culture (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015).

[7] The Act itself can be seen on the UK Parliament website ('The Thanksgiving Act'); for more on the plot itself, see Antonia Fraser, *The Gunpowder Plot. Terror and Faith in 1605* (London: Arrow Books, 1997) and Brenda Buchanan, *Gunpowder Plots: A Celebration of 400 Years of Bonfire Nights* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

ebration essentially compulsory, the government effectively legislated the creation of a popular tradition.

According to F. Marian McNeill, the burning of the 'guy', originally an effigy of Guy Fawkes himself, connects back to the burning of witches as a means of exorcising evil from a community and an individual.[8] Be that as it may, the tradition of burning a 'guy' has caught on in Scotland, too, with Halloween guisers (disguised revellers[9]) asking for 'a penny for the guy' as they go door to door. The effigy today more often represents contemporary political figures or disgraced celebrities than Guy Fawkes himself.

In Scotland, a troublesome relationship with the English state (before and after the unification of the crowns in 1603 and of the parliaments in 1707) has meant that Guy Fawkes Night never gained as much traction as south of the border. Nevertheless, over the last several decades, Scotland's Halloween bonfires have given way to a burgeoning tradition of community fires lit on 5 November, pulled by the gravitational field of a large, well-established tradition, while the tradition of 'guising' — in its modern form of trick-or-treating — continues to grow.[10]

Ian Massie, a Tarves native, recalls the unregulated vitality of the annual Halloween traditions of his youth.

IM: *Well! It's, fit d'ye say, unorganised chaos! [...] It wis always a big bonfire, but it used to be held up in the football park. There used to be an old tennis court up beside the football fields and that's where they used to be held, when I was a lad.*

*Aye. Aye, an it wis jist a free for all, really. I mean, people would just run aboot, put rockets in bottles in the ground. It's amazing; nobody iver got hurt, that I can remember. No. No.*

TM: *Would people bring something to put on the fire? Or was that a group of people who got that together?*

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8 McNeill, 3, p. 147, n. 20.

9 Guising in Scotland was traditionally carried out at Hogmanay — the Scottish New Year — but is now associated with Halloween, possibly due to the influence of World War II evacuee children from Glasgow on rural customs (McNeill, *The Silver Bough*, 4, The Local Festivals of Scotland (Glasgow: MacLellan, 1968), p. 212), and, of course, the growing effects of Americanised Halloween traditions being re-imported into Scotland.

10 For a more detailed look at the relationship between Guy Fawkes Night and Halloween, see Jack Santino, 'Light up the Sky: Halloween bonfires and Cultural Hegemony in Northern Ireland', *Western Folklore*, 55.3 (Summer 1996), 213–231.

IM: *Well, fin I was a loon, I suppose, I used to collect timber and wood and anything for a bonfire, yep, aye. I used to ging roon wi a cart an collect stuff. […] That would have been 1965, roon aboot there; I was aboot ten or eleven year old.*

*But it used to be a good night, I remember when I was a lad. Well, you was just a boy, everything seemed bigger at that time, you know what I mean?*[11]

These semi-formal, collectively initiated fires lasted until the 1990s, after which the communal tradition petered out and the celebration was reduced to little more than a few individual backyard fireworks, centred on Halloween and 'Bonfire Night' (Guy Fawkes), 5 November.

By the time the millennium came around, organic community behaviours could no longer be counted upon bring about a village-wide celebration and it was clear that an organised effort would be required to put on an event of any scale. According to local Councillor, Paul Johnston, there had been 'plenty of smaller bonfires and things', but nothing of any scale. What was needed was something to bring the community together to strengthen the social fabric and build *communitas*. As Palio di Siena participant Paolo Sammicheli noted, many traditional events are really excuses for the community to get together and be together.[12] So, drawing on the 'usable past'[13] central to creating community identity, in this case local bonfire traditions, the Millennium Committee was established by the Boys' Brigade.[14] The event was a great success, says Ian Massie,

IM: *We had a big party in the Square for the millennium. And everything was sorta, there was no licences, you didnae hae to have*

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[11] Ian Massie, 'Interview about the Tarves Bonfire' with Thomas A. McKean, 23 October 2020, Elphinstone Institute Archives, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen. All quoted interview material is transcribed to reflect the speakers' use of the Scots language, using a 'revised verbatim' style. Elisions are noted by […] and 'stage directions' describing non-linguistic features by bracketed italics [*laughs*]. My grateful thanks go to Emma Bennett for her invaluable work on the transcriptions and to Eilidh Whiteford for her proofreading expertise.

[12] Paolo Sammicheli, 2 July 2020, oral seminar contribution to the Société Internationale d'Ethologie et de Folklore Summer School, Siena, 25 June—3 July 2020.

[13] Fine, p. 179.

[14] A Christian organisation whose mission is to give young people 'opportunities to learn, grow and discover in a safe, fun and caring environment which is rooted in the Christian faith' (Boys' Brigade, https://boys-brigade.org.uk/ [accessed 16 January 2021]). As part of their mission, the BBs, as they are commonly known, often engage in civic events designed to build community identity and cohesion.

*a licence for everything, it was jist free for all. You could just hold a party anywhere and we'd a huge party on behalf of the village. That was a committee set up for jist the millennium celebrations. We were just called Millennium Group at that time.*

The following year, riding high on this success, the group quickly encountered regulatory forces.

IM: *We decided, well, we've got a good thing here, we might as well hae another party. But as it transpired, there wis a lot of restrictions the following year, see, your licences and this and that and the next thing. And we said, wait a minute, ye can't have a free for all one year and then, all of a sudden, ye need a licence for the fire brigade an a licence for the police tae attend. […]*

*We managed tae get round it, a wee bit. Then the actual day of it, a local resident complained and the police told us we couldn't have a party. And we says, Well, well OK, we can't have a party, right? We'll jist have a impromptu party in the square [laughs]. The police didn't like that! Right, they would come an arrest the organisers o the party, which was masel and anither five of us. And we said, Well, we dinna fancy bein arrested so how about […] if we just say, Right, it's the people of Tarves that's organised the party. Are you going to come and arrest everybody in Tarves? An we niver heard anither word aboot it!*

*So we set wirsels up: Tarves People's Party! [laughs] Needless to say, we have conformed to the legal requirements since, bit on that occasion it was a bit of a rebel cause, as you would say. So that's how the People's Party started. […] It wis the Millennium Party fer a start, and then we were havin various parties ever since.*[15]

Brought into being by Ian Massie and Colin Taylor, the Tarves People's Party gave collective cover to the individuals involved in that early event, but the participants clearly enjoy the mildly subversive nature of the name and the implication that they might be a radical, grassroots local political movement, in the Gramscian tradition, a fact which has not gone unnoticed by local Councillor, Paul Johnston: 'A bit of that was a bit tongue in cheek. […] I suppose it was a bit of political

[15] The Party has a clear origin story based in community advocacy unlike many communal organisations which 'lack an explicit moment of formation, seeming to slide into structure'; Fine, p. 88.

satire against me and other politicians like me.' In reality, the name is more humorous than serious:

IM: *The People's Party is that group of people that hang about the pub and hang about various other things. […] And it's the Tarves, a bit of Methlick […], 'mafia' of families. You'll know the names as soon as you say [them].*

Through the People's Party, the community has created 'vernacular order'[16] out of disparate players, a focal point for decision making and communal responsibility, which can stand in reaction, sometimes in opposition, to the official order of councils and other civic bodies. Underlying all of the risks, challenges, and the regulatory elements that influence and control the enactment of the Tarves bonfire, lies a strong sense that such practices are 'not at bottom either a badge of pride or an inheritance to display but a job that must be done'[17] and the TPP has constituted itself in order to take on that mantle in the face of diverse regulatory challenges.

## Function

A custom's *social function* undoubtedly responds to, and indeed creates, regulatory ramifications. One of the main functions of events such as the bonfire is to bring the community together, whether for spiritual, religious, or social reasons, into a 'collective promotion of connection and mutual engagement'.[18] This effect, regardless of the motivation behind it, has been important for generations, and is ever more so as other forms of collectivity, such as religious worship and communal work traditions, have declined.

IM: *We're lucky in Tarves. Anybody comin in tae the village, they won't maybe come forward, but if you ask them, they'll help ye oot, yeah. An there's other people that will come forward, [...] they dinna domineer the thing, they dinna overtake everywhere, ken? They like tae gauge what's going on, an then voice their opinion, which they're quite entitled to do.*

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16 James Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 30.

17 Noyes, Dorothy, 'Three Traditions', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 46.3 (September/December 2009), 233–268 (p. 248).

18 Fine, p. 52.

Often in village settings, incomers can create a stir, sometimes undermining the very character of the place they have chosen to make their home. So far, according to Paul Johnston, Tarves is coping well with expansion.

PJ: *I've got this idea that most of the communities get to a particular size and then they start to lose that cohesion. [...] You get the impression that those villages, and those communities, which are around about 150 households are the most cohesive. And then they work well. [...] And if you go much above three, four hundred, you're into the territory where people are saying, Well, we don't know everybody in the village, [and] you're losing your sense of community.*

A common question for any human settlement is, Where are you from? Do you belong here? This is reflected in many a Scottish incomer's rueful statement that you need to have been here for at least five hundred years to be considered a local. One of the main reasons for this line of enquiry is to provide a basis for differential power dynamics, usually with regard to whose opinion holds the greater weight, or whose way of doing things is more natural (indigenous, so to speak, with outsiders' ideas and processes often seen to be disruptive to local practice and precedent). Insider-outsider judgements give locals a chance to disregard input, or at least to motivate some kind of engagement as the price of admission, before taking new, or outsider opinions on board.

In Tarves, a new housing development initially created a kind of split, but the community is beginning to find an equilibrium and recohere, thanks in no small part to initiatives like Christmas lights and the bonfire. In 2016, because the Glebe field was planted with crops, the fire was held at the upper end of the village, near the new housing, which undoubtedly would have encouraged cohesion and integration. Fortunately, in Tarves, the sense of community is resilient enough to absorb change, and Ian sees recent arrivals very positively.

IM: *There's one, two, three members come in in the last, maybe five-six years. And I wid say they're an asset tae the village. They've worked, beavered away an [...] bring a lot o good things to the village. [...] It's an ongoin thing, ye know. Ye should niver be stuck in your ways. [...] Ye find people get stuck in their ways, an this is the wey it's been done; this is the way it's aye goin tae be done. Bit, ah no.*

As I have suggested, change in the form of new ideas is essential for the survival of traditions, but so is community continuity. This is not *stasis*, but rather connected and articulated change, the 'creation of the future out of the past',[19] made possible by a fine balance between dynamism and retaining *enough* stability so as not to alter the village's sense of itself too rapidly for acclimatisation and adaptation to take place.

The early folklorists were obsessed with origins (preferably ancient, pre-Christian, 'primitive', and 'savage') and later with magical and ritual functions,[20] ideas which, while fascinating, are not at the top of anyone's mind today as they take part in an Aberdeen City Council-run public event, or a commercially driven Hogmanay event in Edinburgh. Nevertheless, the bonfire today may be more fundamental to human need than we think, absent any supposed ritual origin, or supernatural practice aimed at magical causation.

As darkness falls in the north of Scotland (Tarves is at 57° N), everyone feels it and needs to know that we will make it through. Into the darkness we bring light, both to ease the gloom in a practical way and to assert our ability to counteract it through artificial means. Thus, the bonfire brings simple comfort, answering what is surely one of our most primordial needs, as Paul Johnston suggests.

PJ: *Everyone in this part of the world has probably been burning things around that time of year, […] somewhere halfway between autumn equinox and the solstice, which puts it around about November the 1st to the 5th, somewhere around there. So, I think everyone just likes a good bonfire.*

Whether it be Hanukkah, Diwali, or Christmas, festivals bringing light into our lives at the winter solstice stretch back into the distant past, testifying to a deep human need for light and the hope it brings.

IM: *Oh, I think it jist gives everybody a lift. I think it's jist a fine run in to Christmas, ken? […] We've got the bonfire, then we've Christmas lights, an then it's Christmas, an I think it just gives every-*

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19 Henry Glassie, 'Tradition', in Bert Feintuch, ed., *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), pp. 176–197 (p. 176).

20 For a taste of these perspectives, see Richard Dorson, *Peasant Customs and Savage Myths: Selections from the British Folklorists* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968).

*body a wee bit o a, jist a lift, before, ken, the dark nights. It's the first sorta weekend o the dark nights. I think everybody jist looks forward to it.*

While we may appreciate these pleasures on a cognitive level, and be reassured that darkness is mutable and that Spring will come, numerous studies of 'Seasonal Affective Disorder' point towards there being a physiological dimension to this desire for light in the midst of winter.

## Esoteric Factors

One of the most obvious regulatory mechanisms within the community is the local committee. Most contemporary calendar customs enacted outside the home are run by a group of one sort or another, accomplishing much collectively that no single person could do by themselves.[21] These bodies usually arise out of an individual's or small group's desire to keep something going, or to see something happen in their community. For successful ones, the event takes shape, often expands, and acquires a form and tradition all its own. Most committees, however, end up with aging members and are eventually desperate for new, younger participants. In addition, they are often run by a particularly charismatic individual whose enthusiasm is difficult to replace, and who, it sometimes happens, exerts such influence and control that potential new participants are marginalised.

The Tarves bonfire has, so far, avoided this arc by keeping its organisation as informal as possible, with only six members. For Ian Massie, 'It's nae like runnin a club, you know what I mean? We hinna got premises or nothing like that, so basically, jist to try and keep the thing goin, jist tae keep the tradition goin'. The Tarves People's Party might be considered a kind of anti-committee, so dedicated are they to avoiding formality, regulation, and the oft-resulting ossification that can bring. The Party has a bank account, but that is about the end of it:

IM: *No, no, we're nae really constituted, no, because, [pause] I know there's somebody that wid like us tae have a constitution, I know. He's got method in his madness, he wants us tae be controlled by himself.*

21 See Fine, chapter 3, 'Association', pp. 75–98.

TM: *There's always one.*

IM: *There's always one! [...] So no, I mean, he's nae a member o the committee either. That's right. Yeah, but no no.*

With this informality, as opposed to a constituted committee setup, the Tarves People's Party allows itself the freedom to follow their own agenda: do it the way they want, living up to the subversive nature of their moniker.

One of the advantages of this lack of structure is that the committee really is open to all and is thus more responsive to the wishes and energies of those taking part.

IM: *Anybody can join, yeah. Anybody can join, yup, yup. There's never, we've asked for people tae join, bit there's masel an Colin Taylor, we're sixty-five noo. [laughs] We're lookin for younger members to come onboard to push us out of the way sort of style.*

The organic structure allows participants to rely on everyday social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion to keep the event focused as its founders would wish. The downside, of course, is the perennial founder's dilemma, found in probably every committee of which I have been a part or seen in action: how to keep an event going as one would wish while still handing over responsibility to new people. Each community handles this in a different way, but in my experience, those who find a halfway house of some kind — with formal, understood, but not legally codified procedures — are the most successful, perhaps, in part, because they mimic very long-standing traditions of community organisation, what Emily Lyle has called the Village Pump level of community calendrical practice, based on direct interpersonal relationships between people well known to each other in an almost familial community setting.[22]

For Ian Massie, the Tarves bonfire presents an emic opportunity to control otherwise unregulated aspects of November practice in the village.

[22] Emily Lyle outlines three types — the Deep Well, the Village Pump, and the Grand Spectacular — of increasing scale and decreasing connection to rooted tradition. The Tarves bonfire falls to the middle of these, with obvious links to the Deep Well, but flirtations with the Grand Spectacular.

IM: *Fan we go roon collectin money in the fortnight before the bonfire, ye get people coming to you, Oh, I don't believe in fireworks; I don't believe in the bonfire.*

*And I always say to them, Look — I kinda half agree with them — I say, Look, I don't believe in people having fireworks in their own back garden. I says, Would you rather have a twenty-minute display one night o the year or everybody havin fireworks for aboot four or five nights on the trot? In ten different gardens, aa owre the place scarin everybody's animals? […]*

*So, I mean, so, my attitude is that it's far better jist a twenty-minute fireworks display and that's it finished. Done. No more. […] There's one or two people let fireworks off the night before, but over the years it's virtually nil.*

In this year of COVID, as the event was cancelled, Ian suggested that there might be a return to home-based, individual celebration, resulting in more, and more protracted, disturbances for animals and people: 'It could be more this year. It could be worse'. As the dates came and went, living only a few miles away from Tarves, I saw a noticeable upswing in home displays this year, with numerous examples visible from my house in all directions.

As in every community, and with every such event, there are some in the village who are not committed, but their concerns are swept away by a more general enthusiasm.

IM: *I would say out of the grumblers there would be, maybe...four that I know of. [...] Ken fit like. It's always the same ones. [...] Jist like tae grumble, grumble aboot anything, ken? Well that's whit I mean, they grumble about the money, about the amount o money spent. But if they hinna donated, [...] they've no right tae grumble. That's my attitude, ken? If you donate, you can say whit you want, but if you don't donate, dinna grumble.*

In Britain generally, there is a social expectation that organisers and participants will raise money for charity at an event of any size, or for a personal undertaking such as running a marathon or walking the Great Wall of China. Though it feels very contemporary, this pattern actually goes as far back as the mid-fifteenth century, when the urge to keep supernatural forces at bay associated with traditional customs was harnessed in service of fundraising.[23] For organisers today, this is

[23] Ronald Hutton, 'Seasonal Festivity in Late Medieval England: Some Further Reflections', *The English Historical Review*, 120.485 (February 2005), 66–79 (pp. 72–73, 74).

a godsend, as being seen to raise money for a good cause increases social acceptance of, and commitment to, the event. Even those sceptical of the bonfire itself, and, perhaps, of its original purpose and function, are often won around by charitable goals, which give them an undeniably positive framework within which to contribute.

Though not a fundraising organisation, as such, the Tarves People's Party does solicit donations, both as part of its civic duty and as a means of smoothing over potential social frictions.

IM: *No, it's definitely not aboot raisin money, no, no, no. […] But it annoys me, tae a point, when I can see clubs that are doing their best tae survive an there's money awash in the village that's bein used stupidly. […] But well-well. That's my opinion though.*

While the lion's share of bonfire organisation is supported by volunteers, cash is needed for the fireworks, insurance, and facilities like the temporary soup kitchen. For Ian, the event can be harnessed effectively to encourage participation. They begin by visiting local businesses, to raise enough to assure them that, along with donations on the night, they will at least break even. Some suggest that all the money should be spent on the fireworks, while others lament that it might be, so identifying specific charitable beneficiaries provides an ideal basis upon which to limit outlay on the display.

IM: *That's the wey we sort o alleviate the problems, with handin some money out tae local organisations. And that jist keeps a lid on the thing an keeps everybody happy.*

Over the years, the group has raised money for the local pre-school group, a local old-people's home, the bowling club, and the Remembrance Day 'Poppy Appeal' to benefit military veterans. Generally, they pass through the crowd with buckets to accept donations, but with fewer people carrying cash, two card readers have been purchased.

IM: *Okay, it raised aboot a hundred and twenty quid, which is nae a lot oot o two thousand people, but it's still a hundred-and-twenty that we wouldn't've had if we were still askin for cash. [...] But, it proved a point. [...] There's quite a lot o people, I could tell ye their names — I won't — but jist intentionally come tae the bonfire with no cash an they were caught out this year.*

TM: *Ha-ha, yes, no excuses.*

IM: *Yes. No excuses. Yes, aye. There one lad, he says, [...] Oh I'm sorry, no cash, jist got cards, you winna hae a cash machine.*

*And I jist says, Oh ere we go, ere's the cash machine. So, give him his due, he gave quite a donation, as well, so that wis nae a problem! Aye, that wis funny; it's a good laugh, as well as having a purpose.*

In recent years, with the proliferation of wind turbines in the Aberdeenshire countryside, villages have found a new source of cash: an agreed upon portion of the income from energy generation. This has taken some of the fundraising pressures off local event organisers and enabled turbine-funded committees to support local projects, including schools, pre-schools, and teen clubs, and also seasonal events like the bonfire and the Christmas lights.[24]

While many regulatory forces are plain to be seen in the organisational structures of community interaction, there are others less obvious, sometimes overlooked because of their ubiquity in other and all parts of our lives. Principal among these are gender and geography.

Gender plays an inescapable role in the shaping and practise of Scottish customs, broadly speaking reflecting the roles that society has historically assigned to women. Thus, the most prominent roles in traditional events are assigned to (and, of course, by) men. From the Borders Common Ridings and the Burning of the Clavie in Burghead to Shetland's Up-Helly-Aa, men, and only men, enact the most visible parts of these customs.[25] Key roles are played by women in every instance, for example with hospitality (food and drink), craftwork (clothes and costuming), and support (safety marshalling), but these are invariably areas culturally sanctioned as feminine, a phenomenon noted by Gillian Bennett with regard to belief traditions — the roles assigned are themselves constrained by society's perceptions of what is 'appropriate' or 'acceptable' for women.[26]

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[24] Udny and Pitmedden, two villages neighbouring Tarves, for example, have benefited from substantial annual windfalls from turbine income (see Joanne Warnock, 'Community Turbine Propels Local Projects Forward', *Press and Journal*, 26 May 2017).

[25] One exception to this pattern of male centrality is the Stonehaven Fireballs in which both sexes take part on an equal basis.

[26] Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women and the Supernatural* (London and New York: Penguin, 1987), pp. 29–33.

In Tarves, the committee is made up of men, while some of the stewarding on the day — the public face of the event — is more integrated, with women taking part in serving food and charity fundraising. So, while gender is not an organising principle, as it is in the Common Ridings where women are explicitly banned from participating in the rides, cultural patterns inevitably make themselves felt in the development and enactment of the bonfire, perhaps most stereotypically in the fact that men try to make it bigger and better (than anyone else's) and stir up inter-village rivalries, while women fulfil the nurturing roles noted above.[27] In this way, gender roles in the Tarves bonfire casually mirror those of society.

Moving on to geography, communities like Tarves have long enjoyed local sports rivalries and ancient traditions of *blason populaire* and competition, whether in the rule-bound setting of a football game or enduring social interactions. While not explicitly competitive, Ian seems to take a bit of pride in the scale of the current Tarves event, a huge celebration with thousands attending, a substantial fireworks display, and a fire around ten metres across.

IM: *It's fun to do, yes. Some people in the village say, We were better than Methlick; We were better than Ellon. We're nae worried; we're just wintin tae be the best that we can do.*

TM: *So, some people have a slight competitive sort of feel about it.*

IM: *Aye, well, a competitive sort o streak.*

*Well, having said that, oor bonfire, the bonfire itself is always bigger than anybody else I've seen! Apart fae Aberdeen an Peterhead maybe. Aye, last year's bonfire was absolutely massive.*

*So I'm very worried for next year. There's not one this year, so everybody will be storing up aa their rubbish!*

TM: *Well, you should have twice your rubbish.*

IM: *Twice the rubbish next year!*

Though this rivalry is very informal, it nevertheless exists, according to Paul Johnston.

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[27] This is not to say that rivalry and competition are exclusively male domains, as Sheila Young explored in her unpublished paper '"Networks of Love": From Community to Competition in Women's Prenuptial Rituals in Northern Scotland', American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Miami, 19–22 October 2016.

PJ: *Yeah, it's a bit a big part of life between each of the villages around here for generations.*

*I can remember Arthur Watson saying to me, I'm not a Tarvesian.*

*I said, Arthur, you were awarded an MBE for your services to this village, for all of the work you've ever done in Tarves. You are Mr. Tarves. Nobody ever thinks you, of anything else.*

*No, he says, I was born at Burnside, which is Tarves, but just the other side of the river. But unfortunately, [I] went to Methlick School.*

*And, as he said, after eighty years, he only just felt that he could be accepted as somebody from Tarves.* [laughs]

*So there is a rivalry. And you always get the little things. And I think it's all to do with just being separate communities. You tend to build a rivalry because you want a rivalry. You want to have a sense of place and things. And that's what I love about the area.*

The rivalries emerge in other areas of community life, as well, such as the hotly contested installation of Christmas lights and decorations, gardening competitions, and flower displays, says Paul: 'So out it comes. And, of course, people then rally round and do things'.

## Exoteric Factors

Moving outwith the village and its local networks, one authority with considerable influence, albeit mostly in the past, is the church, which has had a long and often oppressive relationship with calendar customs, endlessly attempting to exterminate those it felt were 'heathenish' or 'idolatrous'[28] — adjectives that are really no more than stand ins for 'anti-Christian' or, more correctly, 'anti-church' — in other words, practices that were not under *its* control and therefore undermining of its authority over social organisation, behaviour and, ultimately, loyalty and fealty. The regulatory social power of the institution has greatly diminished over the last few centuries with assimilation chosen over extermination.[29] Thus Christian celebrants bless the wa-

[28] Eighteenth-century references to the Burning of the Clavie at Burghead, Morayshire, Scotland, quoted in Banks, 2, p. 36.

[29] This policy is famously set out in a purported seventh-century letter from Pope Gregory I's to his British Isles emissary, Abbot Mellitus, although the text actually calls only for usurping the buildings and sites associated with pre-Christian worship,

ter at a clootie well,[30] preside over a May Day morning dew face-washing service on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh,[31] or offer a Clavie Service the Sunday before the event.[32] Today, local councils, legislative bodies, and police forces take a leaf from the church's book, working with local organisations, communities, and individuals to mould their practices into relatively recently established regulatory frameworks, rather than simply attempting to end a tradition, which is sometimes centuries old, sometimes relatively new, but in either case emerging from individual and community need and agency, and therefore possessed of meaning and significance for those who practise it.

Even in present-day Tarves, the church has a small hold on the proceedings, with the bonfire being held in the Glebe, land belonging to the Church of Scotland. Every customary practice needs a place and a space, sacred or otherwise, and the Tarves bonfire usually burns in the Glebe, a piece of land owned by the established Church of Scotland.[33]

IM: *Well, there was a wee bit o argument aboot [that]. They were wantin various restrictions puttan on it, an we said, no, no, no. Fit dae ye ca it? It's, eh, aye, jist a wee bittie political gettin.*

*The Glebe hid been bein rented oot an the Church o Scotland didn't know it had been rented out. So the kirk in Tarves got a rap*

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not the rites, deities, and beliefs. See Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, book 1, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-book1.asp [accessed 22 November 2020]. For a few examples of church authorities attempting to control vernacular culture, see John Rule, 'Methodism, Popular Beliefs and Village Culture in Cornwall, 1800–50', in Robert B. Storch, ed., *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Croom Helm and St Martin's Press, 1982), pp. 48–70.

30 Banks, 1, p. 127.

31 Banks, 2, 222–23; pixyledpublications, 'Custom Survived: May Dew Collection, Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh', 31 May 2017, https://traditionalcustomsandceremonies.wordpress.com/2017/05/31/custom-survived-may-dew-collection-arthurs-seat-edinburgh/ [accessed 22 November 2020].

32 Dan Ralph, 'Interview with Dan Ralph', with Thomas A. McKean and Valentina Bold, 15 June 1998, Elphinstone Institute Archives, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen.

33 The Tarves bonfire has been held elsewhere than the Glebe, however, with the ritual space regulated into being by the practice itself, rather than being contingent on a particular physical space, or an edifice, such as a church; cf. Alan Jones, 'Just a Little Corner of Belfast to Burn, *Fortnight,* 414 (May 2003), 12–13 and Reza Masoudi Nejad, 'Performed Ritual Space: Manifestation of Ritual Space through Flagellation in Mumbai Muharram', *Journal of Ritual Studies,* 31.2 (2017), 1–15 (p. 12).

*on the knuckles from 112 George Street [head office of the Church of Scotland] in Edinburgh.* [laughing] *[...] They were caught with their pants down, as ye should say, like!*

TM: *Oh, that's brilliant, that's brilliant, so the church gets involved, as well.*

IM: *Aye, well it is the Glebe field, so it's their field, you know. […] Well, we managed to appease them. That's nae a problem.*

In a beguiling turn of events, the Tarves People's Party was able to draw on the church's history of cultural appropriation, specifically the sanctification of *Samhainn* and autumnal fires.

IM: *It was actually James the First of England, James the Sixth of Scotland, saved from Guy Fawkes. […] And apparently the English bishops of that time decreed that there should be beacons lit on the anniversary of the saving of the King. God Save the King! So, it actually is a religious thing. […] So I put that to the kirk this year.*

Three or four centuries ago, few would have dared to go up against the church, given the reverent respect in which it was held and the level of social control it wielded. It is a sign of changed times that Ian and the Party were determined that the bonfire would go ahead on their terms.

IM: *Aye, throw the history back at them. They were niver going tae stop us; they were jist goin tae make life a wee bittie difficult for us. No, no, no. It's nae as though aa the money's goin intae oor pockets, you know what I mean? We're trying to do our best for the village.*

In this way, the Party was able gain support from the church, a reversal of historical power dynamics that speaks of a deeply altered society in which secular authority has taken the place of the religious.

It is fitting that this particular reversal is centred on a practice in the *Samhainn*-Halloween-Guy Fawkes season, traditionally a time of inversion and misrule. What bigger inversion of the natural order of things than a small committee of individuals confronting the might of the church? And while this inversion of authority seems very contemporary, what with the growing cult of the individual, and self-defined communities taking precedence over collective religious authority, the church has always had a rather pragmatic approach to specific dates, such as the birth of Jesus, conveniently placed to overlay older seasonal practices.

One often unseen form of regulatory control is economic, with working life and budgetary considerations affecting the timing of the event. Traditionally and historically, *Samhainn* bonfires, and later Halloween adaptations, would have been on the eve itself, while Guy Fawkes Night was pinned to 5 November for historical reasons. But just as most of the church's regulatory power has ebbed and been taken on by civic bodies and individuals, so too has the authority of tradition — whether practice-based or Christianised — given way to the modern patterns of daily work, which have changed dramatically from a rural model of subsistence agriculture where people worked in and around the home, whenever daylight hours allowed, to one in which many are employed elsewhere, with highly structured working hours.

IM: *We used to have it on a Friday night but then, what with the committee members workin, it took us a whole week to set the bloomin thing up. An ye wis comin home fae yer work at night an it was dark an you wis, ken? So we decidit, 'Right, we'll go for't on a Sunday night'. An that gives us like a Friday afternoon, Saturday, an then Sunday tae set the whole thing up.*

Having the fire on a weekend eases pressure from work, gives more time for the organisers to get everything in place, and, for the same reasons, makes it easier for people from elsewhere to attend as they, too, are off work. There would have been less need for this in the past, of course, as each community would have had its own fire and therefore not needed the time, or transport, to attend someone else's.

Perhaps the regulatory influence most emblematic of the shift from spiritual to 'commercial' comes from the TPP's business partner, Fireworks Scotland, which effectively controls the Tarves bonfire's date for economic reasons.

IM: *Fireworks Scotland always like us to be the last, cause we get all the fireworks that they dinnae use.* [laughs] *We're always the last one for Fireworks Scotland, so we're always the Sunday after the 5th. So we get aa the best fireworks [...] relatively cheap. Well, he just uses them up, sorta style. What he's got left.*

*I mean, last year's display, I don't know if you wis at it, bit, oh my god, it wis unbelievable. [...] There's nae words tae describe it. It wis just fantastic, like.*

This system has two key advantages: it gives the TPP a reduced price, and it ensures an outstanding display, as Fireworks Scotland bene-

fits from selling off unused merchandise. While this end-of-season economic regulatory element may seem tied to our contemporary cash economy, it is in some ways an echo of former practices, as Paul Johnston suggests: 'And at the end of the season, you['ve] probably got lots of wood chopped down, ready waste. Fire festivals. Perfectly acceptable idea!' In other Scottish customs, the same practical and social pressures can intrude the traditional Shrove Tuesday Ba Games in the Borders villages, for example, which are now held on a range of dates to allow people to take part in their neighbouring communities' events.[34]

Thus, the bonfire's attachment to a particular date and time, originally decreed by ancient custom and embedded religious practice, has loosened. And while the event is still very much about communality, the role of propitiatory behaviours practised to ensure good fortune and bounty, and people's fealty to the church, have radically diminished. In the end, once a seasonal event tied to the turning of the year gets detached from an associated astronomical singularity, the exact calendar date is of little relevance. In this way, events like British autumnal bonfires can easily be co-opted by civic, religious, or political forces. Paul Johnston,

> PJ: *I think it's a ghost of things gone by. Yeah, I mean, it wis about Guy Fawkes (which I always jest about: the only person who entered parliament with honest intentions), but, you know, that was so long ago and it was all about, you know, burning Catholics and stuff like that. […]*
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> *Well, while I accept it was James and it was a Stuart king who was on the throne, or whatever, I would have to say that it [was] probably completely and utterly irrelevant to everyone in this part of the world. […]*
>
> *It's winter. People are beginning to go [*gestures, i.e., getting fed up with the cold and darkness*]. And the whole year has always been peppered with fairs, fetes, festivals of one description or another. It's just part of the pattern of life, if you're in a rural area, that would probably be one of the things that you would do. […] Something really quite sort of elemental, earth and fire. Water. These are all things which are important to people. I think this is about ghosts of the past as well.*

[34] Michael Ashkenazi discusses the moving of traditional calendar events due to various social pressures in 'Cultural Tensions as Factors in the Structure of a Festival Parade', *Asian Folklore Studies,* 46.1 (1987), 35–54 (p. 48).

Events with deep traditional origins, functions, and meanings, like the Tarves bonfire now unashamedly exist to serve the community, and enactment is therefore at its will.

Let us turn now to look at civic regulations exoteric to the community itself, which come primarily from Aberdeenshire Council and the law enforcement body, Police Scotland (formerly Grampian Police). For practically any public event, licensing is required specifying who the organisers are, the parameters of the proposed activity (numbers, space used, safety precautions and preparations, traffic planning, etc.), expected numbers, and such like. Tarves's millennium event was effectively spontaneous and so was able to sidestep these formal regulatory strictures, whether through unfamiliarity with the rules or (semi-) wilful disregard. As Ian Massie said, it was a great success and gave the community a taste for more. Thus, when an attempt was made to regulate the following year's event, the original group was affronted, challenged by the codification (and, let's be honest, paperwork) necessary to conform to Council permission procedures. A rural North-East Scotland individualism asserted itself, and the group resisted by suggesting that the public celebration was exactly that, an essentially spontaneous gathering of diverse individuals, 'belonging' to no one, and therefore no one person's regulatory responsibility, rather than an organised event, as such: a party with, for, and by residents collectively, a Tarves people's party.

Today, as long as a few simple rules are followed, the Police and Council authorities are quite happy for the event to go ahead.

IM: *No, we've never hadna really a problem since the second year o the millenium. Aye, nivver been no problems at all. The night of the bonfire we usually hiv 'No Parking' signs up on hot spots in the village, as you would call them, the police are quite happy wi that, there's nae a problem wi that at all. Mud on the road was comin oot o the field, nae a problem, sweep it up and na, na, we tried oor best tae keep on top of everything just sort o keep everything sweet, as you would say.*

Successful though they may have been, one formal regulatory requirement for any event these days is public liability insurance. For most — dances, village fêtes, fairs, whist drives — this is not of great import, but for many calendar customs it can be problematic. Whether it is the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona, or hundreds of people throwing

themselves into a scrum in the Scottish Borders' Shrovetide Ba Games, traditional practices often involve an element of risk, and no more so than with fire festivals, which often involve participants in close proximity to burning materials.

The bonfire tradition is far more hands off than, say, Burghead's Clavie, or Allendale's Tar Barrel Ceremony, but nevertheless brings with it risks associated with fire and, perhaps more importantly, a visceral, deeply instinctive reaction from the authorities about its potential dangers. Over recent decades, such practices have been under increasing pressure to provide fire safety infrastructure and, of course, insurance in an increasingly litigious world.

Traditionally, safety would be in the hands of both practitioner-participants, who know what they are doing through long years of communal experience,[35] and onlookers, who could be counted upon to have an awareness of potential danger and a reasonable sense of self preservation. Nowadays, our safety is often seen to be someone else's responsibility, in this case the police and the regional authority. And so, we find that any event of scale requires insurance, crowd barriers, traffic control, and more, with responsibility shifted from the individual to the institution.

In many cases, this can lead to conflict between the community and the authorities, the reshaping of events to conform with these strictures and, in extreme cases, the demise of events and practices that have been around for decades or centuries.[36] The Tarves bonfire is not such an event, however, and the liability insurance costs, at just £225, are not so onerous as to put the event in any danger of cancellation.

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35 Ronald Hutton suggests that the very origin of these experts, the 'official' practitioners, lies in early authorities' attempts to control chaotic events by limiting participation to sanctioned individuals. Thus, the emic groups of today ultimately derive from the *etic* regulatory pressures of bygone years; see Ronald Hutton, 'Seasonal Festivity in Late Medieval England: Some Further Reflections', *The English Historical Review*, 120.485 (February 2005), 66–79 (pp. 70–71).

36 See, for example, the imposition of crowd barriers and safety marshals at Stonehaven's Hogmanay Fireball Ceremony ('Fireballs', http://www.stonehaventolbooth.co.uk/attachments/article/9/Chap3_Fireballs-_Notes_1page.pdf [accessed 31 October 2020]). The regulations are partly due to media exposure swelling crowd numbers beyond a scale controllable by traditional means. In Ottery St Mary, insurance costs in 2010 skyrocketed 1150% ('Ottery', https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/8113814/Centuries-old-Ottery-tar-barrel-race-at-risk-after-insurance-rose-1150-per-cent.html [accessed 12 December 2020]).

IM: *No, it's nae too bad, no. Not for the type o occasion we're havin. […] Last year wis exceptional. It was absolutely fantastic, the crowd that we hid last year. […] It was absolutely massive, the crowd that we hid, for a small village like Tarves.*

Councillor Paul Johnston was involved from the start and the group took advice on safety matters from the neighbouring village's Ellon Rotary and Community Council.

PJ: *It's fairly informal. […] There are sufficient stewards for the police not to be worried. There are sufficient safety margins that have been given, and advice been given from Fireworks Scotland of how far you have to be away to not worry the police […]*

*I've been to plenty of bonfires where I have had concerns, but I wouldn't have had any concerns with our one. It seems well organised. People are well back and, apart from coping with mud, there's never really been a problem.*[37]

I have long maintained that communities themselves are the best overseers of participant safety, particularly when their practices are celebrated without large numbers of visiting outsiders. As with many public events with numerous variables — fire, weather, crowds, strong drink, traffic — there is a measure of good fortune which ensures success. It could be said, however, that many instances of 'good fortune' are made possible by careful planning, sensible execution, and good-faith behaviour on the part of participants. This last point, in particular, deserves some attention. From the point of view of the authorities, fire festivals are often, perhaps understandably, seen as accidents waiting to happen, whereas the organisers, participants, and attendees have a clear self-interest in not getting hurt, burnt, or killed. These two 'sides' have quite different perspectives on risk — one looking to limit or eliminate it, the other, in particular the organisers, understanding it and having the experience to control it within the context of the event.

Behind the ubiquitous contemporary need for insurance lie the issues of health and safety, which are not just a concern for civic authorities. Communities themselves have a far more vested (and less litigation-driven) interest in the safety of their participants than even the civic authorities, whose concerns are largely regarding liability and

[37] Paul Johnston, 'Interview about the Tarves Bonfire' with Thomas A. McKean, 3 November 2017, Elphinstone Institute Archives, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen.

lawsuits. That is an exaggeration, but it is often seen that way by communities and the general public.

In a traditional context, and by that I mean a long-standing, local, small-scale event without large numbers of incoming tourists, the community is often the best regulator of safety and behaviour. They know what they are doing and have done it successfully for centuries. The participants are their families, relatives and neighbours, the greatest incentive of all to ensure safety. This dynamic changes with 'new' traditions, where local expertise is nascent, and, in the era of the demise of local festivals, the growth of easy transport, and increased leisure time, which has meant that the crowds for spectacular (and dangerous) customs have increased exponentially. Thus, a big fire festival might have a core of local participants who know what they are doing, and a huge parade of followers, many of whom may never have made or even seen a fire, and thus have little idea of its potential danger.

## Conclusion — Tradition is a Process

Regulatory pressures are always in flux, their influence, and status relative to each other, varying with society itself. Thus, as the bonfire's direct connection to traditional practices and the overlain religious calendar has diminished, it has changed from being considered an essential activity — vitally important for propitiation, good fortune, and success — to an elective one, part of a long trend of customary practices becoming detached from their foundational supernatural connections.[38] Where a protective or spiritual event, deeply entwined with belief, customary practice, and community fortunes, *compelled* participation, time, and effort, a recreational purpose wields far less regulatory power. The bonfire's status in the social life of the community thus reduced becomes subject to regulatory influences formerly seen as being of lesser importance, its enactment 'directed less toward the transcendent and more toward the sociopolitical realm'; as Jack Santino puts it, 'The transformation that is intended is of one's opinion, one's attitude'.[39]

[38] See, for example, David Vincent, 'The Decline of the Oral Tradition in Popular Culture', in Robert B. Storch, ed., *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Croom Helm and St Martin's Press, 1982), pp. 20–47.

[39] Jack Santino, 'The Ritualesque: Festival, Politics, and Popular Culture', The Archer Taylor Memorial Lecture 2005, *Western Folklore,* 68.1 (Winter 2009), pp. 9–26 (p. 24).

There is something primal about fire, though, something which compels attention and connects us with, to use Lyle's imagery, a very deep well of human experience.

PJ: *This is a very old land. We live in a very old landscape with the amount of standing stones, hill forts, you know, enclosures, and everything there round about. You must have imagined that there would have been people here, you know, three, four thousand years ago in this landscape. Why wouldn't there have been something as elemental as fire [...] important to life and existence at all times?*

Here, Johnston shows a reflexive awareness of the power of older supernatural practices and associated beliefs, consciously 'folklorising'[40] present day routines though such associations and reinforcing the iterative nature of customary practice. Anchored deeply in the performed past, these elemental associations underpin the idea that our realisation of culture is 'never for the first time', as Richard Schechner puts it, but rather 'for the second to the *n*th time. Performance is "twice-behaved behavior"'.[41]

Communities are thus, over time, subject to a complex layering of regulation and control, which, though seemingly clearly hierarchical, are often held in *equal* esteem by residents, since proximity can magnify authority quite dramatically. In this way, a desire to meet local expectation or avoid local disapproval can sometimes override an outside, relatively distant civic authority even though the latter may technically have actual legal authority to apply strictures. Thus, individuals and communities develop and maintain a matrix of understandings around authority: to whom do I listen and about what, effectively categorising which aspects of life are answerable to which regulatory influences. In the context of a calendar custom, this layered understanding serves as a regulatory framework that allows or generates change, and control its rate and impacts.

The Tarves bonfire functions on many levels, its form in a complex relationship with the diverse regulatory pressures outlined here. Per-

[40] On folklorisation, see John H. McDowell, 'Rethinking Folklorization in Ecuador: Multivocality in the Expressive Contact Zone', *Western Folklore*, 69.2 (Spring 2010), 181–209; and Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, 'Intangible Heritage as a Festival; or, Folklorization Revisited', *Journal of American Folklore*, 131.520 (Spring 2018), 127–149.

[41] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 36.

haps the most compelling conclusion is that tradition and customary practices are, above all, processes rather than products.[42] Without change, traditions lose their topicality and relevance. 'Never be stuck in yer ways,' says Ian, attesting to the human need for constant renewal and regeneration.

This regeneration does not happen spontaneously, but arises instead directly out of the phenomenon of regulation. Competing attempts at control, regulatory forces attempted, successful, and failed, between them create, define, and shape how a custom develops and survives, or ossifies and dies out. Regulation exists as a manifestation of abstract force meeting behaviour or action. One without the other is nothing, but in coming together, patterns and paradigms are shifted and rules acted upon and adopted. As with reception theory,[43] without these two sides, each playing its part, the *meaning* of regulation and control, the real-world effect, amounts to nothing. Both regulator and regulated are needed.

As with most established customs, the sources of regulatory authority are diverse and often obscure. What is immediately clear is that no one individual, or even committee, can establish, control, shape, or eliminate a community custom. Even in our age of Councils, committees, codified civic authority, and, above all, insurance regulations, a social custom such as the Tarves bonfire follows its own organic rules, to an extent. 'The council of village elders does not command anything, it merely declares what has always been,' writes Henry Maine,[44] acknowledging the fact that regulatory bodies are often relegated to playing a catch up role in relation to community practice, much as a descriptive lexicographer is always slightly behind the curve of language change.

Broadly speaking, the control of traditional practices, the sharp end of regulation, can take the form of either recognition, that is acceptance and symbiosis, or prohibition.[45] In the present era, authorities local and

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[42] See Ronald Hutton, 'Modern Pagan Festivals: A Study in the Nature of Tradition', *Folklore*, 119.3 (December 2008), pp. 251–273, where he explores the notion that the formation of a tradition itself is a cultural process (p. 269).

[43] See, for example, Terry Eagleton, 'Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Reception Theory', in *Literary Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 47–78.

[44] Henry Sumner Maine, *Village-Communities in the East and West* (London: John Murray, 1871), p. 68.

[45] For a South African example, see Patrick Bannister, 'Regulating "Tradition": South African Izangoma and the Traditional Health Practitioners Act 2004', *Cambridge Anthropology*, 27.1 (2007), 25–61.

national often take the former position, working with communities and individuals to bring public and private practices in line with contemporary public safety regulations, compatible with human rights and other top-tier legislation. This method works in other fields, as well, for example with the social normalisation of the use of St John's Wort for mild depression, such that its potential interactions are addressed in government medical documentation.[46] Either response to a traditional practice — recognition *or* prohibition — recognises the power and influence of these traditions, and their embeddedness in the fabric of society.

All these regulatory negotiations take place within a matrix of society, and that derives from affiliations, both with the self and others, expressing and enacting who we are in the context of regular social interaction. From this, as Gary Alan Fine says, 'Allegiance is constituted in the local worlds in which citizens participate and then extends to allegiance to a world that is more expansive, but perceived as similar in kind. This is the hinge on which society depends.'[47] These hinges, then, are people like Ian Massie and Colin Taylor who, as individuals, and as the small groups they create, regulate society, upwards to the large civic institutions providing infrastructural frameworks for our lives, and downwards to the small, local organisations that give voice to our need for community expression. In effect, then, regulation from above and below *is* tradition, for without its shaping and reshaping influence, customary practices would stabilise, ossify, and lose their relevance in the always rapidly developing world around them.

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[46] National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on St John's Wort, https://bnf.nice.org.uk/drug/st-johns-wort.html [accessed 23 October 2020], and on under-researched dosage, https://www.nice.org.uk/donotdo/although-there-is-evidence-that-st-john-s-wort-may-be-of-benefit-in-mild-or-moderate-depression-practitioners-should-not-prescribe-or-advise-its-use-by-people-with-depression-because-of-uncertainty [accessed 23 October 2020].

[47] Fine, p. 21.

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# *Karakondzho:* Evil Spirits of the Twelve Days of Christmastime in the Balkans

**Abstract.** This article examines beliefs related to the liminal Yuletide activity of evil spirits in Balkan culture. *Karakondzho* is a conventional umbrella name for these beings who appear on Christmas eve, do their harmful work over the twelve nights of Yule, and on Epiphany disappear until the next year. I look at the features and actions of specific demons, and the spaces in which they are active, drawing on ethnolinguistic analysis of Slavic and non-Slavic terminology, massive lexical, folkloric, and ethnographic data, published and archival, along with my own field research. Cognate features found in various countries allow us to trace some of the complex inter-Balkan development of their image, associated linguistic borrowings, and cultural influences, and to suggest archaic prototypes of these seasonal evil spirits.

**Keywords:** Yuletide, Christmas season, Balkan demonology, folk seasonal regulation

## Introduction

This article sheds light on a segment of the folk imaginary related to the appearance of certain evil beings at certain times of the calendric year. In the Balkan region, the twelve-day period is closely linked to evil being(s), known in most of the countries in the peninsula, it is an interesting case study. They appear on Christmas Eve and disappear or are driven away by priests or ritual processions on Epiphany.[1]

Yuletide, the winter solstice, is a liminal period during which, according to folk worldviews, all demons are thought to become more vigorous. The twelve days, as a delimited period, have dialectal asso-

[1] *Rodopi: Traditsionna narodna dukhovna i sotsialnonormativna kultura* [*The Rhodope Mountains: Traditional Folk Spiritual and Social-Normative Culture*] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1994), p. 39; Zorka Delinikovola, 'Obichai svrzani so poedini praznitsi i nedelni dni vo Radovish' ['Customs Connected with Some Festivals and Days of Weeks in Radovish'] in *Glasnik na Etnoloshkiot muzej* [*Newsletter of the Museum of Ethnology*] (Skopje, 1960), pp. 143–45.

ciations which portray it as transitional, dangerous, impure, demonic, abnormal, infernal, and a dead time.

The mythical evil spirits associated with this time are known under multiple dialectal names,[2] with *karakondzho* being a commonly accepted conventional umbrella term, though, according to many scholars, this name is only found in the languages of nations that have experienced direct contact with Greek and Turkish culture; other Balkan and European nations do not have such a designation.[3] These seasonal mythic figures, associated with Christmastime and winter in general, are known in the Balkans to Slavic and non-Slavic populations, as well as to both Christians and Muslims. The Greek version is *kallikantzaros*, the Bulgarian and Gagauz *karakondzho*, *karakoncho,* Serbian *karakondhzul*, the Macedonian *karakondzhol*, Aromanian *carcandzal* (with lack of the term in the Rumanian tradition), the Albanian *karkanxoll* and the Turkish *kara concolos*. Entries in dictionaries and encyclopedias,[4] special works on the Slavic mythology[5] without fail mention the

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[2] In Bulgarian language only the list of nominations for this evil spirit includes 60 terms. See: Irina Sedakova, 'K probleme zaimstvovanii v balkanoslavianskikh iazykovykh i etnokul'turnykh sistemakh' ['Towards the Problem of Borrowings in Balkan Slavic Languages and Ethnocultural Systems'], in *Slavianskaia iazykovaia i etnoiazykovaia sistemy v kontakte s neslavianskim okruzheniem* [*Slavic Language and Ethnocultural Systems in Contact with non-Slavic Environment*] (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2002), pp. 483–510.

[3] Slobodan Zechevich, *Mitska bicha srpskih predanja* [*Mythic Beings of Serbian Tales*] (Beograd: Etnografski institut, 1981), p. 166; Tanas Vrazhinovsky, *Narodna demonologija na makedontsite* [*Macedonian Popular Demonology*], vol. 1 (Skopje, Prilep, 1998), p. 228.

[4] Nikita I. Tolstoi, 'Karakondzhaly' in *Mifologicheskii slovar'* [*Dictionary of Mythology*] (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopedia, 1990), p. 273; *Bulgarska mitologiia: Entsiklopedichen rechnik* [*Bulgarian Mythology: Encyclopedic dictionary*] (Sofia: 7M+ Logis, 1994); Irina Sedakova, 'Karakondzhul', in *Slavianskie drevnosti: Etnolingvisticheskii slovar'* [*Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary*], ed. Nikita I. Tolstoi, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia, 1999), pp. 466–48.

[5] Roger Bernard, 'Le Bulgare караканджо "sorte de loup garou" et autre formes Bulgares issues du Turc karakoncolos' in *Izsledvaniia v chest na akademik M. Arnaudov: Iubileen sbornik* [*Investigations in Honour of Academician M. Arnaudov: Festschrift*] (Sofia, 1970); Ljubinko Radenkovich, 'Mitoloshka bicha vezana za godishnje praznike' ['Mythic Beings in Connection with the Calendar Festivals'] in *Etnoloshko-kulturoloshki zbornik* [*Ethnologic-Cultural Book of Essays*], vol. 2. (Svrljig, 1998); Anna A. Plotnikova, 'Iuzhnoslavianskaia narodnaia demonologiia v balkanskom kontekste' ['South-Slavic Folk Demonology in the Balkan Context'], *Studia mythologia Slavica*, 1 (Ljubljana, 1998), pp. 119–30; Ute Dukova, *Naimenovaniia demonov v bolgarskom iazyke* [*Names of the Demons in the Bulgarian Language*] (Moscow: Indrik, 2015).

*karakondzho*'s 'Balkan origin'. Descriptions of the *karakondzho*s, or at least mention of them, is a commonplace in ethnographic works devoted to calendar rites or the demonology of local traditions. Most generally, *karakondzho*s are either thought of as monsters of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, or anthropo-zoomorphic appearance, or invisible creatures that assault people at nights and ride them, usually beyond the limits of the human world. These creatures may be very dangerous and bloodthirsty, or they may just scare people.

For this study, I follow the methodology of the Moscow ethnolinguistic school, founded by Nikita I. Tolstoi back in the USSR in the 1970s:

> *Ethnolinguistics is part of linguistics, a subdiscipline which orients the scholar towards investigating the correlation and coherence between a language and folk culture, language and archaic mentality, language and folk art, through their interrelations and diverse correspondences. Ethnolinguistics is not just a hybrid of linguistics and ethnology, or a mixture of certain elements, factual or methodological, of one discipline and another.*[6]

I thus draw on data from a range of vocabularies, especially dialectal and regional ones, folklore and ethnographic publications, and archives, as well as my own field research of the last 30 years. To characterize the *karakondzho* as a seasonal demon, I apply an ethnolinguistic scheme devised for describing mythological beings,[7] listing a wide range of attributes which helps to reconstruct an archaic conception of a mythic being and its origin.

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[6] Nikita I. Tolstoi and Svetlana M. Tolstaia, *Slavianskaia etnolingvistika: Voprosy teorii* [*Slavic Ethnolinguistics: Theoretical Questions*] (Moscow: Institut slavianovedeniia RAN, 2013), p. 19, https://inslav.ru/publication/tolstoy-n-i-tolstaya-s-m-slavyanskaya-etnolingvistika-voprosy-teorii-m-2013 [accessed 5 October 2020]. For classical examples of ethnolinguistic studies on the theme of the ritual year in English, see Svetlana M. Tolstaia, 'Rites for Providing and Stopping Rain in Slavonic Folk Tradition', *Cosmos*, 12 (2005 [2001]), 179–95; Nikita I. Tolstoi, 'Magic Circle of Time', *Cosmos*, 18 (2005 [2002]), 193–206.

[7] Liudmila N. Vinogradova, Aleksandr V. Gura, Galina I. Kabakova, Ol'ga A. Ternovskaia, Svetlana M. Tolstaia, and Valeria V. Usacheva, 'Skhema opisanija mifologicheskikh personazhej' ['Scheme for Descriptions of Mythic Beings'], in *Materialy k VI Mezhdunarodnomu kongressu po izucheniiu stran Iugo-Vostochnoi Evropy* [*Materials for VI International Congress on Investigation of South-Eastern European Countries*], Sofia, 30 August 1989–6 September 1989, Materialy kul'tury [Material Culture] (Moscow: Institut slavianovedeniia RAN, 1989).

Another explanation is needed here regarding the linguistic and cultural contexts of the Balkan area. The Balkan languages (Romanian, Aromanian,[8] Bulgarian, Greek, Roma, Gagauz,[9] Albanian, Macedonian[10]), despite belonging to different families share distinct similarities in their vocabularies and grammatical systems which have allowed the scholars to think of them as members of a Balkan *Sprachbund*.[11] Many scholars see this unity not only in languages but in various spheres of popular culture, such as the spectacular parallels between Greek and Bulgarian calendar customs and mythological ideas.[12] Tatiana V. Civjan has widened this approach and put forward the notion of a specific Balkan worldview, an idea widespread among Balkanists today.[13]

Due to Greek and Turkish influence, shared history, close proximity, protracted contact, and multilingualism in many regions, the Balkan languages have a great number of borrowed words connected with specific lexical subsystems. That of demonology, for example, describes mythic beings using foreign words, alongside taboos and euphemisms, in order to protect against the entity's harmful deeds.

It is difficult to analyse the entire system of terminology because of the mixture of borrowed and native vocabulary and related ethnological data. Foreign words are not always seen as 'alien', because of the assimilation of the original root, their use with 'native' suffixes, and folk etymology. Many lexical units have transformed over time and cannot be relied upon to carry a linguistically clear picture of their ultimate origin. This is exactly the case with *karakondzho* and its dialect versions. The same processes are at work with regard to folkloric and ethnographic evidence, much of it of different origins and varying

[8] Aromanian is a dialect of Romanian language spoken on the territory of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania.

[9] Gagauz is a Turkic language spoken by Orthodox Christian people on the territory of Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine and Turkey.

[10] The list of the members of the Balkan Sprachbund varies according to different scholars. Some linguists do not regard the Turkish, Serbian, Croatian, and Slovene languages as Balkan, while some others do.

[11] Kristian Sandfeld, *Linguistique balkanique: Problèmes et résultats* (Paris: Champion, 1930).

[12] Mikhail Arnaudov, 'Grutski vliianiia v bulgarskiia folklor' ['Greek Influence on Bulgarian Folklore'] in *Izbrani proizvedeniia* [Selected Works], vol. 2 (Sofia: Bulgarski pisatel, 1978), pp. 59–68 (p. 61).

[13] Tatiana V. Civjan, *Lingvisticheskie osnovy balkanskoi kartiny mira* [*Language Basis of the Balkan Model of the World*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1990).

geographically, nevertheless, a detailed analysis yields some evidence regarding the spread and development of its particular root.[14]

Several factors play a role in this respect. First of all, the materials available to us do not come from very ancient times, but rather record the state of the system as it existed no earlier than the nineteenth century. Second, demonology is a sphere of popular knowledge that intimately intersects with religious beliefs. Therefore, religious differences (e.g., between Orthodox Christianity and Islam) add important nuances to the interpretation of evil spirits, especially with regard to calendric holidays, feasts, and fasting.[15]

## 1 *Karakondzho*: Language Issues

### *1.1 Terms for the Christmastime Evil Spirits*

Taken together, the characteristics of the *karakondzho* are so varied that they seem to be beyond any consistent system's framework. Nevertheless, it is possible to make certain generalisations. The term itself is stable in all the Balkan traditions though it is subject to considerable phonetic and morphological variation. The morphological nuances are direct reflections of the beliefs associated with the *karakondzho.* Thus, in Bulgarian, the respective terms are often formed in the masculine or neutral gender while in Serbian they are feminine.[16] The formation of a group entity of innumerable demons is reflected in the collective plural (*karakondzhureto*) found in Bulgarian, which features many folk tales about families of *karakindzho*s.

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[14] See the three maps in Irina Sedakova, 'K probleme zaimstvovanii', pp. 483–510.

[15] In this respect a remark made by V. A. Gordlevskii seems to be exceptionally valuable. He distinguished the superficial, borrowed components in the Ottoman Turkish popular culture: [These components] 'suppress grains of the original Turkish beliefs and that is not surprising because Turks by the moment of their conversion to Islam had not developed as yet a consistent religious system. As Turks came into contact with neighboring nations they borrowed from these nations superstitions these nations believed in. Thus the Ottoman Turks' superstitions acquired even more motley and confused character.' See Vladimir A. Gordlevskii, 'Iz osmanskoi demonologii' ['From Osman Demonology'], in *Izbrannye sochineniia* [*Collected Works*], vol. 3 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1962), p. 305.

[16] Thus in the Serbian dictionary of mythology the entry for this evil spirit is called *Karakondzhula* (with the feminine ending *-a*). See Liubinko Radenkovich, 'Karakondzhula', in *Slovenska Mitologija: Entsiklopediiski rechnik* [*Slavic Mythology: Encyclopedic Dictionary*] (Beograd: Zepter Book World, 2001), pp. 259–61.

There are specific documented terms for winter demons, like *kandzo*, *kandzil*, which in some Balkan areas mean 'devil'. In everyday speech, these are used as swear-words: *kandzul*, *kandzo* is Bulgarian for 'damn it', *kundza* is 'devil, demon bringing misfortune';[17] *kundzavurin* is the Serbian for 'devil, scoundrel'.[18] These terms thus bridge the Bulgarian and Serbian border.[19]

Another sub-group of terms for winter evil spirits consists of *dzhongoloz*, *dzhangoloz* formed through metathesis and vocalisation of the consonants in *karakondzho*.[20] It appears to be derived from Turkish c*ongalaz*, 'old woman'.[21] Similar meanings are recorded in the Bulgarian *dzongoloz*, pejorative for an 'old man',[22] and *dzhongolozin* 'old profligate'. Normally these words are used in invectives: *Proklet dzhongolozin* 'Damned dzongolozin'.[23] The same lexical unit applies to Christmastide guisers and to a child born on Christmas who, according to old beliefs, would possess peculiar, demonic features. Irrespective of the linguistic origin of this term, these beliefs are common throughout the Balkan region.[24] This phenomenon of a single root being associated with many derivative terms for sets of objects, actions, or ritual persons in one custom is characteristic of the vocabulary of folk culture.

Vladimir A. Gordlevskii adduces the terms *karakondzho, kondzholos*, and *dzongolos* as synonyms for the winter demons, though it seems that there are two slightly different meanings. In the first, the terms denote the monsters that, at Christmastime, leave their caves. In the second, they denote a house-spirit that inflicts harm only on utensils

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17 Stefan Mladenov (compiler), *Bulgarski tulkoven rechnik s ogled kum narodnite govori* [*Bulgarian Explanatory Dictionary with a View towards Popular Dialects*] (Sofia, 1951), p. 531.

18 Yaksha Dinich, *Rechnik Timochkog govora* [*Dictionary of the Timok Dialect*] (Beograd, 1992), p. 437.

19 Irina Sedakova, 'K probleme zaimstvovanii' , map 1.

20 Bernard, 'Le Bulgare караканджо' .

21 *Bulgarski etimologichen rechnik* [*Bulgarian Dictionary of Etymology*], 8 vols (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo 'Prof. Marin Drinov', 1971–2017), I, 368.

22 Naiden Gerov, *Rechnik na bulgarskiia ezik* [*Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language*], vol. 1 (Sofiia: Bŭlgarskii Pisatel, 1975 [1895]), p. 289.

23 *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia i narodopis* [*Collection of Popular Works*], vol. 42 (Sofia: BAN, 1936), p. 115.

24 Irina Sedakova, *Balkanskie motivy v iazyke i kul'ture bolgar: Rodinnyi tekst* [*Balkan Motifs in Bulgarian Language and Culture: Birthlore*] (Moscow: Indrik, 2007), p. 277.

and tableware. According to the Turkish popular etymology, the word *congoloz* can be traced back to words *con, can* 'tiny bells'. This hypothesis finds a confirmation in Bulgarian ritual and linguistic materials. The Bulgarian words *dzhan, dzhon* and *chan, dhangaratsi* 'the ritual bells' are borrowed in the Bulgarian and Macedonian dialects.[25] These bells are a defining attribute of Yule guisers (who, appropriately, get the name *dzhongaldzhii* 'those with the bells').

*1.2 Popular Etymology*

The first component of *karakondzho* (from Turkish *cara* 'black') is well assimilated in the Balkan Slavs' dialects. *Karakondzho* is principally portrayed as the black demon and some scholars suppose that this color characterisation is the fundamental feature, due to the semantic transparency of the *kara* component of the term. A similar process is seen in the Bulgarian popular interpretation of the first component, which is associated with the verb *karam* 'to ride'; this is one of the most frequent activities ascribed to *karakondzho* at Christmastime. Another related popular etymology traces the term's second part back to the word *kon* 'horse', a Bulgarian term for the evil spirit *karakoncho* that corresponds to the centaur-like appearance of this evil spirit.

*1.3 Terminology of the Twelve Days and the Seasonal Evil Spirits*

Winter (Christmastime) demons are known under other names. In this respect Northern Greece and Southern Bulgaria form a common territory where the terms for the calendric days and for the associated creatures are similar: *pogani* 'the pagans', a poly-semantic word meaning 'unclean', 'indecent'. It denotes also aliens and people of different religious faiths (*boganets* is a synonym for *karakondzho*, but also, in the Rhodopian dialect, 'a Bulgarian Christian converted to Islam'[26]). This latter meaning is well known in popular culture but is also recorded in ancient literary manuscripts[27] and is but one example of the fact that the terms for the evil spirit and Christmastime can be identical — *pogan*.

The terms for the twelve-day period itself contain a multitude of mythological and ritual allusions, since it is seen as a period of transi-

[25] Gerov, *Rechnik na bulgarskiia ezik* , vol. 1, p. 287.

[26] *Bulgarska dialektologiia: Materiali i prouchvaniia* [*Bulgarian Dialectology: Materials and Studies*], vol. 2 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1965), p. 130.

[27] *Bulgarski etimologichen rechnik*, V, 416–21.

tion between dark and light,[28] a time belonging to the evil spirits, Bulgarian *diavolski dene* 'devil's days'. The lexical meanings for the twelve days characterise it as 'unbaptised, unholy', reflecting popular and Christian beliefs that the water, and sometimes the earth and sky, are considered 'unbaptised' until Epiphany, too. Other lexical meanings include, 'unclean', 'unholy', 'foul' and 'vicious'. This is the time, too, when souls of the dead are released and bother people during the night (*cf*. Macedonian term *mrtvi denove* 'dead days').

## 2 *Karakondzho* as an Evil Spirit

Unfortunately, neither ethnographic descriptions nor dictionary entries have many accounts of the evil spirits of the twelve days, contrary to what the above ethnolinguistic scheme would imply. Most descriptions are comprised of just a few details such as their seasonal activity, their appearance, and the sort of harm they cause. Beliefs about appearances, attributes, functions, habitation sites and victims of these demons, and popular views of their genesis are fragmentary, while scholars' hypotheses are often contradictory. The references, empirical data, and analytical works all produce a very variegated picture.

The characteristics of the *karakondzho* and its activities are differentiated not only between individual traditions (e.g., Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, etc.), but also *within* each one, though there are common, shared elements. The most resilient characteristic is their seasonality: their activities are tied to the hard winter frosts, predominantly to the Christmas season in the Christian tradition (with Yuletide extending into the new year, January is called 'the month of *Karakondzho*' in Bulgaria), and to the winter holidays in the Islamic tradition. Belief in their seasonal nature is less stable in some Serbian areas, though. In Gruzha, Central Serbia, for example, people believe that the *karakondzho* appears twice a year, at Christmas and in autumn.[29] In some parts of northeastern Bulgaria, the *karakondzho* is intertwoven with the image of Saint Teodor (Bulgarian *Todor*), the demonic horseman who appears in spring, during Teodor's week (the first week of the Lent).[30]

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[28] Emily Lyle, *Archaic Cosmos* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), p. 49.

[29] *Srpski etnografski zbornik*, vol. 58 (Beograd, 1948), p. 343.

[30] In Bulgaria, *Todor*'s week is also called *cherna* 'black', *prazna* 'empty', *luda* 'crazy'. The rites and regulation of activities in this period are in many respects similar to

The most recent transformation of the *karakondzho* (as with many other mythic creatures in recent times) has been its admission to the pantheon of childish bugbears and to folklore with no temporal or seasonal correlation.[31] In all traditions, the *karakondzho* is now the nighttime demon which appears with the darkness and disappears with the first cock crow. What follows is a resume of the features associated with these winter mythic creatures.

*2.1 Appearance*

It is possible to isolate areas of the Balkan peninsular where certain perceptions of the *karakondzo*'s appearance predominates. Normally four aspects of appearance are considered: anthropo-zoomorphic, zoomorphic, human, and invisible. A centaur's appearance is recorded predominantly in Northern Bulgaria. The *karakondzho* is perceived as a human being, sometimes with various anomalies: one-eyed, one-legged, with huge ears, gaunt, naked or covered with hair, with red burning eyes, with disproportionally big heads, very tall or, on the contrary, of a child's height. However, descriptions of the *karakondzho* as a human being with goat's legs, tail, horns, claws, etc., predominate in Greece. The appearance of animals (dogs, cats, hares, hens, lambs, monkeys, camels, bears) is often attributed to the *karakondzho* and werewolf properties are inherent in them, as well.[32] Only Serbs describe the *karakondzo* as

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the Christmas 12 day period: the water is deemed to be 'impure', children born in this week and people who died during it may turn into the *karakondzho* or a vampire. Eggs laid during *Todor*'s week are not used for chicken raising because demons (*tudurcheta* 'small Teodors', or *karakoncheta* 'small *karakondzhos*') may grow from such chickens. Sometimes Saint Teodor is imagined as a rider on the white horse who rides from the cemetery as *talasam* 'evil spirit'. Saint Teodor is directly likened to the *karakondzho* : '*Sveti Todor e kato karakoncho I khodi na bial kon prez Tuduritsa*' ('Saint Teodor is like *karakoncho* and rides the white horse in Todor's week). See Rachko Popov, 'Svetsi-demoni' ['Saints-Demons'], in *Etnografski problemi na narodnata kultura* [*Ethnographic Problems of Popular Culture*] (Sofia, 1992), p. 81; *Loveshki krai: Materialna i dukhovna kultura* [*Lovech Region: Material and Spiritual Culture*] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1999), p. 284. I suppose these parallels are of late origin because Saint Teodor's image with the *karakondzho*-like appearance is recorded specifically in north-east Bulgaria where the *karakondzho* has a horse-like appearance.

[31] Irina Sedakova, field research in the village of Ravna, Provadia region, Varna area, Bulgaria, 1997 (personal archive).

[32] *Kapantsi: Bit i kultura na staroto bulgarsko naselenie v Severoiztochna Bulgaria. Etnografski i ezikovi prouchvaniya* [*Kapantsi: Everyday Life and Culture of the Old Population of North-East Bulgaria. Ethnographic and Linguistic Investigations*] (Sofia, 1985), p. 270.

a female demon. While notions of *karakondzho* families and female *karakondzo*s are known in Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia[33] (with narratives about the attendance of a village midwife to the female *karakondzho* in labor), the lack of female *karakondzho*s is emphasised in Greece. Hence the belief that children born at Christmastime become the Christmastime demons extends only to infant boys. Finally, the *karakondzho* may be invisible, with Macedonians and Bulgarians describing its presence as 'a wind' or 'a voice'.[34]

*2.2 Location*

The *karakondzho* comes out of caves and woods, from underground (according to Bulgarian Christmas beliefs, the earth is like a sieve and the demons can get out that way). Among the recorded tales there are stories with mentioning of the precise loci of the *karakondzho* (for example, an area known as *Garvanova dupka* 'Raven's Hole'), near the village of Petkovo in the Rhodope mountains. Serbs, and sometimes Bulgarians and Macedonians, often consider the *karakondzho*s to be the water demons, as they live under ice, near mills, wells, etc. Stories about the *karakondzho* residing in lakes are recorded in Montenegro.[35]

*2.3 Performance (Activity)*

The most widespread image of the *karakondzho* depicts a creature that mounts a human and rides him all the night, sometimes leaving him on cliffs, near whirlpools, or on a frozen river.[36] Serbs believe that drunkards and women are natural 'targets' of their attacks (for example, with its long arms, the *karakondzho* drags women out of their homes through chimney stacks). Bulgarians think that targets are late-night travellers and children.

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[33] It is not surprising that in Serbian dictionaries the *karakondzho* is interpreted as a 'witch' and is an expressive word for description of a grubby, uncombed woman.

[34] Vrazhinovsky, *Narodna demonologija na makedontsite*, p. 229; *Rodopi: Traditsionna kultura*, p. 39.

[35] Pavel A. Rovinskii, *Chernogoria v eio proshlom i nastoiashchem* [*Montenegro Now and Before*] (Sankt-Peterburg, 1888–1915).

[36] Anastas Primovski, 'Obshtnost na niakoi obichaii u rodopskite Bulgari' ['Similarity of Some Bulgarian Customs in the Rhodope Mountains'], in *Narodnostna i bitova obshtnost na rodopskite Bulgari* [*People and Everyday Commonality among the Bulgarians of the Rhodope Mountains*] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1969), p. 172.

Segmented data on the *karakondzho* as a bloodthirsty vampire able to drink blood or devour a person are partially embedded in the pagan winter rituals connected with killing the Christmas pig.[37] In this respect, we can isolate areas of northeastern Bulgaria where people believe that the *karakondzho* appears only at the place where a pig was killed, and areas in Greece where this demon is thought to have a passion for pork. The custom of burning the Christmas pig's bones is carried out with an explicit intention 'to burn the *karakondzho*', more evidence of a close connection with the pig.[38] In the Rhodope mountains, the Christmas ritual pig is called *karakanzel* and dishes cooked of it are deemed to be unclean, foul.[39] This connection with the Christmas pig and with pork is not so simple, however. On one hand, the *karakondzho* itself licks the blood at the site where the pig was slaughtered,[40] likes pork, and enjoys its entrails. On the other, the demon monitors the people's compliance with the fast, ensuring they do not break it prematurely and do not eat in excess as they begin to consume pork.

The *karakondzho*s, like many other demons, are capable of bringing disease (Bulgaria, Macedonia), particularly if a person encounters them, puts a foot on 'their' territory, or disturbs their children.[41]

Data on the *karakondzho*'s role in the home space is far more sparse. It is known to sit on chimney stacks, whistle down chimneys, go into dwellings to smash tableware, spoil food or water (by spitting or urinating in them), but such beliefs occur in irregular and patchwork patterns across the Balkan Slavic countries. They are most typical for Greece and with migrants from Greece, as well as with transhumant stockbreeders.

Particular 'rules' pertain in dealing with food and water in Christmas folk customs. In Serbia people do not drink water during the night and do not wash unbaptised children. In Bulgaria and Macedonia, it is advised to cover water and food vessels at night, or even to empty them in order to protect against the *karakondzho*'s harmful acts of spoiling drink and food.

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37 *Rodopi: Traditsionna kultura*, p. 39.

38 *Plovdivski krai: Etnografski i ezikovi prouchvaniia* [*Plovdiv Region: Ethnographic and Linguistic Investigations*] (Sofia, 1986), pp. 255, 303.

39 *Rodopi: Traditsionna kultura*, p. 91.

40 *Loveshki krai: Materialna i dukhovna kultura*.

41 *Rodopi: Traditsionna kultura*, p. 39; Vrazhinovsky, *Narodna demonologija na makedontsite*, p. 229.

*2.4 Karakondzo Origins*

The notion that people born (or conceived) in the Christmas season become the *karakondzho* is a shared belief across Balkan nations.[42] Ability to transform specific to *karakondzho*s may be inherited: ordinary people may become *karakondzho*s during the Christmas season.[43] Besides that, they may 'spoil' or contaminate ordinary people and integrate them into their own flock. In regions where the *karakondzho*s are likened to vampires, their origins are identical. They are either people who died at Christmastime (corpses are pricked with a needle to prevent this conversion[44]), in particular, dead children born on Christmas Eve,[45] or they were the dead who had been buried without adherence to strict funeral rites. Occasionally, the *karakondzho* is the soul of a pig killed for the Christmas festivities.[46]

## 3 Folk Protective Measures against *Karakondzho*

Among the Balkan Slavs, the Christmastime interdicts are mainly of a protective nature, aimed at avoiding meetings with *karakondzho* and averting any harm. It is forbidden to leave the house at night, spin or weave, start a journey, propose a marriage, baptise children, bury the dead, perform funeral services, or pray for the dead. All practices with

[42] According to the beliefs of the Southern Slavs, children born during the 'impure' Christmas period become *karakondzho*s, or vampires, and in the future a dragon may fall in love with girls born during this period. Old women and midwives fumigate such babies immediately after their birth; see *Rodopi: Traditsionna kultura*, p. 90. If a child is born before cockcrow, women sew a 'one-day' shirt (one which must be made within a single day and night) and put it on the child; see *Strandzha: Etnografski, folklorni i ezikovi prouchvaniia na Bulgaria* [*Strandzha: Ethnographic, Folklore and Language Investigations of Bulgaria*] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1996), p. 231; *Loveshki krai: Materialna i dukhovna kultura*, p. 285. Greeks attribute demonic properties of the newly born to the fact that they were conceived before the Annunciation. To avoid the conversion of an infant into a *karakondzho* the infant's mother rasps away the infant's nails and puts a garland of garlic on its neck; see George A. Megas, *Greek Calendar Customs* (Athens: Press and Information Department, Prime Minister's Office, 1958), p. 34.

[43] Khristo Vakarelski, 'Bit i ezik na trakiiskite i maloaziiskite bulgari' ['Everyday Life and Language of Thracian Bulgarians'], Part 1, in *Trakiiski sbornik* [*Thracian Collection*] (Sofia, 1935), p. 406; Zechevich, *Mitska bicha srpskih predanja*, p. 168.

[44] *Rodopi: Traditsionna kultura*, p. 90.

[45] *Strandzha: Etnografski, folklorni i ezikovi prouchvaniia na Bulgaria*, p. 231

[46] Tsvetana Romanska Archive, Gostilitsa village, Gabrovo region, Bulgaria.

the water are forbidden (washing clothes, dishes, etc.). Any home dwellers who violate the Christmastime bans on work may be punished.

The use of protective amulets and preventive actions is extensive. In the Rhodope mountains, people sprinkle water consecrated on Saint Ignatius's day, and millet from their sleeves, clockwise around the home.[47] The *karakondzho* is tasked with 'impossible' missions of the sort customarily used for driving away evil spirits; counting the seeds in sunflower heads,[48] for example, or combing wool.[49] Strict observance of 'rules', such as those governing the use of Christmastime ritual objects (e.g., garlic, the coals of the yule log, water in which coal has been extinguished, Christian symbols, such as the cross, the sign of the cross, a prayer) all help to avoid an encounter with the *karakondzho*. Homes are thoroughly protected against the ingress of evil spirits: doors are kept closed, bells are hung on the door, and signs of the cross are painted on them with oil tar.[50] Inside houses, the people talk to each other in hushed voices to prevent the *karakondzho*, that are believed to sit on the roof, from hearing what people say.

Children born on a Saturday can see the *karakondzho*'s frightening smile in windows indicating those who will die in the next year. It is believed that 'the Saturday people' (born on a Saturday) guard the house from the *karakondzho* and prevent its appearance in the house.[51]

## 4 Non-Slavic Balkan parallels

### *4.1 Greek Evidence*

Many stories are told in every village about these evil spirits at this time, though descriptions of their appearance and behavior differ.[52] Fermor delineates two principal types: giants of anthropo-zoomorphic appearance in which 'goatish' features predominate, and black dwarfs led by the devil (*karakondzho*s of this type predominate on the Black Sea southern coast). In Greece and Cyprus, we find the *kallikantzari*,

47 *Rodopi: Traditsionna kultura*, pp. 39, 91.

48 *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia i narodopis*, vol. 42, p. 115.

49 Archive of the Ethnographic Institute with Museum (Sofia), 775-II.

50 *Strandzha: Etnografski, folklorni i ezikovi prouchvaniia na Bulgaria*, p. 231.

51 Sedakova, *Balkanskie motivy*, p. 278.

52 Irwin T. Sanders, *Rainbow in the Rock: The People of Rural Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 183.

evil spirits depicted as small black humanoids often, with goat legs or other animalistic features, and, as Kyriakides notes, all unusual in some way, e.g., one-eyed, one-legged, clad in rags, wearing iron footwear and pig skins.[53]

They come down the chimney stacks and so the flues are tightly closed during the twelve-day Christmas period and sweetened water is placed in front of ovens for them. They eat filthy food, such as frogs and snakes, and are fond of pork,[54] so housewives put pork on their homes' roofs to prevent the evil spirits from coming in. On Lesbos, women scatter ashes around homes to protect their houses against them.[55] They are bloody-minded and nocuous, but not deadly, attacking travelers, making them dance until the first cockcrow, and they are very noisy, beating drums. The second type of *karakondzho* is harmless and innocuous: they infiltrate houses, smash tableware, consume all strong drink, dance, and involve travellers in their dances.[56] Apart from these tricks, these monsters do not harm people, but just spoil the water and foodstuffs (pork in particular).

They appear before Christmas and disappear on Epiphany when a priest sprinkles houses with Epiphany water. The monsters come out from the underworld where they support the tree of universe.

Magical protective actions performed for protection against dangerous spirits of the ancestors are used against the *karakondzho*s: gates are painted with oil tar, thorns are stuck into gates and doors, houses and churches are surrounded with red thread. Nowadays, the mandible of a young pig is used as a protective amulet in Greek villages. People place them in front of doors, throw salt or old boots into fireplaces, hang uncombed flax out before doors, bake flapjacks, smudge them with honey and throw them on the roof before the Epiphany. While leaving for the Epiphany service people say: 'Let's go, let's go, for the priest has come already and is consecrating the water'. Similar beliefs about Christmas evil spirits are found in Blagoevgrad (Bulgaria) among migrants from the Drama and Solun regions.

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53 Megas, *Greek Calendar Customs*, p. 34.

54 Stilpōn P. Kyriakidēs, *Two Studies on Modern Greek Folklore* , trans. Robert A. Georges and Aristotle A. Katranides (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1968), p. 33.

55 G. Georgeakis and Léon Pineau. *Le Folk-Lore de Lesbos* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1894), p. 34.

56 Patrick Leigh Fermor, *Mani: Travels in the Southern Peloponnese* (London: John Murray, 1958), p. 194.

### *4.2 Turkish and Slavic Muslim Evidence*

As seen in these descriptions, there is a great affinity between the Greek Christmastime demons and those of Bulgaria, Macedonia, Croatia and Serbia. Greek parallels are not sufficient, however, so we may adduce further materials from Ottoman Turk and Muslim-Slavic popular demonology. The latter data are particularly significant in that they reflect a system of coexistence between the two cultures and religions in the same territory. For example, in Visochka Nakhia (Croatia) *karandzolo*s as they are called are known only to Muslims. In the Rhodope region, where many are Muslim, representatives of different religions describe and perceive the *karakondzho* in diverse ways.

Here, the *karakondzho* resembles a vampire (Chepino, Rhodope mountains). 'The days of *karakondzho*' is a period of nine days or a week following the New Year or Christmas. On the first evening after the New Year, a stone, or a branch (picked with the left hand while saying 'Let this branch be the roof of my home'), is thrown over the house roof three times to prevent the evil spirits from coming in. Vessels with water are sealed for the same purpose. It is believed that people born at Christmastime follow the *karakondzho*s on their walks along rivers.[57]

Materials on the demonology of Ottoman Turks, gathered by V. A. Gordlevskii, add some details to the general appearance of the Christmastime demon as it is seen by Balkan Slavs and Greeks. In 'regions where Greeks and Turks lived side by side and Greeks predominated,' for example, '*karakondzho* has passed from Greeks to Turks. At Christmastime it rattles with chains and generates terrible noise and frightens people.'[58] Gordlevskii writes about an evil spirit called *dzhongolos* and/or *kondzholos*, which appear in the cold wintertime, during the seasonal Muslim holidays. They spit in open vessels (water buckets, salt cellars) and thus, housewives cover such vessels tightly. Mothers scare their children, too: 'Close vessels, otherwise *dzhongolos* will come in night and spit in them with its venomous spittle. It will poison you.' The contributor who relates these details adduces the popular etymology in which the basic morpheme is the mutilated word *cingildın*, i.e. 'rattling'[59] for the evil spirit is covered all over with bells. At night-time,

[57] *Rodopi: Traditsionna kultura*, pp. 39, 91.

[58] Gordlevskii 'Iz osmanskoj demonologii', p. 64.

[59] Vasilii V. Radlov, *Opyt slovaria tiurkskikh narechii* [*Dictionary of the Turkic Dialects*], 4 vols (Sankt-Peterburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1889–1911), IV, 22–23.

it gently opens doors to bedrooms. Its face is black, its eyes sparkling as fire, its hair snarled. It wears black garments. Usually people who see it die of fright. Frequently, the *cangolos* comes up to a window and shouts something, imitating the voices of acquaintances. When a person comes out, the demon takes him/her to some recess and strangles them. This is also known to Armenians who associate it with Lent and frighten children with it. Gordlevskii writes that there is 'a cave in Zirenbashy. Every year in winter, during the coldest nights, turnskins, or werewolves, *karakondzholo*s came out of it and drove carts all around, coming back to the cave and disappearing there at dawn'.[60]

## 5 Conclusions

The ethnolinguistic data here adduced describe the superficial facts bound up in the language and associated rites. But a full reconstruction of the term *karakondzho*, as well of the genesis of these creatures, is impeded by the fact that the demonological vocabulary has been subject to numerous overlays and cross-impacts, due to close contacts between neighbouring Balkan nations' languages and cultures. The ethnographic literature expresses very different, often incompatible opinions on when and where the form and description of the *karakondzho* coalesced. The theory of ancient origins is faced with strong evidence that Byzantine, Romaic, and Turkish mythologies and ritual systems are the original basis for the emergence and subsequent dissemination of these beliefs in the Balkans. Etymological studies often prove to be blind alleys, as the Turkish term can be traced back to the Greek which, in turn (and sometimes via Albanian), is traced back to Turkish — a vicious circle.

It is difficult to deny an at least superficial resemblance between the Christmastime demons and a centaur (the Bulgarian *karakondzho* often has similar form), but also with Pan, Satyr, and Cyclops (in all Balkan traditions), although this resemblance is merely superficial. Chaikanovich and others reject an ancient Greek origin and assert the *karakondzho*'s connections to the cult of the dead.[61] Components of various nations and religions, and of various chronological strata, have

[60] Gordlevskii 'Iz osmanskoi demonologii', p. 64.

[61] Chajkanovich Veselin, *Stara Srpska religiia i mitologiia* [*Old Serbian Religion and Mythology*] (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1994), p. 313.

merged in this demon. There are Slavic affinities, particularly with *shulikuny*, the Russian winter demons,[62] and the feminine hypostasis of the Serbian evil spirit partially corresponds to the East Slavic *kikimora.*[63] Besides that, it is evident that, at least in Bulgaria, proto-Turcic components should to be taken into consideration (see, for example, the resemblance of the *karakondzho* to the Yakut *siuliukiunam*).[64]

It is also important to find out *how* a lexical unit and a corresponding fragment of the associated spiritual culture, finds its way into other languages and cultures. In this respect, spatial ethnolinguistic studies are of particular importance. An obvious phonetic and morphological affinity between Romaic lexical units and south Bulgarian Thracian lexical units (the Bulgarian *kalikanzeri*), and the obvious domination of derivatives from the Turkish basic unit *karakondzho*, allows consideration of two paths for the terms and their ethnographic content to have passed from one ethno-cultural tradition to another. The first route is via direct borrowing from/to the Greek by the South Slavic languages, the second via Turkish.

Seen from this standpoint, the traditional spiritual cultural vocabulary (the role the 'alien' words and ideas play in development and transformation of popular beliefs, rites, superstitions, and folklore) is of particular interest. Often, the frightening, dangerous, unexplainable or incomprehensible are tabooed and deliberately replaced with foreign terms, not just exoteric in origin, but also 'foreign sounding', perceived by the language carriers as 'alien' (e.g., names of unbaptised 'impure' children found in Bulgarian folk culture: *ayol, gudzho, dzhole, dzhivgar, dzavdzhe*).[65] There are many terms originally borrowed from other languages in the transitory rites that imply a change of a status, i.e., in birth, wedding, and burial rites. This is true for some liminal calendric periods like Yuletide and it is no surprise that the evil *karakondzho* spirits appear at that time.

The most important feature of the evil spirits that come under the term *karakondzho*, known throughout Balkan folk culture, is their tem-

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62 Tolstoi, 'Karakondzhaly', p. 273.

63 Marina Vlasova, *Novaia abevega russkikh sueverii* [*New ABC of Russian Superstitions*] (Sankt-Peterburg: Severo-Zapad, 1995), pp. 170–72.

64 *Mify narodov mira* [*Myths of the Peoples of the World*], 2 vols (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopedia, 1982), II, 482.

65 Sedakova, *Balkanskie motivy*, pp. 45–47.

porality, as they are mostly associated with Yuletide, a dangerous, 'unclean', 'unbaptised' time of the year. In the images of this demon many beliefs of different origins (proto-Turkic, ancient Greek, old Slavic) have merged, and in the very terms themselves we can see amalgamations of these Greek, Turkish, and Slavic roots.

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# Traditional Ritual Responses to Contemporary Misfortunes — The *Youth Kurban* Sacrifice and the Regulation of Social Life in a Post-socialist Bulgarian Village

**Abstract.** This paper presents a study of the so-called youth *kurbans* conducted in the spring of 2006 in the villages of Kralev Dol and Yardzhilovtsi, in midwestern Bulgaria, inhabited exclusively by Orthodox Christians. The aim was to trace the use of traditional ritual practices in enriching and regulating the social life in the village in the post-socialist period. The analysis focuses on contemporary forms of collective ritual sacrifice, the *kurban* — a feast with key social functions in the Balkan context — performed in times of natural and personal misfortune. The emphasis is on examples re-established by young people in the first decade of the new millennium. They organise, perform, and present the ritual sacrifice, self-regulating the social life in the village without the intervention of the Bulgarian Orthodox church. Traditional ritual patterns are widely used in response to social adversities and natural disasters. I suggest that at the beginning of the new millennium, the collective *kurban* and the joint ritual meal are becoming an integral part of everyday local religious practice, as well as an important element in marking and regulating the social and cultural boundaries of different groups in a post-socialist Bulgarian village.

**Keywords:** post-socialist Bulgaria, kurban, feast, religious practice, social boundaries

## Introduction

This research presents a survey of a new ritual, the youth *kurban*, in the villages of Kralev dol and Yardzhilovtsi in the environs of the city of Pernik in midwestern Bulgaria, based on fieldwork conducted with Tzvetana Manova, an ethnographer of long standing at the Regional Historical Museum in Pernik. I will examine the usage of traditional ritual practices from the past in reviving, regulating, and enriching the social life of the village in the post-socialist period. My analysis focuses on the contemporary forms of the village *kurban*, a feast with promi-

nent social functions, traditionally related to the ritual support of community identity. It also emphasises innovations in the collective forms of ritual sacrifice. I will examine village *kurbans* as societal holidays, i.e., not only as rituals, supporting the relationship between the community and its patron-saint, but as practices important for the (re)production of group identity and communal unity.[1]

The ritual that includes an obligatory blood sacrifice has entered all the Balkan languages as *kurban*, which derives from an Old Testament term rooted in the Aramaic word *korban*.[2] The ritual itself is traditionally performed by different ethnic and confessional groups, among both Christians and Muslims, in the Balkans.[3] The sacrificial ritual functions on several social levels — as an individual sacrifice, and as a collective sacrifice from the family and/or the village community. These collective ritual sacrifices and the concomitant shared feasts are some of the best examples of the integrative, regulative, and communicative nature of the social ritual in the Balkans.[4]

Eric Hobsbawm's concept of 'invented tradition' is a key lens through which to view a vast variety of newly emerging, formalised ritual and symbolic practices that reinforce, by way of constant repetition, values and norms of community behaviour.[5] The reference to the past and (in most cases) the construction of certain successions with some of the traditional models already known to the community, are used as a legitimisation for the above mentioned culture markers in the present. A key process for Hobsbawm is the *adaptation* of the old under new conditions and contexts and the *use* of well-known patterns for new and different aims. To these, I would add the idea of new *interpreta-*

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1 Jan Assman, *Kulturnata pamet* (Sofia: Planeta 3, 2001) [Bulgarian translation of *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1997)], p. 143.

2 Asja Popova, 'Le kourban, ou sacrifice sanglant dans les traditions Balkaniques', *Europaea*, 1.1 (1995), 145–70 (pp. 145–47).

3 For background, see Biljana Sikimić and Petko Hristov (eds), *Kurban in the Balkans* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2007).

4 See detailed comparison in Petko Hristov, *Obshtnosti i praznici. Sluzhbi, slavi, sabori i kurbani v yuzhnoslavyanskoto selo prez parvata polovina na XX vek* [*Communities and Celebrations: The Sluzba, Slava, Sabor and Kourban in South Slavic Villages in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*] (Sofia: Etnografski institut s muzey [Ethnographic Institute and Museum], 2004).

5 Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1–14 (pp. 1–5).

*tions* of traditional ritual patterns in the changed social context of the post-socialist Bulgarian village.

A central goal of these invented traditions is the establishment of social cohesion and its symbolic framing and/or membership in real or imagined communities. My working hypothesis is that, despite the diversity of new symbolic forms and ritual practices in post-socialist Bulgaria, they still maintain an umbilical tie to the tradition. Even at the start of a new millennium in the village of Graovo (Pernik region), these new *kurban*s still function as a significant mechanism in the construction of local identity. In the particular case of the *youth kurban*, we see a way of constructing distinctive group identity peculiar to a whole generation, one raised and nurtured in the years of active socialist atheism.

## The Youth *Kurban*

The youth *kurban*s in the villages of Kralev Dol and Yardzhilovtsi, which I witnessed in the spring of 2006, do not have an earlier tradition in the festive-ritual system of midwestern Bulgaria. Both villages are part of the historical territory of the Graovo region but, taking into account the distance between them, it is unlikely that the new ritual was transmitted from one to the other. Instead, it seems that the local *kurban* tradition emerged and developed independently in each village. The only similar documented case of *kurban* 'for the health of the young people' is found in the village of Vlahovo (included in the municipality of Smolyan after 1960), in the Rodopa Mountains of southern Bulgaria. The ritual was performed there after a series of misfortunes with a young man in 2001. Locals decided to revive the traditional *kurban* for health, it having been discarded in socialist times. Every year, on the first Saturday in June, all the inhabitants of Gorno and Dolno Vlahovo organised a *kurban* for the 'health and luck' of young people in this micro-region, inviting guests from the neighbouring villages with Bulgarian-Muslim and Christian populations.[6] These new *youth kurbans* are a fascinating new development in the ritual cycle of the post-socialist Bulgarian village.

[6] Vanja Jordanova, 'Dva kurbana ot Ustovo' ['Two kurbans from Ustovo'], in *Obrednata trapeza* [*The Ritual Table*] (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2006), pp. 301–05.

## The Youth *Kurban* in Kralev Dol

Kralev Dol is situated in the eastern part of Graovo (Pernik region), in the foothills of Vitosha Mountain, near the capital, Sofia. On the village's land, the remains of a Roman villa and the ruins of a medieval fortress, Markovo Kale, have been found, testifying to a long continuity of occupation in the region. Today, the village has a population of about 500 people, but, in the words of the mayor, Plamen Georgiev, one of the initiators of the youth *kurban*, 'We are around fifty people who are the driving force of the village, at the moment'.[7] Even though the school is closed, the village has an active social life, a small manufacturing shop, a local construction company, a vital community centre with a library, folklore and dance groups, and its own football team. The organisation of the youth *kurban* is undertaken by 30–50-year olds, supported by the mayor and the employees of the community centre. Georgiev, born in Kralev Dol in 1963, told me:

> *The* kurban *in the village is like the World Cup in the capital!* Kurban *is a holiday to every dweller of the village!... The* kurban *is important for the village, but it lasts just for a day. For me, the social life of the village as a whole is so important. We have a singing group; we want to establish a museum in one of the rooms in the community building; we take care of the Survakari [a male folklore group that performs winter masquerade rituals in January], and the football team, etc.*

Traditionally, two *kurbans* for the whole village are organised in Kralev Dol, one on 9 May for the holiday of the Summer St Nikola,[8] for which Lenten meals are always prepared (the *kurban* dish is a stew made of boiled beans), and another on 29 June, the patron saints day of the village's church, St Peter and St Pavel, which includes a ritual meat

[7] All quotations from community members are from interviews conducted by Petko Hristov and Tzvetana Manova in 2006; the records are held in the archives of Pernik Museum and our personal collections. All contributors have given their permission for their words and their full names to be used. Translations are my own from the original Bulgarian.

[8] In the traditional Bulgarian calendar, St Nikolas is an important saint in whose honour there is a big winter festival, *Nikulden*, on 6 December (see Vasileva 2003). See Margarita Vasileva (ed.), *Traditional Bulgarian Calendar* (Plovdiv: Vion Publishers/ Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2003). In some regions Orthodox Christians also celebrate a summer version of the festival, *Leten Nikulden*.

dish evoking a lamb sacrifice. These two *kurbans* are accompanied by ritual feasts, for the St Peter's holiday in front of the church, and for the Summer St Nikola under a group of very old trees, 'three oaks', also known as *Svetogo*, 'belonging to the Saint'. These two Christian holidays were organised every year with the help of the church administration and older local people and the practice has not been interrupted, even in the era of Bulgarian socialism. The village holiday (*sabor*) is different from the village *kurban* feast and is celebrated on *Krăstovden* ('The Feast of the Cross', 14 September), when every householder invites guests and relatives to a feast at their home. On this day there is no common *kurban* sacrifice.

Opposed to these traditional *kurbans*, 'done for centuries', the newly created practice of the youth *kurban* in Kralev Dol has a fixed date of origin (1 May 2003), particular performers (young people), and a purpose (luck and health of the young). The catalyst for the founding of this first youth *kurban* was a series of misfortunes including a young man with broken limbs and the deaths of two young people from the village (a 27-year-old man in an accident, and another from a heart attack). At first, two members of the affected families, the mayor of the village and the owner of the village pub (Liybka Tosheva, born in 1958 in Kralev Dol), intended to make their own *kurbans*, but after a discussion with the younger members of the village, it was spontaneously decided that the *kurban* would be held for the health of all the young in the village. Plamen Georgiev:

> *We thought that when we make* kurban*, we will stop all these misfortunes with the young people of the village. And really, after we did the* kurban *[in 2003], we haven't had any serious accidents with young people after that. We don't even have any severe illnesses any more.*

The first date proposed for the feast was 22 March, the first day of spring, but since that was during Lent, they decided on 1 May, international Labour day, which is an official public holiday in Bulgaria.

In the first three years, the organisation of the youth *kurban* was based only on 'enthusiasm, without us even thinking about it much'. Every young person from the village used to leave a small amount of money in the pub to help fund the *kurban*, paying for the two lambs that are ritually sacrificed in the centre of the village, in front of Luybka Tosheva's pub, because, she says, 'the *kurban* should be sacrificed where the food will be prepared'. According to tradition, the sacrificial

animal should be slaughtered by a man. In the case of the youth *kurban*, this man was Hristo Toshev, Liubka's husband, born in 1953 in Kralev Dol. Before the sun rises on the feast day, and before the slaughtering of the lamb, Hristo says a blessing: 'For the health of the young people, may they live long and healthy'.

According to Lyubka Tosheva, 'The *kurban* should be given away to people by the one who have prepared the dish' (personal communication). Thus, for the first three years, she was the one preparing the *kurban* and the one who was giving it away to the locals on the village square. The first *kurban* in 2003 was for the young people, after which they went home and some of the organisers stayed in the pub where Lyubka would give away ritual bread and boiled wheat, as is the tradition for the day of St Peter. Last year, the organisers decided that the youth, too, should eat where the sacrifice was performed, 'because the *kurban* should be eaten by all together!', said Lyubka. Besides the lamb for the *kurban* meal, the organisers provided bread and the beer for the common feast, and the *kurban*-soup was served by two young employees of the community centre, following the rule that all the food should be given away.

After the first three years, in the spring of 2006, the model of the celebration was changed. According to the traditional beliefs of the locals, once a *kurban* was defined as a 'votive offering' it should take place for at least three years and if it continues for another year, it should be considered annual. This is why the organisers decided to move the whole ritual preceding the *kurban*, and the *kurban* itself, from the village square to the churchyard, the place where all the other village *kurbans* traditionally took place.

On 1 May 2006, I attended a youth *kurban*, distinctive in the active preparatory participation of the elderly citizens of Kralev Dol. In the first years of the feast, they would not take part in the preparation of the *kurban*, nor attend the shared feast table. Later, despite the belief that 1 May is the young people's *kurban*, older citizens gradually began taking part by giving small amounts of money and helping with the preparations. Stoyna Efremova Jordanova, one of the women cooking the *kurban*-soup on that early morning of the 2006 feast, proudly said: 'We are the main support of the young people! But we are still just helpers! We celebrate our *kurban* on the day of St Peter and the Lenten one on the Summer St Nikolas's day'.

*Fig. 1. Organisers serving the youth* kurban *in the churchyard, 1 May 2006. Photo by Petko Hristov*

*Fig. 2. Preparing the* kurban *soup by the older women, 1 May 2006. Photo by Petko Hristov*

The answer to my question as to how many *kurban* they make in Kralev Dol was consistent: 'Three: one "lenten", one "with meat" and a "youth" one.' The elderly women showed their 'guest status' at the feast with their behaviour, as well. While for the traditional *kurban* each of them prepared and brought a ritual bread (*pogacha*) and cooked wheat, for the youth *kurban* they simply brought flowers to put on the icons in the village church. They brought their grandchildren with them.

The youth *kurban* feast performed for 'the luck and the health of the young people' in Kralev Dol, represents a diverse and unique combination of familiar community traditional ritual practices and newly established ones (according to Hobsbawm's concept). The presence of the Orthodox Church in the ritual is also intermodal: while in the first years of the ritual performance a priest from the neighbouring village was paid to attend the feast, in 2006 the sanctification was entrusted to two young, newly-settled priests — 'Old Believers'.[9] Despite a certain amount of distrust towards them from elderly villagers, they engaged with the ritual without remuneration, after the tacit agreement of most of the community. They also served in the church following the 'old style' of the Julian calendar. The people of Kralev Dol seem satisfied with the 'old style' liturgy of the new priests; they are unquestionably well educated, lacking mercenary motivation, and another strong positive feature of their skills is enthusiastically highlighted by Georgiev, quoting older people in the village: 'They are singing really nice, just like in Alexander Nevsky!' (the cathedral church in Sofia).

According to the organisers, the whole festive system of the new *kurban* is still open to negotiation among the participating young people. Plamen Georgiev summarised this as follows:

> *The kurban feast is ours — we are going to do whatever we would like to do! [...] We are doing this for the young people and thus they will get whatever they want — a disco with a DJ, meatballs, BBQ, beer! This will be it! On the twelfth of July [the traditional kurban on St Peter's day, Julian calendar], we are going to celebrate it the way the grannies want it. On that day it is their choice.*

[9] Clergy of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church who do not accept the replacement, begun in late 1969, of the Julian calendar by the so-called New Julian calendar, the dates of which match those of the Gregorian calendar. Priests sympathetic to this way of thinking hold their liturgy and rituals according to the 'old Orthodox tradition', *i.e.*, according to the Julian calendar.

*Fig. 3. Consecration of the* youth kurban *by old-style priests, 1 May 2006. Photo by Petko Hristov*

## The Youth *Kurban* in Yardzhilovtsi

The new youth *kurban* in Kralev Dol is not unique in last two decades. Another was founded in 2001, in Yardzhilovtsi, the largest village in Pernik region, with no direct connection with, or influence from Kralev Dol.

Yardzhilovtsi is an old village in the western part of the Graovo region, consisting of four 'neighborhoods' (*mahala*): Upper, Krăstina, Middle and Down. There is a construction company, a small pastry concern, a working school, and a community centre, actively organising the activities of the amateur folklore groups of the village. The most famous of these is the *Survashkari*, traditionally made up of young men

who ritually travel through the village performing masquerade games on *Vasiliovden* (Saint Basil the Great 's day), the start of the new calendar year on 14 January in the old style (Julian calendar); in local tradition, the ritual is known as *Surva*. The group regularly takes part in the annual international festival of masquerade games held in the city of Pernik, where they often win awards.

In Yardzhilovtsi, the *kurban* tradition had been 'lost', abandoned from the middle of the twentieth century during the socialist period, and the St Nikolas church was only used as a cemetery church. The motives for the organisation of a new *kurban* in May 2001 are similar to those in Kralev Dol. The year before, there were seven cases of young men between eighteen and twenty-six years old who died through illness or in car accidents. This provoked communal memory, harking back to 1944, the 'blackest year in the history of the village', according to Ginka Spasova, born in Yardzhilovtsi in 1923, when 'eighteen young men left the village, eleven of whom were never to come back', having been killed taking part in the local partisan unit. The parallel between the two 'black years' for the village played a key role in inspiring Yardzhilovtsi young and middle-aged people to make a new *kurban* for the 'health of the young people' and all the villagers.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Summer St Nikolas's day in Yardzhilovtsi was celebrated traditionally with a *kurban* on 9 May (New Julian). On that day, the village young people, carrying gonfalons and led by the priest, walk through the village in a litany procession, which concluded with a prayer for rain.[10] For this feast day, a special communal celebration for the entire village *kurban* was held. Each neighbourhood sacrificed a lamb, or a ram, and prepared four cauldrons of *kurban* soup. If the Summer St Nikolas celebration day happens to be on a Lenten Friday, the ritual dish should be bean stew, according to Ginka Spasova.

Most of the Yardzhilovtsi residents gather around a shared table in front of the church, and each woman brings ritual bread (*kolach*) with a decorated cross and a hole in the middle in which they placed a candle, and flowers to decorate the icons of St Nikolas and the Virgin Mary. The *kolach* was placed on a platter with boiled corn and then

[10] The so-called *Litiya*, or *Krstonoshe*, is a popular Christian Orthodox custom, usually held in spring, in which believers, led by the village priest, go round the village territory with gonfalons.

placed on the table with the other contributions for consecration by the priest. The male representatives of the village community were to prepare and cook the *kurban* ritual dish and to provide the alcohol for the common table, wine and *rakia*. After the consecration of the ritual dishes and breads, a big table was prepared and each family took their traditionally designated neighbourhood place. The feast joyfully concludes with dances (*horo*) and songs. This village *kurban* was different from communal village festivities such as *sabor*, celebrated on *Golema Bogoroditsa* (the day of St Mary, 28 August, old style). One of the organisers of the celebration, Ginka Spasova, says,

> *On the day of the* kurban*, the whole village comes — men, women, children, old and young, everyone is coming. Only those who are not able to walk don't come… Here [where the* kurban *is cooked and given away], you eat for health — yours and everyone else's. You have to bring your own bowl and eat here. This is what you should do, for health!*

After the political change on 9 September 1944, the tradition of the village *kurban* in Yardzhilovtsi was slowly abandoned due to pressure from the new communist regime. In the first decade after the imposition of socialist ideology, some of the old people still brought and gave away their own *kurbans* — for the health of a newborn child, for the beginning of a young man's military service, etc., but by the early 1950s the practice was finally abandoned as a communal holiday.

The decision to make a *youth kurban* in Yardzhilovtsi in 2001, for the health of all the young, presented the mayor and other initiators with a dilemma as to when and where the ritual should take place. According to the mayor, Grigor Hristov, it was decided that a small chapel would be constructed, because, 'This is how you make *kurban*: in front of a chapel.' The historical, traditional place for the *kurban* — in the old church — was abandoned, as it now functioned mainly as a cemetery church in communal consciousness. According to Grigor Hristov, it was simply impossible for a '*kurban* ritual for health to be made in the cemetery' (2006).

The danger of a political division in the community prevented the ceremony from being held in the *Murtvak* region, where the young partisans had been killed in 1944. '*The place for the kurban and the chapel should not divide the village, but on the contrary to unite it*', as Grigor Hristov says. Thus, the oldest part of the village, *Oslome*, was chosen

for the new *kurban*. It was decided that the building of the new chapel should start at the same time as the celebration of the first *kurban*, dedicated to the *Leten Nikulden* (St Nikolas day in summer), precisely because this saint is perceived as a patron and protector of the village. In this way, the traditional *kurban* on 9 May was given a new shape, with a newly chosen ceremonial place, marked with the building of a new orthodox chapel, and a new focus — the 'health of the youth'.

In the spring of 2001, just days before the first *kurban* took place, a person specially chosen by the organisers went to the site before dawn to note the exact direction from which the sun would rise in order to properly orient the construction. About four hundred inhabitants of Yardzhilovtsi gathered for the first *kurban*, witnessing at the same time the ground-breaking ceremony, in which the mayor and the other organisers took part, for the new church and the construction and consecration of the stone altar. In subsequent years, those gathered for the *kurban* would light their candles on this first stone altar. At every celebration, voluntary donations were made to help fund construction of the church, but the main work was done with the help and the resources of the local people and businessmen. According to the mayor, none of the state or local institutions in Pernik, or the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, helped this construction.

Over the years, this place in *Oslome*, chosen for the old 'new' *kurban* and the new chapel, has gradually and intentionally turned into a sacred place for the community. Locals are enthusiastic about the new building and the renewed *kurban* practice. The number of people who return to Yardzhilovtsi every year for the celebration is constantly increasing, with more than six hundred as early as 2002. Warned by older residents that once the annual *kurban* tradition is started it should not be stopped, the organisers have taken responsibility for preparing the whole ritual, including the meals and everything needed for the shared table, using their own donations as well as collective funding, such as money gathered by the *Survashkari* folklore group during their masquerade games in the village. In January 2006, *Survashkari* won again in Pernik and the prize money was given to the village for the purchase of two rams, the next sacrificial animals for the *youth kurban*. The *kurban* is thus being made and given away the traditional way, with each of the older women bringing ritual bread and placing it on a tray with boiled corn, as it was done before 1944. They bring flowers to decorate the icons and they light their candles on the unfinished altar as well.

2003 was a challenging year for the new/restored *kurban* practice when on 9 May it poured with rain. The locals proudly told me how no one would leave the meadow where the *kurban* dish was cooked and the preparations began. Even though they were soaking wet, everyone stayed so that they could eat the ritual dish there, where it was meant to be. So, the shared ritual meal of the celebration was saved and the new *kurban* tradition firmly established. In the words of Mayor Hristov: 'This was our test of whether the *kurban* is going to be maintained or not. This was the test day — on the third time!'

In May 2006, I had the opportunity to observe a similar test — on that feast day, it again poured. Locals explained that in the past they used to make a special ritual litany for rain on that day. Nevertheless, very few of the people who came to the *kurban* celebration elected to partake of the ritual dish at home. The majority stayed until the sun dried the meadow, and they prepared the feast tables in the early afternoon on 9 May, while congratulating each other: 'Congratulations on our *kurban*! Who drinks — to drink again; who gives — to give again!' As practice established since 2001 required, the remainder of the ritual meal was given to the school's canteen and to the kindergarten, to be given to the children the next day.

## Conclusions

The phenomenon of new *youth kurbans* in the region of Pernik is difficult to fit into a classic ethnographic interpretative model for the re-construction of tradition. In line with new perspectives on post-socialist Bulgarian villages, I concur with Margarita Karamihova's observation, based on her work on contemporary *kurban* practices of Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria, that, 'The *kurban*s represent a true specific social rule, one which doesn't ask questions, but gives answers to specific needs instead.'[11]

In this study, my aim has been to demonstrate how, through a centuries-old traditional cultural matrix specific to the Balkans such as a ritual offering of a blood sacrifice, different local communities are constructing and/or deconstructing their own social-cultural identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. My observations indicate

[11] Margarita Karamihova, 'Kurbanite, koito šokirat samo etnologa', in *Obrednata trapeza* (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2006), pp. 320–26 (p. 325).

that the *kurban* ritual and the feast itself are becoming an integral part of everyday local religious practice at the beginning of the new millennium, as well as an inseparable element of the rituals 'marking the borders' of different local and social communities in a post-socialist Bulgarian village.[12] Furthermore, the study of the *kurban* as an important part of the festival cycle is particularly topical as regards post-socialist revival and the reduction of other aspects of the ritual life in the village in the last two decades, resulting in the regulation of all social life. Regardless of whether this process is referred to as 'return' or 're-vitalization' of religious life and ritual practices, it becomes part of the religious landscape[13] and an increasingly topical response to life and social crises that have marked the transition to democratization in many post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

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[12] Cf. Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 53.

[13] Cf. Evgenia Troeva, and Petko Hristov, 'Sacred Geography of the Post-Socialist Balkans: Transformations of Religious Landscape and Pilgrimage', *Southeastern Europe*, 41.1 (2017), 1–18.

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# 'Sweeping the Worlds Clean' in North-East Scotland: The 'Wild Hunt' as a Contemporary Shamanistic Ritual

**Abstract.** The 'Wild Hunt' is a folk myth found mainly in northern European mythologies associated with an ecstatic 'soul-ravening' night flight led by a godly figure who is accompanied by an other-than-human group of either dead souls or ghostly figures. This particular myth has been incorporated and celebrated in present-day pagan rites, especially during Samhainn, the festival for the 'Celtic' New Year. Among those drawing upon the myth in creating their own 'Wild Hunt' ritual is Andrew Steed, a shamanic practitioner residing in Fife, Scotland. Even though the mythic tale is often linked with figures such as Odin, Gwyn ap Nudd, or Herne, Steed associates it with the Irish saga of the Second Battle of Moytura (Cath Maige Turied), as passed to him through the tales and the spirits. 2016's three-day ritual, held near Lumphanan, Aberdeenshire, was his eighteenth. This paper aims to present and examine the rituals, structures, themes, aims, and functions of Steed's 'Wild Hunt' celebration, as well as his personal opinions on his adaptation and his role in it, while also addressing my the experiences during the event in academic terms. It will include a general academic discussion on the 'Wild Hunt' concept and the ambiguity regarding its origins and functions, and will also touch upon the shamanic aspects of the 'Wild Hunt', in its mythical-ritualistic form and as manifested by Steed.

**Keywords:** 'Celtic' traditions, shamanism, pagan spiritualities, legend, the realm of supernatural

*When the winter winds blow and the Yule fires are lit, it is best to stay indoors, safely shut away from the dark paths and the wild heaths. Those who wander out by themselves during the Yule-nights may hear a sudden rustling through the tops of the trees — a rustling that might be the wind, though the rest of the wood is still. But then the barking of dogs fills the air, and the host of wild souls sweeps down, fire flashing from the eyes of the black hounds and the hooves of the black horses.*[1]

[1] Kvendulf Hagen Gundarsson, 'The Folklore of the Wild Hunt and the Furious Host', *Mountain Thunder*, 7 (Winter 1992), http://vinland.org/heathen/mt./wildhunt.html [accessed 13 December 2015].

The 'Wild Hunt' is a pan-European mythic tale of a 'soul-ravening' night flight to the beyond. Encountered in various local beliefs in western and northern European folklore — though there have been several accounts in south-eastern European traditions as well[2] — the 'Wild Hunt' is a supernatural flying cavalcade of lost souls or spirits, led by a godlike figure who abducts living souls and leads them to other-than-human worlds.[3]

The 'Wild Hunt' as a contemporary ritual has become an integral part of contemporary shamanism and 'western' pagan spiritualities. Among the present-day shamanic healers who have integrated it into their calendar year is Andrew Steed, English-born, but with Scottish roots: storyteller, pilgrimage leader, and author who associates the 'Hunt' with the Celtic saga of the 'Second Battle of Moytura' (*Cath Maige Turied*), as passed to him by the local tales and spirits. The weekend ceremony that I attended, alongside other participants in late November 2015 near Lumphanan, in Aberdeenshire, was Steed's eighteenth in a ten-year span. Steed, in his adaptation of the 'Wild Hunt', plays the role of the group leader, regulating and controlling the shape of the event through his experience, interpretation, and leadership. This article, which is part of my ethnographic research on contemporary shamanism and vernacular healing in Scotland, will examine Steed's 'Wild Hunt' adaptation, and explore its structure, themes, and ideas. It will offer perspectives from the healer himself and other participants, explore its aims and functions, while also looking at the 'Wild Hunt' as a pan-European tradition. Finally, it will attempt to describe and interpret and participants' experiences.

## The 'Wild Hunt' in European folklore

Jakob Grimm was among the first to examine the 'Wild Hunt' phenomenon, in his *Teutonic Mythology*:

> *Another class of spectres will prove more fruitful for our investigation: they, like the ignes fatui, include unchristened babes, but instead of straggling singly on the earth as fires, they sweep through forest*

[2] Ronald Hutton, 'The Wild Hunt and the Witches' Sabbath', *Folklore*, 125 (2014), 161–78.

[3] Katharine Briggs, *An Encyclopaedia of Fairies, Hobgoblins, Brownies, Boogies, and Other Supernatural Creatures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), p. 233.

*and air in whole companies with a horrible din. This is the widely spread legend of the furious host, the furious hunt, which is of high antiquity, and interweaves itself, now with gods, and now with heroes. Look where you will, it betrays its connexion with heathenism.*[4]

According to the various localised 'Wild Hunt' traditions, the leader of the horde ranged from the Norse god Odin (and his Teutonic counterpart, Woden or Wutan),[5] the Welsh psychopomp Gwyn ap Nudd,[6] the English Herne the Hunter,[7] the Greek Goddess Hekate[8] and the Greek God Hermes,[9] to local northern European godly figures, such as Frau Percht and Frau Holda.[10] In later times, other figures have also been introduced as leaders of the horde, such as kings, biblical heroes, or local legends.[11] The mob of spirits also varied; in different versions it could be made up of deities or spirits or tormented souls, soldiers killed in battle, unbaptised children, or criminals.[12]

The 'Wild Hunt' phenomenon can be found in European folk tales and narratives under two different names, but with almost identical features: the 'Wild Hunt' (*Wilde Jagd*) and the 'Furious Host' (*Wütendes Heer*). Even though the differences are minor and not clearly distinct, scholars have attempted to distinguish them.[13] Simrock suggested that

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4 Jakob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. James Steven Stallybrass, 4 vols (London: 1880–88), III, 918.

5 Wolfgang Golther, *Handbuch der Germanischen Mythologie* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1895), pp. 195, 284–85, 315.

6 John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (London, Edinburgh, and New York: University of Oxford, 1901), pp. 180–81; C. Squire, *Celtic Myth and Legend* (London: Gresham, 1912), p. 255.

7 Eric Fitch, *In Search of Herne the Hunter* (Milverton: Capall Bann Publishing, 1994).

8 A. N. Athanassakis and B. M. Wolkow, *The Orphic Hymns: Translation, Introduction, and Notes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Hutton, 'Wild Hunt', p. 165.

9 Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), p. 151.

10 Lotte Motz, 'The Winter Goddess: Percht, Holda and Related Figures', *Folklore*, 95 (1984), 151–66.

11 Claude Lecouteux, *Phantom Armies of the Night* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2011).

12 M. R. James, 'Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories', *English Historical Review*, 37 (1922), 413–22; Briggs, *Encyclopaedia*, p. 437; Motz, 'Winter Goddess'; Hutton, 'Wild Hunt', pp. 169–71.

13 Karl Simrock, *Handbuch der Deutschen Mythologie mit Einscluss der Nordischen* (Bonn: Marcus, 1887), p. 191; Susan Hilary Houston, 'Ghost Riders in the Sky', *Western Folklore,* 23 (1964), 153–62 (pp. 154–55); Golther, *Handbuch der Germanischen Mythologie*, p. 283.

the two vary in their geographical origins — the 'Wild Hunt' stems from the North German regions, while the 'Furious Host' originates from Southern Germany — and in what is brought along with them: the 'Hunt' was thought as the more terrifying one bringing on an immediate impact, while the 'Host' was considered to be an omen foreshadowing catastrophes or death.[14]

Ronald Hutton challenges the whole concept, pointing out that we are actually confronted with various localised versions of ambiguous origin which 'overlapped and converged' in the process.[15] He suggests, instead, that two different and distinct types of night-time rides existed. The first type was a benevolent fairy cavalcade of female spirits led by a female figure, visiting residents in their homes to bless them. On some occasions, Hutton adds, the cavalcade dragged these people along with them, while their victims were having a disembodied experience. The other type was a cavalcade consisting of malevolent spirits, but with the absence of a definite leader. Hutton actually criticises Grimm for merging the two aforementioned types of night raids with another popular European legend, that of the 'lone spectral huntsman',[16] who according to Lecouteux could be a demon, a sinner, or a wild hunter[17] — but definitely not accompanied by a horde of spirits.

When it comes to the 'Wild Hunt' tradition in Scottish and/or Irish folklore, its presence can be found in 'popular' and antiquarian literature, and in academic sources. It is mainly associated with the belief in the 'fairy cavalcade' — also known as 'sluagh sidhe' in Gaelic.[18] Katharine Briggs describes it as, 'the Host of the Unforgiven Dead, […] the most formidable of the Highland fairy people',[19] and Lewis Spence adds:

> *In the Western Isles of Scotland, the Sluagh, or fairy host, was regarded as composed of the souls of the dead flying through the air,*

14 Simrock, *Handbuch der Deutschen Mythologie*, p. 191.

15 Hutton, 'Wild Hunt', pp. 164, 175.

16 Hutton, 'Wild Hunt', p. 175.

17 Hutton, 'Wild Hunt', pp. 56–84.

18 Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations... Orally Collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, 5 vols (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1940–54), III, 330–31; W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1966 [London: Oxford University Press, 1911]), pp. 108–09.

19 Briggs, *Encyclopaedia*, pp. 373–4.

*and the feast of the dead at Hallowe'en was likewise the festival of the fairies.*[20]

While in the Scottish Highlands and the Western Isles the belief in the 'sidhe cavalcade' dominated in people's narratives, in the Lowlands there was another early modern tradition linked to the fairy cavalcade: the *seely wights*, meaning 'blessed, or magical beings'.[21] There were mainly women, who entered into trances (giving them therefore a shamanistic aspect) and flew out at night 'on swallows' accompanied by spirits, gaining magical prowess in fortune-telling, shape-shifting, spell-casting, and healing while on the journey.[22]

Finally, in the Northern Isles of Shetland and Orkney, until well into the eighteenth century, the 'Wild Hunt' legends were still recited in the local Norn language, due to the historic connection of the two archipelagos with Norway. For example, the song *Darraðarljoð* describes how a man from Caithness named Daurrud watched the Valkyries flying over the site of the Battle of Clontarf and plundering among the slain.[23] Moreover, the two island groups have their own unique variant of the 'Wild Hunt' in which *trows*, creatures whose traits and appearance resemble both the Scandinavian trolls and the British fairy folk, form the flying cavalcade.[24]

## The 'Wild Hunt' as Part of Contemporary 'Celtic' Shamanism

Whether a continuation of an ancient belief or a modern construct, fusing together elements from different traditions, the 'Wild Hunt' has been an integral part of many contemporary shamanic healers' work. Steed bases his shamanistic approaches and manifestations entirely on 'Celtic' British traditions — the customs and beliefs that are thought to have existed in the British Isles before Christianity emerged. Steed worked for more than a decade with local Native American medicine

[20] Lewis Spence, *The Magic Arts in Celtic Britain* (Dover: Courier Corporation, 1945), p. 88.

[21] Julian Goodare, 'The Cult of the Seely Wights in Scotland', *Folklore*, 123 (2012), 198–219 (p. 200).

[22] Goodare, 'Cult of the Seely Wights', p. 214.

[23] http://www.orkneyjar.com/tradition/darra.htm [accessed 14 December 2015].

[24] Adam Grydehøj, 'Historiography of Picts, Vikings, Scots, and Fairies and its Influence on Shetland's Twenty-First Century Economic Development' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2009), p. 59.

people in Pennsylvania and Alabama, and with the contemporary 'western' shamanic healer, Tom Cowan, but twenty years ago, while leading pilgrimages to the British Isles, he started receiving calls from the spirits of his homeland to return to his home country and reconnect the people with their land. Since then, Steed has been 'weaving the local Medicine', as he puts it, based on the tales and knowledge that comprise the 'Celtic' mythical world. He has been leading his own pilgrimages, workshops, and year-long apprenticeships, while also publishing books and releasing CDs of his own songs and stories.

I first contacted Steed in October 2015 asking him for an informal discussion about his shamanistic teachings and practices. Instead, Steed invited me, along with twenty others, to his three-day 'Wild Hunt' ceremony so that I could have a better understanding of his work before an interview. The event was held at Corse House, a remote mansion in the woods outside Lumphanan, Aberdeenshire, on the weekend of 20–22 November, with the majority of the rituals to be held outdoors, either in the woods or inside a medicine circle that Steed himself constructed, regardless of weather conditions.

Though Steed was initiated into the tradition of the 'Wild Hunt' by his former teacher, Tom Cowan, in the United States, but acknowledges that, 'it's way different than when I worked with him. And yet has some of the same elements. It's more primal.'[25] What Cowan and Steed have in common, though, is that they both associate the 'Wild Hunt' with the 'Second Battle of Moytura', the mythic battle between the Fomorians and the Tuatha Dé Danann — the first inhabitants of Ireland according to Irish mythology — when the latter rebelled against the former's oppression and prevailed due to the bravery shown by the sun god Lugh. The saga survives in two manuscripts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, much later than it was originally conceived, meaning that it might well have been influenced by later Christian beliefs and traditions.[26] For Beresford Ellis, the story 'clearly contained much older traditions',[27] while Gerald Murphy believes that it was a composite

[25] Elphinstone Institute Archives, EI2015.039, Andrew Steed, 'General Discussion on Contributor's Life Journey and Shamanistic Work', 3 December 2015, interviewed by Athanasios Barmpalexis, Lower Largo, Fife, 00:11:49.

[26] Martyn Whittock, *A Brief Guide to Celtic Myths and Legends* (London: Robinson, 2013), pp. 58–62.

[27] P. Ellis Berresford, *The Mammoth Book of Celtic Myths and Legends* (London: Robinson, 2002), p. 17.

work, compiled in the twelfth-century from ninth-century material, much earlier than originally thought.[28]

The battle between the two sides is considered nowadays by contemporary healers who include it in their calendar year as symbolic of the eternal battle between darkness and light. In particular, the decisive involvement and contribution of Lugh to the outcome of the battle is thought of as an indication of the prevalence of the light even in the darkest time of the year.[29] Usually held in wintertime, from Samhain onwards to Yule, the ritual in contemporary 'Celtic' shamanistic contexts is a re-enactment of the aforementioned mythic battle, where the Fomorians are the evil forces, attempting to steal the world's prosperity and cause chaos, and who need to be repelled by the participants who have allied with the spirits of the Tuatha Dé Danann.

## Andrew Steed and the 'Wild Hunt' Ritual

Steed's 'Wild Hunt' had three main goals: (a) to sing the souls home; (b) to pick up the bones of the dead; and (c) to sweep the worlds clean in a symbolically driven communal attempt to protect humankind's prosperity and wellbeing against the evil spirits of the Fomorians. In his email sent to all participants, Steed asked us to bring along a range of supplies that included:

- Indoor and outdoor clothing
- Drum and rattle
- Eye covering for deep journey work
- Three clooties (Celtic prayer ties), cloth strips made of cotton or a flammable material measuring about eighteen inches by one inch.
- Offerings for the land
- A sturdy stick about three feet long
- A fist-sized stone to be left on the land to honour the ancestors
- Photographs of people who have passed to be honoured.

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[28] Gerald Murphy, *Saga and Myth in Ancient Ireland* (Dublin: Cultural Relations Commission of Ireland, 1954), pp. 17–24.

[29] Tom Cowan, *Fire in the Head: Shamanism and the Celtic Spirit* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), p. 53.

The 'Hunt' was divided into three parts: two outdoor opening and closing gatherings, with offerings and prayers to the spirits expressing gratitude and asking for protection, two preparation rituals accompanied by music, dance, songs, drumming, journeying, and storytelling, and the main 'Wild Hunt' ritual on the Saturday night.

Saturday morning, ceremonially, consisted of two preparations for the main event rituals. The first was a 'keening session', based on Steed's song, 'Uaithne', referring to the Dagda's harp which was stolen by the Fomorians after the Second Battle of Moytura.[30] Steed demonstrated the keening in the house and the participants were asked to replicate it afterwards outdoors in the medicine circle. The other ritual was a Saturday midday 'shamanic' journey attempting to encounter the spirits of Lugh and the Morrighan for illumination and advice. The journey was facilitated by drumming while blindfolded. At the end of the session, participants were asked to go outdoors in the woods in order to connect with nature, find peace and rejoice after their journey. As Richard Kieckhefer points out, these kinds of preparation rites offer 'a combination of mastering the body and strengthening the soul, along with intense effort' while also providing 'access to otherwise hidden energies'.[31]

The preparation for the main event was in the early afternoon, before the scheduled dinner. Participants were asked to dress a scarecrow-type of figure, which would symbolise the 'Wicker Man',[32] to be placed into the centre of the circle in order to be burnt as part of a symbolic sacrifice. We were also asked to decorate the medicine circle with

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[30] Lady Gregory, 'Part I Book III: The Great Battle of Magh Tuireadh', in *Gods and Fighting Men: The Story of the Tuatha De Danann and of the Fianna of Ireland* (Dublin: Gutenberg, 1904), http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/gafm/gafm07.htm [accessed 12 March 2016].

[31] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 53.

[32] The Wicker Man is believed to be a large human-like statue burned for sacrifice, that was used by druids of the pre-Christian 'Celtic' tribes. The evidence comes from Caesar's *The Gallic War* (Ellis Berresford, *Mammoth Book of Celtic Myths and Legends*, pp. 64, 184, 187). Contemporary academics are sceptical about its existence and question the motivation of the Romans, who possibly, and consciously, wanted to portray the local tribes as barbaric and open to human sacrifice. See Peter S. Wells, *The Barbarians Speak: How the Conquered Peoples Shaped Roman Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 59–60. Despite this controversy, the sacrifice of a Wicker Man figure is central to many contemporary pagan rituals.

items that were either built by Steed himself or gifted to him. Steed informed us that the main event would happen at night, around ten o'clock, and would last approximately two hours. We were asked to paint our faces with blue woad powder, every participant with their pattern of choice. Finally, Steed also told us that the sticks that we brought along would be used either as weapons against the Fomorians or as brooms 'sweeping the worlds clean'.

Healer Evelyn Rysdyk also works with the 'Wild Hunt'. She writes about the role of preparation in contemporary 'Wild Hunt' rituals:

> *Oftentimes, the groups that gather for this work, dress for 'battle' carrying weapons staffs and shields into their journeys while wearing fearsome masks. They are guided and protected by their helper spirits and power animals. [...] [They] resemble those sixteenth century Schiach-perchten, driving out the 'bad spirits' in alpine villages!*[33]

The 'Wild Hunt' ritual itself was held outside in the medicine circle in below freezing conditions. Three of the female participants were also placed near the 'northern gate' as the keening women, with one of them sitting on the 'storyteller's throne'. The rest gathered around the fire pit, where Steed had already set the Wicker Man on fire. Each participant was asked by Steed to address his/her ancestors individually in front of the pit, followed directly by the beginning of the ritual. All participants started engaging with three tasks, fighting the Fomorians with their sticks, sweeping the worlds clean, or picking up the bones of the dead. At the same time, the three keening women lamented. Steed, dressed in his kilt outfit, kept repeating that all participants needed to be in constant motion doing one of the three main tasks for the ritual, as the prosperity of the world was at stake. When not engaged with the tasks, all participants were thus dancing and/or singing; Steed himself was doing the same, motivating the others. The ritual lasted around an hour and forty-five minutes and ended with a short speech by Steed, thanking the spirits for protecting us against the Fomorians, and for allowing us to perform the ritual.

The weekend celebrations ended the next day, with another short ritual of 'gratitude' towards the spirits inside the circle. Steed asked the participants to help him dismantle the medicine circle and not run

[33] https://shamamabear.wordpress.com/2013/10/12/the-wild-hunt/ [accessed 13 May 2016].

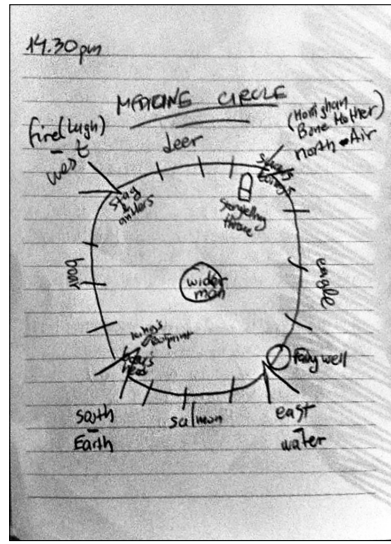


*Fig. 1. The drawing I made of the medicine circle.*
*Photo by Athanasios Barmpalexis, 21 November 2015, Corse House, Lumphanan, Aberdeenshire*

*Fig. 2. The medicine circle, the day after the 'Wild Hunt' ritual.*
*Photo by Athanasios Barmpalexis, 22 November 2105, Corse House, Lumphanan, Aberdeenshire*

away with pieces off it, as it was to be moved down to Cornwall for the next year's ritual. In our later discussion, Steed told me that he considers the medicine circle as part of his journey, and deeply connected to his spirit world; it must therefore remain intact. He also explained his decision not to allow any photographs to be taken during the two days of rituals:

> *I've thought about that because other people weaving a medicine way [...] take photographs left, right, and centre. They post them everywhere, and they get a lot of publicity. [...] I believe it is dishonouring to the spirits, I think it desecrates the medicine, it waters it down.*[34]

## Aims and Functions of the 'Wild Hunt'

Walter Burkert and Robert Segal explored the meaning and function of rituals related both to myth and hunting, pointing out that when rituals and myths are combined together with hunting traditions, they have an even deeper socialising function.[35] Burkert argued that 'hunting ritual(s) had become so important that [they] could not be given up' by communities,[36] while Segal suggests that by performing altogether, 'a society bonded itself together as a group, and also provided a way for its members to vent their anxieties over their own aggressiveness and mortality'.[37] This social-bonding is particularly prevalent in Steed's 'Wild Hunt', as a contemporary form of a mythic ritual of hunting, offering both spiritual and social bonds to its participants. Its spiritual contributions are manifested in three ways: First, there is an *inner urgency to reconnect with nature coming from the realisation that modern people have been disconnected from it*. According to Greenwood, the Hunt 'opens awareness with the cyclical process of nature through magical consciousness',[38] while Harvey argues that these events remind us that people, 'are not the sole inhabitants of the

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[34] EI2015.039, 00:39:08.

[35] Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual: Sather Classical Lectures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Robert Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[36] Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual,* p. 55.

[37] Segal, *Myth*, p. 78.

[38] Susan Greenwood, 'The Wild Hunt: A Mythological Language of Magic', in *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism,* ed. Murphy Pizza and James R. Lewis (Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 195–221 (p. 195).

planet' and that 'these encounters with the land, its seasons and its inhabitants teach the centrality of relationship and mutuality'.[39] The fact that Steed's 'Wild Hunt' must be performed outdoors, regardless of the weather conditions, confirms this idea of reconnection with nature.

Second, there is a *deeper understanding of the holistic nature of the life-death-rebirth cycle*. According to Greenwood, again, one is able 'to see in a different way, shaped by the rhythm of moving from one state to another — from light to dark and also from life to death', adding that 'to be taken by the hunt, is to face the chthonic realms of the otherworld'.[40] Deleuze and Guattari add that this view of nature is closer to that of 'non-westernised' cultures, that 'life is a matter of "coming and going"' and not of 'starting and finishing', as in 'western' civilizations.[41] The presence of the shamanic figure in these rituals — a figure synonymous with liminality — adds to the above arguments.

Isabel Addison, one of the three keening women for the 'Wild Hunt' ritual in Lumphanan, described how she experienced it:

> *I have taken part in three 'Wild Hunts' having experienced my first in November 2014. That year I wasn't entirely sure why I had been drawn to participate but now I know. [...] It is indeed deep and transforming. Only by experiencing this will you get it! [...] An important aspect of 'wild hunting' is singing home the lost souls, not just of human beings but of all beings. Seeing, feeling and sensing their transition to Spirit is an honour and I have been privileged to be one of the women keeners helping this transition.*[42]

Addison thus verifies the idea that the 'Wild Hunt' ritual offers a deeper understanding of the 'life-death-rebirth' cycle. She not only experienced the transition of 'all life to spirit', but they also realised that life and death is a matter of 'coming and going', where everything is interconnected in a constant cycle, instead of 'starting and finishing'.

Third, there is a *possibility for engagement, re-enactment and imitation of mythical events through ritual*. Mircea Eliade first introduced this notion, in relation to 'traditional' societies:

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[39] Graham Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism* (London: Hurst, 1997), p. 181.

[40] Greenwood, 'Wild Hunt', p. 210.

[41] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988), p. 25.

[42] Elphinstone Institute Archives, EI2016.030, Isabel Addison, 'Questions on Connections with Shamanic Healer and "Wild Hunt"', 4 April 2016.

> *In imitating the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythic hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man of an archaic society detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred time.*[43]

Eliade also suggested that an 'enacted myth acts as a time machine, carrying one back to the time of the myth and thereby bringing one closer to god',[44] something also achieved through storytelling — integral to Steed's 'Wild Hunt'. Whether true for the traditional societies' ritualistic motives or not, Eliade's notion about the role of imitation in ritual does seem to apply to contemporary mythologically-themed rituals. For example, during Steed's 'Wild Hunt' ritual, I became so engaged with the re-enactment of the battle against the Fomorians, that I kept not only imagining but also sensing that I was fighting against these spirits. It also detached me from reality and instead took me to a 'time beyond time' place, where 'Celtic' mythical heroes fought against each other, just as Eliade describes for rituals in traditional societies. Moreover, Steed's charismatic way of narrating these stories contributed greatly to this aspect of the experience.

As for the 'Wild Hunt's' social bonding functions, Victor Turner notes that hunting rituals are by nature activities connecting individuals, social groups (he considers spirits a social group, as well), and the natural world.[45] Steed's ritual functions in a number of ways.

First, it brings an *escape from everyday life and the problems/issues related to it*. Harvey notes that the individual, by participating in these ceremonies, is enabled to 'direct the growth of their own identity in self-chosen, self-affirming ways' and find an alternative way of expressing his/her sentiments,[46] a notion confirmed by Addison herself:

> *The work [...] has helped me clear negative and painful aspects of my life that I had buried deep within me, that I have never confronted or dealt with. [...] By working under the guidance of Andrew Steed I have been able to clear a lot of [it].*[47]

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[43] Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 23.

[44] Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, p. 7.

[45] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 281–84.

[46] Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, p. 15.

[47] EI2016.030.

Harvey adds that, 'The vital thing [...] is the attempt to discern that which affirms life and that which negates it'.[48] This escape from reality also happened to me, as I let myself enjoy the ritual, leaving my temporal issues behind. Even the harsh weather conditions seemed irrelevant. Moreover, alongside an escape from reality, the ritual also offered the opportunity to its participants to interact and bond with similarly minded people. Participant Robert Taylor:

> *The Hunt is incredible, and I really enjoy it. I meet lots of people from a variety of backgrounds. My wife supports me but wouldn't do it. I have one other friend who I know would enjoy it and hope to bring him one day. I probably stand out as unique because I do a nine-to-five job, and this is like a separate life. But it is very much the true life for me. The nine-to-five is the illusion. You could say it has all been part of my awakening to the truth of nature and spirit.*[49]

As Robert Smith explains, echoing both Addison and Taylor, these events are 'prime device[s] for promoting social cohesion, for integrating individuals into a society or a group and maintaining them as members'.[50] Steed's 'Wild Hunt' accomplishes exactly this.

Second, the practice is an *occasion for community/group work and activities*. Amy Simes calls gatherings like this 'working' or *'ritual groups'* and divides them into open or closed categories, depending on whether or not new members are allowed to take part. She notes that open working groups are, like Steed's, typically led by one or two people, encourage members to contribute during the ceremony in some way, and give part of the meeting over to personal introductions, so that new participants feel comfortable.[51] Vivianne Crowley calls this communal behaviour 'group mind', a phenomenon which produces symbols that are 'the product of the group itself which, by the work-

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[48] Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, p. 15.

[49] Elphinstone Institute Archives, EI2016.030, Robert Taylor, 'Questions on Connections with Shamanic Healer and "Wild Hunt"', 4 April 2016.

[50] Robert Smith, 'Festivals and Celebrations', in *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 157–72 (p. 167).

[51] Amy Simes, 'Mercian Movements: Group Transformation and Individual Choices amongst East Midlands Pagans', in *Pagan Pathways: A Complete Guide to the Ancient Earth Traditions*, ed. Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey (London: Thorsons, 1997), pp. 169–90 (pp. 172–74).

ings of the ritual, has become a separate entity'.[52] This opportunity for community work that the 'Wild Hunt' brings is also acknowledged by Steed himself:

> *It brings people together to explore. And they connect with it, because they're open to connect with it. I mean, that's one thing like anything... You've got to be open, if you're not — if you close the door, it ain't gonna happen, is it? They opened themselves, because they are searching. […] But yeah, it brings people together, and as you witnessed, that weekend was profound for many people.*[53]

Lastly, the ritual *(re)connects people with their ethnic roots and heritage*. In fact, Steed told me that the people working with him overseas, in the States or Canada, are in more desperate need to connect with their ancestors:

> *Well, you've only got to go to the United States or Canada... And what's interesting is, having led pilgrimages since 1999, I've had more people travelling with me from the USA or Canada than I have from these Isles. Because people from the USA or Canada yearn to touch these Isles. […] Yeah, they're looking to connect with their roots, with their heritage. […] So, going to those lands, the stories resonate. And it brings a group of 'Celts' together.*[54]

Marion Bowman explores this idea of a need for connection, suggesting that a direct spiritual and/or cultural heritage is not a necessity for people to feel in touch with ancient traditions.[55] Instead, this fascination with 'Celtic' spirituality is a combined result of romanticism, post-modernism, and globalisation. She dubs these people 'Cardiac Celts': 'They feel in their hearts that they are Celts. For [them], spiritual nationality is a matter of elective affinity'.[56] Strmiska agrees that people in America and Canada show a strong desire 'to identify with [an] ethnic group whose history or traditions they find [...] appealing;

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[52] Vivianne Crowley, *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age* (London: Aquarian Press, 1989), p. 121.

[53] EI2015.039, 01:25:41.

[54] EI2015.039, 01:24:38.

[55] Marion Bowman, 'Cardiac Celts: Images of the Celts in Paganism', in *Pagan Pathways: A Complete Guide to the Ancient Earth Traditions*, ed. Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey (London: Thorsons, 1997), pp. 242–51.

[56] Bowman, 'Cardiac Celts', p. 246.

or to reach toward a spiritual identity beyond ethnic distinctions' and he compares it to the situation in Europe:

> *For Europeans with a long line of ancestors in the same country, speaking the same language and practicing the same traditions over many generations, ethnic identity is a far more straightforward and appealing concept.*[57]

## 'Wild Hunt' Experiences and Interpretations

The most common academic interpretation of ritual experience is that you usually see what your unconscious is guiding you to see. Greenwood interprets her own experience in psychoanalytic terms, a bringing of the unconscious into the conscious with the 'magical techniques of naming and symbolising the unnameable in a manner common to shamanic rituals conducted in non-Western areas'.[58] Rachel Morgain, who also examined a 'Wild Hunt' ritual by a neo-pagan group, explains their experiences by applying Rudolf Otto's and Sigmund Freud's theory of the 'uncanny': the experience that arises when something that was hidden comes to light. Freud writes that this comes to the surface when 'infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed'.[59]

Morgain examines how storytelling and instrumentality — invoking spirits, holding the ground, or using tools — as part of the ritual have the ability to interpret symbolically psychological issues, how the woods could create an unfamiliar environment, how references on the destructive nature of modern society could invoke social anxiety and transformation — which Weber has termed as 'disenchantment of the world'[60] — or how learning to enter on a journey could take you into

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[57] Michael Strmiska (ed.), 'Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives', in *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: ABC Clio, 2005), pp. 1–55 (p. 17).

[58] Greenwood, 'Wild Hunt', p. 211.

[59] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', trans. James Strachey, *New Literary History*, 7 (1976), 619–45 (p. 639).

[60] Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, in *From Max Weber: Essays in* Sociology, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 129–56 (p. 155).

dark paths in order to dig up, recognise, and incorporate 'whatever is in the shadow […] for the rest of the weekend'.[61]

After some consideration, I feel that some of my own experiences in Steed's 'Wild Hunt' could indeed be interpreted through the theory of the uncanny, most notably during the illumination journey to Lugh and Morrighan while blindfolded. I got 'lost' in it and it was difficult for me to come back, especially because I was blinded by the light when I first attempted to take the eye covering. Considering the fact that the ceremony is called the 'Wild Hunt', was held outdoors in the wilderness, and that it was actually hunting season in North-East Scotland, with several waterfowl hunters nearby and hundreds of gunshots heard , it seems to me a natural consequence that I envisioned myself being shot in the woods by hunters during the journey. The unfamiliar environment and settings must have provoked my fear of dying.

There are two other incidents however, that I found difficult to interpret through this lens. Going into the main ritual with relatively high levels of disbelief and still finding difficulty experiencing the rituals as profoundly as other participants, I closed my eyes and appealed to 'nature' for a *physical* sign, rather than a symbolic one, that a 'connection in nature' indeed exists. I asked that the sign should be in the form of an owl and immediately heard hoots coming from the trees. Robert Taylor, who was not far from me at the time, came to me right after the ritual and asked if I had seen the owls flying over us. His question startled me, as I thought that hearing them was simply a moment of imaginative autosuggestion. Something similar also took place at the end of the ritual, when Steed was thanking the spirits for their presence and assistance. A cow bellowed from the river side of the circle, just as he ceased speaking. Steed laughed, but at the same time seemed in awe, and during our recorded interview in December, he told me something of which I was entirely unaware. Cattle were considered sacred in 'Celtic' mythology symbolising wealth, abundance and prosperity, and also, as this was a ritual based on 'Celtic' traditions, the cow was 'the confirmation [that] everything that we've just weaved is being heard in all of the spaces in the world'. Steed concluded:[62]

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[61] Rachel Morgain, 'On the Use of the Uncanny in Ritual', *Religion*, 42 (2012), 521–48 (pp. 528, 533–4).

[62] EI2015.039, 00:07:21.

> *It's what Táin*[63] *was all about. Who's got the bigger herd, it was a symbol of wealth. [...] So, if you think about that, right at the very end of the 'Wild Hunt' — and Boann sits in the East Gate, that gate of birthing — and we've just been going through the North Gate of death for rebirth, sweeping away all that looks to rob prosperity from the world, so abundance can flow... and right at the very last bit, we had the cow! THAT IS MAGIC!*[64]

My explanation and interpretation of those two experiences follows David Hufford's 'Experience Source Hypothesis' in which he asserts that phenomena that are seemingly difficult, or impossible, to interpret scientifically can actually be empirically interpreted through a systematic analysis of persisting motifs and patterns found in narrative retellings of the experiences. Hufford named these experiences, 'Core Spiritual'. He argued that these experiences happen under normal circumstances, occur independently of one's prior beliefs and assumptions, form stable perceptual and narrative patterns, and refer to spirits without any retrospective interpretation.[65]

I consider my experiences to be 'Core Spiritual' ones. They happened under normal circumstances and were not products of a psychopathological illness, I approached the ritual with an open heart and an open mind, and my experiences were identical to those of other participants — Taylor for the owl incident, and Steed and the others for the cow. Moreover, I consider them to be magical moments.

When it comes to magic and its meaning for me, I follow Kathleen Malone O'Connor's definition that magic is,

> *the belief in a universal 'sympathy' between all existent things, natural and supernatural, creating a web of meaningful association linking magical knowledge with magical acts.*[66]

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[63] Referring to The Táin Bó Cúailgne, an epic Irish story from the Ulster Cycle, around mythical hero Cú Chulainn's attempt to oppose the Connacht queen Medb and her husband Ailill's intention to steal the sacred bull, Donn Cuailnge.

[64] EI2015.039, 00:06:51.

[65] David Hufford, *The Terror that Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); John Morehead, 'From Sleep Paralysis to Spiritual Experience: An Interview with David Hufford', *Paranthropology*, 4.3 (2013), 21–28.

[66] Kathleen Malone O'Connor, 'Magic', in *Folklore: An Encyclopaedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music and Art*, ed. Thomas Green (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: ABC-Clio, 1997), pp. 519–28 (p. 519).

She also adds that this belief is 'diversely represented' in each culture.[67] Thus, I do not see my experiences as mere coincidences, but rather indications that all in nature — the natural and the supernatural — is interconnected.

Steed told me emphatically during our discussion that such moments were the reason he was so adamant that I should experience his work before having any discussion with him:

> *[...] That's why I said to you: 'Come to the 'Wild Hunt'!' Because there's no point in me sitting here talking to you about something without you having an idea what it is we're actually talking about. And even now, you've had a glimpse. Next year, if you come, you'd have a bigger glimpse. And then, the year after... And then, after five six years, you might go: 'Wow! Hey, you know?' And then you think, you've understood something, and then ten years down the line, you realise it's something else.*[68]

As for Steed's plans, his dream is to lead the 'Wild Hunt' on the battlefield of Culloden:

> *You know, the thing is, whilst it remains a battlefield, there's something there. You know, we have these ways of glorifying. I mean there's a slavery museum in Jamaica. Somebody said, you know: 'Are you going to go there?' The only reason to go there would be to sing it clean and then dismantle it! [...] If they've been used for dark magic, if they've been used for death and destruction... there's energy that's to them! I'm for cleansing it and then releasing it.*[69]

## Conclusion

The 'Wild Hunt's' has persisted through time in European folklore. Whether an ancient tradition or a modern construct, it has also become a central ceremony for contemporary spiritual practitioners, such as Steed, and their communities. As Steed points out and I agree with him:

> *Do we work it like they did then? I DON'T KNOW! I can't say we do; I can't say we don't. All I know is we replicate the Second Battle of Moytura. And it doesn't matter. What matters to me is the integrity of the Medicine. I think it's important that that we honour our heritage,*

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[67] O'Connor, 'Magic', p. 519.

[68] EI2015.039, 01:37:38.

[69] EI2015.039, 01:29:00.

*that we make offerings that the land recognizes and that we get to know more of our own stories...*[70]

As folklore has shifted away from using mainly textual sources to interpret older traditions towards a focus on dynamic processes which are 'both conservative and changing',[71] the significance of what these events bring to people's lives is foregrounded. The 'Wild Hunt' gives participants a sense of belonging, (re)connection with the land, their spirituality and their roots, and an opportunity for social interaction and life-changing experiences. As for the group leader's role, Mara Freeman writes:

*Few of us dare to open what W. B. Yeats called the 'flaming door' and explore the power that crackles on the thresholds of our reality structures. [...] Those skilled in walking between the worlds knew how to harness the power of the threshold where the normal rules of time and space hang suspended.*[72]

Among those who 'walk between the worlds' is Andrew Steed:

*My belief is that one of the reasons I was born unto the planet, was to carry this Medicine and to weave this Medicine. It's a path of my soul. And it's so vibrant and alive. And when people truly get it, 'wow'! We do some amazing work, or the spirit does some amazing work through us. Yeah, it's so real! And I'm grateful that I know these ways.*[73]

And, it is the duty of contemporary healers like Steed, to hold the circle with integrity, make sure participants are safe, and 'dance' with the spirits, as part of their work with the 'Hunt'.

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70 EI2015.039, 00:08:01.

71 Barre Toelken, *The Dynamics of Folklore* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

72 Mara Freeman, 'The Flaming Door', *Parabola*, 25.1 (February 2000), 45–51 (p. 47).

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# From the 'Mad Dash' to 'Shopping Alone': Thanksgiving Rituals of Consumption on Black Friday and Cyber Monday

**Abstract.** There are many longstanding customs associated with the Thanksgiving holiday in the United States — established by an Act of Congress in 1941 as the fourth Thursday in November — such as family feasts, spectatorship of Thanksgiving parades and/or football games, and travel home. Traditions associated with the day following Thanksgiving — known as Black Friday — are typically rituals of consumption that mark the unofficial start of the Christmas holiday (and shopping) season: extended hours at shopping malls, special promotions announced in stores or advertised in advance, and mad dashes (sometimes known as 'great races') when the stores first open. This article uses two folkloristic frameworks to analyse the customary behavior of Black Friday participants, as revealed through interviews conducted with shoppers. One framework identifies these shopping customs as ritualistic; the other employs Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory to describe the shoppers' participation as an adventure. Posing one threat to Black Friday's future are attempts to regulate the mad dash, particularly after a Wal-Mart employee was crushed to death by crowds in 2008. Even more existentially threatening is Cyber Monday, when people are shopping for bargains online while ostensibly back at work. Cyber Monday's increasing popularity suggests that consumers may prefer shopping alone with mobile technology instead of the more social experience of shopping together in a superstore on Black Friday.

**Keywords:** consumer spending, monomyth theory, rituals, shopping, social networking, Thanksgiving Day

There are many longstanding customs associated with Thanksgiving Day in the United States, including rituals of feasting that traditionally feature stuffed turkey, cranberries, and pumpkin pie (as illustrated in Norman Rockwell's famous *Saturday Evening Post* cover,

for example);[1] spectatorship of Thanksgiving parades and/or football games (both collegiate and professional); and journeys (Thanksgiving is the nation's busiest weekend for travel, according to the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics).[2] There are also customs of more recent origin associated with the day following Thanksgiving, known as Black Friday, which now marks the unofficial start of the Christmas shopping season. Black Friday customs include extended hours at shopping malls, special promotions announced in stores or advertised in advance, and mad dashes (sometimes known as 'great races') when the stores first open their doors to the public. To enhance the competitiveness of Black Friday shopping, some of those special sales are starting earlier and earlier, or are creating ever more frenzied shoppers, which in turn has sparked both criticism and regulatory controls. However, what may be even more threatening to Black Friday customs is the rise of Cyber Monday, when people are shopping online for bargains after the Thanksgiving weekend. This article will explore some rituals of consumption associated with the extended Thanksgiving holiday, some attempts to regulate those customs, and some implications for the future.

Until 26 December 1941, when the U.S. Congress formally established the fourth Thursday in November as the holiday, Thanksgiving was a moveable feast.[3] What we now think of as the first Thanksgiving probably took place in September or October 1621 to coincide with the first harvest of the Pilgrims in Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts.[4] In October 1863, during the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln declared the holiday as the final Thursday of November. It remained so until November 1939 (which contained five Thursdays). Still fighting the 1930s Depression, anxious retailers and business leaders asked

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1 Patrick Perry, 'Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms', *Saturday Evening Post*, 1 January 2009, https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2009/01/rockwells-four-freedoms [accessed 17 May 2020]. The Rockwell painting, titled 'Freedom from Want', appeared on the magazine cover dated 1 March 1943.

2 US Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 'U.S. Holiday Travel', 20 May 2017, https://www.bts.gov/archive/publications/america_on_the_go/us_holiday_travel/entire [accessed 17 May 2020].

3 Tanya Ballard Brown, 'How Did Thanksgiving End Up on the Fourth Thursday?', *National Public Radio,* http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2012/11/21/165655925/how-did-thanksgiving-end-up-on-Thursday [accessed 17 May 2020].

4 Hennig Cohen and Tristram Potter Coffin (eds.), *The Folklore of American Holidays* (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1987), p. 331.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt to move the Thanksgiving holiday one week earlier — to the fourth, rather than the fifth Thursday — in order 'to give people more time to shop for Christmas'.[5]

Exactly when Christmas shopping became linked to the day immediately following Thanksgiving cannot be determined. However, a dry goods store in Lima, Ohio, was offering 'unusual selling values' for various items on 'Friday, the day after Thanksgiving', according to a newspaper advertisement from 1894.[6] Similarly, a department store in New Castle, Pennsylvania (roughly 370 km east of Lima) was selling 'coats and dresses at radical reductions' as part of its 'annual After Thanksgiving Sale' on Friday.[7] Also still to be determined is how the day for post-Thanksgiving sales became known as Black Friday — a term that earlier had been used to describe dark days of financial panics in both 1867 and 1869.[8] The Wall Street crash that triggered the economic depression of the 1930s brought similar usages — albeit for Black Thursday (24 October 1929) and Black Tuesday (29 October 1929).

The city of Philadelphia — or at least some of its police officers, bus operators, and taxi drivers — first used the term Black Friday in the mid-1960s to describe the terrible congestion occurring on the day after Thanksgiving, according to a stamp-shop proprietor in Center City, Philadelphia.[9] The traffic was particularly bad on this day, due not only to so many people travelling for Thanksgiving, but also the playing of the annual Army-Navy football game on the Saturday.[10] Coverage of the game in the *New York Times* in 1975 gave the Black Friday term nation-

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5 Brown, 'Fourth Thursday'.

6 Reprinted in Sapna Maheshwari, 'How Black Friday Became a Thing: A Tale 140 Years in the Making', *BuzzFeed News*, 26 November 2015, https://www.buzzfeed.com/sapna/how-black-friday-became-a-thing? [accessed 17 May 2020].

7 Reprinted in Maheshwari, 'Black Friday'.

8 See, for example, 'The Skeleton in the Closet', *Flag of our Union*, 22 (27 April 1867), 268; and 'Financial, Commercial, and Statistical', *The Albion: A Journal of News, Politics, and Literature*, 47 (25 December 1869), p. 785.

9 Martin Apfelbaum, 'Philadelphia's "Black Friday"', *American Philatelist*, 79 (January 1966), 239.

10 Philadelphia hosted the Army-Navy football game from 1936 to 1979 because it was a neutral halfway point between West Point, New York, and Annapolis, Maryland, with a stadium sufficiently large to accommodate the crowds. In 2009, the date of the game shifted from the Thanksgiving weekend to the second Saturday in December. The venue now changes periodically, but Philadelphia hosted the game in 2014, and 2016–2019.

al exposure,[11] though it has now acquired meanings ironically different from those of its origins in traffic congestion and, earlier, in financial disaster. According to a retail analyst at Bear Stearns investment firm (as reported, once again, in the *New York Times*), Black Friday is so named because, 'It is the day when most retailers go from being in the red to being in the black'.[12]

Regardless of the term's origin, Black Friday quickly became one of the busiest shopping days of the year, and a day that is used by retailers 'to lure shoppers to their stores, with extended shopping hours, hourly deals, and in-store promotions'.[13] Statistics vary from year to year, depending in part on the weather and the offerings. In 2018, the International Council of Shopping Centers, which describes itself as 'the premier global trade association of the shopping center industry', saw Black Friday as 'the busiest shopping day of the year'.[14] By 2019, however, Black Friday had dropped to number two; its sales of $31.2 billion were ten percent behind record-setting sales of $34.4 billion on Super Saturday, the last Saturday before Christmas.[15]

To increase both sales and excitement during the 2000s, stores began opening earlier and earlier on Black Friday, promising extraordinary savings to those who were first in line and thus first to grab for themselves the limited supply of deeply discounted merchandise in a mad dash to signal the start of the holiday shopping season. The result, according to professor of media studies Kenneth Rogers, was,

> *a sensational media event. Obligatory human interest stories feature images of impetuous shoppers dashing frantically into aisles*

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11 Gordon S. White, 'Army vs. Navy: A Dimming of Splendor', *New York Times*, 29 November 1975, p. 21.

12 Kenneth N. Gilpin, 'Retailers Ready to Gallop into the Black', *New York Times*, 23 November 2003, Business section, p. 6.

13 Esther Swilley and Ronald E. Goldsmith, 'Black Friday and Cyber Monday: Understanding Consumer Intentions on Two Major Shopping Days', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 20 (2013), 43–50 (p. 44).

14 International Council of Shopping Centers, 'Black Friday Still Busiest Shopping Day, Study Says,' 20 September 2018, https://www.icsc.com/news-and-views/icsc-exchange/black-friday-still-busiest-shopping-day-study-says [accessed 17 May 2020].

15 Lisa Wolfson, 'Saturday Shopping Sets U.S. One-Day Sales Record, Analyst Says', *Bloomberg News*, 23 December 2019, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-12-23/super-saturday-shopping-sets-one-day-sales-record-analyst-says [accessed 17 May 2020].

> *stacked impossibly high with discounted retail goods and feverishly foraging through stuffed racks and bargain bins, while the more staid coverage by the financial press tracks sales numbers minute by minute as a weathervane of consumer confidence.*[16]

John Seabrook, in the *New Yorker*, likened the mad dash to 'a sort of American Pamplona', which has 'become as much a part of the day after Thanksgiving as leftovers. Shoppers get discounts, programmers get some lively content for a slow news day, and retailers get free publicity: a good deal for everyone, except for the clerks who have to work that day, breaking up fights among shoppers and cleaning up the mess left behind'.[17]


*Fig. 1. Crowds gather outside the Apple Store on Fifth Avenue in New York City for Black Friday sales on Thanksgiving Day, 24 November 2011. Photo by JoeInQueens, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*[18]

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16 Kenneth Rogers, 'Black Friday: Crowdsourcing Communities at Risk', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 40 (2012), 171–86 (pp. 171–72).

17 John Seabrook, 'Annals of Disaster: Crush Point', *New Yorker*, 86 (7 February 2011), 32–38 (p. 34).

18 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Black_Friday_at_the_Apple_Store_on_Fifth_Avenue,_New_York_City,_2011.jpg [accessed 2 November 2020].

What seems to be overlooked in the media sensationalism surrounding these mad dashes is a folkloristic framework that identifies the customary behavior of Black Friday participants as ritualistic. According to marketing professor Dennis Rook,

> *the term ritual refers to a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behavior is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness, and inner intensity.*[19]

Although outside observers of the mad dash may see it as unplanned chaos — much like the running of the bulls in Pamplona — the perspectives of actual participants, discussed below, suggest otherwise.


*Fig. 2. Black Friday sales in Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 2017, demonstrate the worldwide spread of the phenomenon. Photo by James I. Deutsch*

[19] Dennis W. Rook, 'The Ritual Dimension of Consumer Behavior', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12 (1985), 251–64 (p. 252).

Another folkloristic framework for analyzing the customary behavior of Black Friday participants is Joseph Campbell's notion of the hero's journey or what Campbell termed the *monomyth* (borrowing the word from James Joyce's 1939 experimental novel *Finnegans Wake*).[20] As explained by Campbell,

> *The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage [...] a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return, [...] which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.*[21]

These two frameworks may be applied to Black Friday thanks to a fascinating series of interviews with thirty-eight women who were at least eighteen years old, and who 'had to have shopped on Black Friday more than one year in a row', conducted over a two-year period by two business professors, Jane Boyd Thomas and Cara Peters.[22] The interviews reveal a series of actions and insider rules that are not only formal, serious, and intense, but that also follow a script analogous to the monomyth described by Campbell. *Separation* takes the form of team planning and strategising; *initiation* is achieved through the mad dash for the best bargains; and *return* occurs after the mission has been accomplished, often with the sharing of war stories and passing on the traditions.

Admittedly, most Black Friday participants may not regard themselves as folkloric heroes who venture forth from a commonplace world into a realm of supernatural wonder. But, there is certainly a sense of

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[20] The word *monomyth* appears once in *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking Press, 1939), 'And didn't they abhor him? the unregendered thunderslog, the male man all unbracing to omniwoman? when they were looking on: the Four and their Ass; the three; the Two. And his Monomyth, ah ho! — Say no more about it. I'm sorry. I saw. I'm sorry to say I saw' (p. 581).

[21] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2nd edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 30, 35 (italics original).

[22] Jane Boyd Thomas and Cara Peters, 'An Exploratory Investigation of Black Friday Consumption Rituals', *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 39 (2011), 522–37 (p. 525).

adventure, particularly as described by Darla (age 56): 'It's a fabulous adventure and I've gotten to the point where I have gotten my whole family involved in it. [...] It's been a family adventure for the past four years'.[23] Similarly, Sarah (age 60) enthuses, 'It's adventurous finding the bargains they advertise. [...] A lot of them are not readily in sight. You have to go past lots of merchandise before you find that super sale item'.[24]

One of the first steps in the quest for Black Friday bargains is the planning and strategising before shoppers even enter the superstore. Laura (age 30) explains her technique: 'I look through *all* the sales ads to see what every store has on sale. I do this even if I know that I am shopping for only one item that year. I want to know everything possible about what is on sale and where'.[25] Jenna (age 21) employs a similar planning strategy with her mother: 'We look through newspapers and read through all the ads. [...] We decide on which stores we think are gonna have the best and rarest deals. Then we plan to visit those stores first".[26]

What particularly pleases the Black Friday participants is their initiation into the world of wonder, where they achieve a decisive victory against external forces. Tanya (age 28) enjoys the competition with other shoppers:

> *It's fun to try to get as many bargains as I possibly can in a limited amount of time. It's like a game show. It's competitive in the sense that everybody is trying to be near the head of the line and get the sale item before everyone else. Walmart, for example, has specific lines to buy certain products so it's a competition to be at the head of the line so you get the product before it runs out. It's competitive when they actually announce the time you can actually take the item and put it in your cart and that is one less for someone else.*[27]

Sarah knows how winning is defined:

> *That I get several items that are good bargains — you know, items at good prices. When I compare what the original price was, and what*

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[23] Thomas and Peters, 'Black Friday Consumption Rituals', p. 529.

[24] Thomas and Peters, 'Black Friday Consumption Rituals', p. 532.

[25] Thomas and Peters, 'Black Friday Consumption Rituals', p. 530 (emphasis original).

[26] Thomas and Peters, 'Black Friday Consumption Rituals', p. 530.

[27] Thomas and Peters, 'Black Friday Consumption Rituals', p. 531.

*I got it for and I feel like I was able to save some money, that's success. Let's see, last November, for example, I got men's slacks for $15 and I got a blouse for myself that was $5. The blouse was originally $40. Now that's a good bargain!*[28]

When a decisive victory has been won, the Black Friday participants return to their everyday lives, but with a sense of renewed power, which is shared with their friends and cohorts. Tanya and her family members,

*trade stories about our interactions in different parts of the stores because we're not necessarily all together, at the same time, in the same moment, you know. My Mom may be in electronics; I may be in clothing; and my sister may be in CD's. And it's fun when we all get out of the mad dash and have purchased our items. We then get back in the car and swap war stories.*[29]

The shopping adventure is often serious, intense, and tough; but it is ultimately about togetherness, bonding, and human connections. Traci (age 40) concludes, 'It's about being together. We all survive and make it through the day together'.[30] Similarly, Kenzie (age 47) explains that Black Friday used to be,

*a tradition with my Mom and me. But, as the stores have started opening earlier, it is hard for my Mom to do such a long day. So, it is switching over to a tradition between my daughter and me. I like the idea of being able to teach my daughter how to find bargains and great deals.*[31]

Whether the stories told and traditions shared by the women interviewed by Thomas and Peters are wholly representative of all Black Friday shoppers cannot be confirmed due to the lack of reliable demographic data. What is more certain, however, is the decline in recent years of the mad-dash adventure, due to several external factors. One is the increased regulation of Black Friday customs following the tragic death of Jdimytai Damour, a thirty-four-year-old Wal-Mart[32] employee

[28] Thomas and Peters, 'Black Friday Consumption Rituals', p. 532.

[29] Thomas and Peters, 'Black Friday Consumption Rituals', p. 531.

[30] Thomas and Peters, 'Black Friday Consumption Rituals', p. 528.

[31] Thomas and Peters, 'Black Friday Consumption Rituals', p. 529.

[32] At the time of this incident in 2008, Wal-Mart would have been correct; the company dropped the hyphen in 2017 (see Lauren Hirsch, 'Wal-Mart Stores to Change

in Valley Stream, New York, on Black Friday 2008, 'just minutes before [the store] was scheduled to open at 5:00 a.m.'[33] Damour was trampled by 'an "out-of-control" mob of frenzied shoppers [who] smashed through the Long Island store's front doors' in search of deeply discounted products.[34] This tragedy — said to be 'a Black Friday first, according to the National Retail Federation' — led to a lawsuit filed in the New York State Supreme Court against Wal-Mart, alleging that the company 'engaged in specific marketing and advertising techniques to specifically attract a large crowd and create an environment of frenzy and mayhem'.[35] In response, Wal-Mart 'reached a settlement with the Nassau County, N.Y., district attorney that called for the company to adopt new crowd management techniques in all 92 of its stores in New York State'.[36] Wal-Mart also 'dropped the term Blitz Day', which had been used in 2007 and 2008, and 'rebranded its post-Thanksgiving Day sales The Event'.[37] Damour's death at the beginning of a traditional mad dash, which had become ritualised and customary, would undoubtedly deflate any enjoyment felt by other Black Friday shoppers, such as Darla, Jenna, Kenzie, Laura, Sarah, Tanya, and Traci.

Posing an even greater existential threat to Black Friday rituals is the more recent custom of Cyber Monday, which acquired its name in 2005 to identify the phenomenon of consumers shopping for bargains online, even while ostensibly back at work on the Monday after Thanksgiving. Reports as early as 2015 suggested that 'Shoppers opted to buy online rather than fight the crowds in brick-and-mortar stores'.[38] In that same year, the *Wall Street Journal* estimated that 59

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Name to Walmart, as it Shifts its Focus to E-commerce, 6 December 2017, https://www.cnbc.com/2017/12/06/wal-mart-stores-to-be-to-walmart-as-it-shifts-its-focus-to-e-commerce.html [accessed 22 June 2020].

33 Rogers, 'Black Friday', p. 171.

34 Joe Gould, Clare Trapasso, and Rich Shapiro, 'Worker Dies at Long Island Wal-Mart after Being Trampled in Black Friday Stampede', *New York Daily News*, 28 November 2008, http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/worker-dies-li-wal-mart-stampede-article-1.334059 [accessed 17 May 2020].

35 Jack Neff, 'Marketing Blamed in Walmart Death', *Advertising Age*, 79 (8 December 2008), 23.

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37 Seabrook, 'Annals of Disaster', p. 38.

38 Marcia Kaplan, 'Sales Report: 2015 Thanksgiving Day, Black Friday, Cyber Monday', *PracticalEcommerce*, 2 December 2015, http://www.practicalecommerce.com/


*Fig. 3. Eager shoppers rush inside a shopping mall in Laramie, Wyoming, when Black Friday sales begin.*
*Photo by Powhusku, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*[39]

percent of Thanksgiving shopping money is currently spent online, 36 percent is spent in stores, and 5 percent is done via catalogs: 'What for decades had been a purely in-store shopping frenzy has ceded much ground to the Internet'.[40] By Thanksgiving 2019, the pattern was clear: 'a record $9.4 billion was spent online by the end of Cyber Monday, an increase of 19.7 percent from 2018. It was the largest online shopping day of all time in the U.S., easily surpassing last year's $7.9 billion'.[41]

articles/94777-Sales-Report-2015-Thanksgiving-Day-Black-Friday-Cyber-Monday [accessed 17 May 2020].

39 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Black_Friday_by_Powhusku.jpg [accessed 2 November 2020].

40 Paul Ziobro, 'Target Escalates Battle for Holiday Web Sales', *Wall Street Journal*, 27 November 2015, p. B1.

41 Marcia Kaplan, 'Sales Report: 2019 Thanksgiving Day, Black Friday, Cyber Monday, *PracticalEcommerce*, 4 December 2019, https://www.practicalecommerce.com/sales-report-2019-thanksgiving-day-black-friday-cyber-monday [accessed 17 May 2020].

By comparison, Black Friday's online sales in 2019 were $7.4 billion, but its in-store sales are no longer carefully documented. One analyst claims that brick-and-mortar sales on 2019's Black Friday increased 4.2 percent from 2018; another asserts that those sales declined 6.2 percent from the previous year.[42] Complicating the analysis is that the total number of Black Friday shoppers, for both in-store and online activity, far exceeds any other day's totals: 84.2 million in-store and 93.2 million online — with many individuals shopping in both ways.[43]

The increased use of mobile devices, largely smartphones, is fueling the rise in online shopping. In 2015, according to *USA Today*, Mobile traffic accounted for nearly half of all online traffic and 27.6 percent of all online sales [on Cyber] Monday, which is up more than 25 percent from the year before.[44] By 2019, those numbers had increased significantly; according to one estimate, '76 percent of all digital traffic during Cyber Weekend came from a mobile device'.[45]

One of the contributing factors for increased online sales — whether mobile or not — was that some physical stores, such as GameStop, Nordstrom, Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI), and Staples, decided to close on Thanksgiving Day in 2015. All of those stores 'saw a substantial increase in online traffic and sales' during the weekend.[46] And in a move that was perhaps unprecedented for a major retailer in 2015, REI closed its 143 physical stores nationwide on Black Friday, encouraging its potential shoppers to spend the day outdoors instead — a decision that REI has continued to make every year since then.[47] The company's CEO, Jerry Stritzke, told reporters that 'Black Friday is the

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[42] Kaplan, 'Sales Report: 2019'.

[43] 'Thanksgiving Weekend Draws Nearly 190 Million Shoppers, Spending Up 16 Percent', *National Retail Federation*, 3 December 2019, https://nrf.com/media-center/press-releases/thanksgiving-draws-nearly-190-million-shoppers [accessed 17 May 2020].

[44] Hadley Malcolm, 'Cyber Monday Clocks Record Sales Led by Surge in Mobile', *USA Today*, 2 December 2015, p. 4B.

[45] Adriana Lee, 'Cyber Monday's $9.4 Billion Sales Blitz', *Women's Wear Daily*, 3 December 2019, p. 9.

[46] Kaplan, 'Sales Report: 2015'.

[47] Kelly Tyko, 'Shop on Black Friday? REI Encourages Shoppers to #OptOutside Instead', *USA Today*, 23 October 2019, https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/10/22/black-friday-store-closings-2019-rei-optoutside-initiative/4063598002 [accessed 17 May 2020].

perfect time to remind ourselves of the essential truth that life is richer, more connected and complete when you choose to spend it outside'.[48]

How many consumers actually took Stritzke's advice cannot be determined. But it seems safe to say that the team efforts of yesteryear's Black Fridays — with the type of camaraderie described by the adventurous social shoppers interviewed by Thomas and Peters — are being replaced by online shopping that is conducted more individually and in isolation, largely on mobile devices that only one person can use at a time. Even if online shoppers may share their screens with their friends to show what they are purchasing, the act of touching the screen or clicking the mouse must be the work of one person alone, whose eyes are typically fixated on the screen rather than in contact with their companions. Shopping alone may be more convenient than a mad dash through a superstore, but folklorists and sociologists may also wonder what we as human beings may be giving up as a result. In spite of the 'social networks' to which we may belong, our participation in social life appears to be declining.[49]

In the late twentieth century, sociologist Robert Putnam observed a trend away from social experiences and towards greater privacy and individuality:

> *Many Americans continue to claim that we are 'members' of various organizations, but most Americans no longer spend much time in community organizations — we've stopped doing committee work, stopped serving as officers, and stopped going to meetings. And all this despite rapid increases in education that have given more of us than ever before the skills, the resources, and the interests that once fostered civic engagement. In short, Americans have been dropping out in droves, not merely from political life, but from organized community life more generally.*[50]

As we move further into the twenty-first century, we find that our relationship to technology is changing, a point that was cogently made

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48 Sarah Halzack, 'REI to Close Stores on Black Friday', *Washington Post*, 27 October 2015, p. A14.

49 Joe Robinson, 'Is Social Networking Destroying our Social Lives?' Huffington Post, 1 February 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joe-robinson/social-network_b_816108.html [accessed 17 May 2020].

50 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 63–64.

in the film *Her* (2013), directed by Spike Jonze and starring Joaquin Phoenix, about a man falling in love with his telephone's operating system, voiced by Scarlett Johansson. 'Technology is no longer some huge extrinsic force that only reaches us in times of war, industrial upheaval, or nuclear paranoia', wrote one reviewer of the film. 'Today's technology is personal. We live, for lack of a better phrase, in the Age of Apple — the indispensable PC, the omnipresent iPhone, the custom iTunes playlist'.[51]

One consequence of technology's personalization and ubiquity is the loss of human interaction. 'People in technologically advanced societies in particular live and talk with each other more and more through avatars and interfaces', rather than through face-to-face communications.[52] It seems unlikely that our Thanksgiving dinners will ever be consumed alone in isolation, but the social shopping that once followed the turkey seems to be heading the way of the dodo, great auk, and passenger pigeon.

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'Crowds gather outside the Apple Store on Fifth Avenue in New York City for Black Friday sales on Thanksgiving Day, 24 November 2011' (photo by JoeInQueens, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Black_Friday_at_the_Apple_Store_on_Fifth_Avenue,_New_York_City,_2011.jpg [accessed 2 November 2020].

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[51] Andrew Romano, 'How "Her" Gets the Future Right', *Daily Beast*, 21 December 2013; updated 11 July 2017, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/12/21/how-her-gets-the-future-right.html [accessed 17 May 2020].

[52] Aaron Cutler, 'Her', *Cineaste*, 39 (Summer 2014), 54–55 (p. 54).

'Eager shoppers rush inside a shopping mall in Laramie, Wyoming, when Black Friday sales begin' (photo by Powhusku, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Black_Friday_by_Powhusku.jpg [accessed 2 November 2020].

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# The Role of Calendar Rituals as Regulators

**Abstract.** Every community has ideas of what is important and meaningful for its members. In a 'traditional' culture, one sees purpose and meaning in rituals, and everyday existence is interspersed with them. In particular, calendar rituals regulate the annual cycle and family customs relate to the cycle of life. This paper examines Udmurt calendar rituals regulated by various means and rules, attempting to explain which of the regulators played a significant role and which favoured the preservation and development of traditional customs. These regulators include the lunar and solar calendars, environmental conditions, society itself and its expectations, and religious life.

**Keywords:** calendar rituals, regulators, Udmurts, taboos and prohibitions, temporal and spatial limits

## Introduction

Traditional customs play a special role in the culture of any community, acting as a mechanism for the preservation and transmission of cultural values, meanings, symbolism, and the very identity of a given society. Such traditions are inherent in most social and cultural systems, where they accumulate, transmit, and transform accumulated social experience. It is also well known that,

> *folklore tradition is the transmission through oral communication of the culturally and socially significant messages and the only way to preserve, transmit, and reproduce information is through its periodic reproduction.*[1]

[1] S. Yu. Neklyudov, 'Kulturnaya pamyat' v ustnoy tradicii: istoricheskaya glubina i tehnologiya peredachi' ['Cultural Memory: Historical Depth and the Mechanics of Transmission in the Oral Tradition'], *Navstrechu Tret'emu Vserossiyskomu kongressu folkloristov. Sbornik nauchnyh statey* (Moskva: Gosudarstvenny respublikanskiy centr russkogo folklora, 2013), pp. 9–15 (p. 9), https://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/neckludov78.htm.

Naturally, every group has ideas about which of these messages must be reproduced, which ones are most important and meaningful for its members and which can be disregarded or hidden. In traditional cultures, these choices, closely related to the purpose and meaning of life itself, are intermingled with, punctuated, and shaped by ritual. In some ways, daily life can be seen simply as a preparatory period for the next rite, the practice itself being the key point of reference for the cycle, a time to prepare for the next phase of everyday life and to shape a desired future. Ritualisation thus seems to be inherent in humans:

> *Our lives are a collection of rituals. The way we wake up, the way we leave or enter our home, the way we prepare our suitcase before going on a trip are simple examples of the many rituals each of us have constructed and they structure our everyday lives.*[2]

Calendar rituals regulate the annual cycle and family customs control everyday social life. But why not the other way around? How and in what way is a ritual itself regulated? In this essay, based on forty years of fieldwork with the Udmurt community,[3] I consider their calendar rites and look at how these rituals have been regulated historically and are today.[4] I will explore which of the regulators played a significant role and favoured the preservation and development of traditional customs.

Modern Udmurt society is no longer traditional, but here I will focus on those who try to keep, preserve, and develop their pagan beliefs while living in a rapidly changing world. These circumstances make

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[2] Pierre Lévy, 'Exploring the challenge of designing rituals', IASDR Interplay 2015 Congress, 2–5 November 2015, p. 1, https://www.academia.edu/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=exploring+the+challenge+of+designing+rituals [accessed 13 May 2020].

[3] I have been working in the Udmurt community since the 1980s, visiting many times, both on my own and with Russian colleagues. I have spoken with people of every age, though the active pagan priests and the elderly from rural areas had particularly extensive stories and narratives. In the last decade, I have also been collecting material from the internet and from contributors who have moved to urban centres from the villages.

[4] Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, *Kalendarnye obryady zakamskih udmurtov* [*Calendar Rites of the Trans-Kama Udmurts*] (Izhevsk: UdIIYaL UrO RAN, 2000); Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, *Tradicionnye obryady zakamskih udmurtov: Struktura. Semantika. Folklor* [*Traditional Rituals of Trans-Kama Udmurts: Structure, Semantics, Folklore*] (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 2003); T. G. Vladykina and G. A. Glukhova, *Argod-bergan: obryady i prazdniki udmurtskogo kalendarya* [*The Turning of the Year: Rituals and Feasts of the Udmurt Calendar*] (Izhevsk: Udmurtskiy universitet, 2011).

it necessary to find new ways and means, a phenomenon that can be seen in changes in ritual culture and practice. But there is something in us that wants to hold on ritual, to hold and protect it and let its function, meaning, and development continue into the present.

'Ritual not only takes place within a social process but is itself processual.'[5] According to Turner, this extends to society itself: 'Society (societas) seems to be a process rather than a thing — a dialectical process with successive phases of structure and communitas.'[6] Nevertheless, some features are preserved and constant, even if, outwardly, they may seem to radically transform through these processes. Among these are concepts of space and time, always there at an unconscious level, and nothing happens without them.[7] Taking this as a given, let us look for other key phenomena necessary for the functioning of any ritual.

## Taboos and Prohibitions

People are more focused on taboos than on what is allowed. We generally pay more attention to prohibitions, what not to do, than adhere to positive rules aimed at guiding our behaviour. 'Prohibitions are thus a particular type of regulator, ones which are essential, above the rules, and play an important role in maintaining the cohesion and identity of the confessional group.'[8]

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[5] Matheu Deflem, 'Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30.1 (1991), 1–25 (p. 22).

[6] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 203.

[7] Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, 'Ciklichnost vremeni i prostranstva v tradicionnyh predstavleniyah zakamskih udmurtov' ['Cyclicality of Time and Space in the Traditional Worldview of Trans-Kama Udmurts'], *Vzaimodeystvie kultur narodov Urala* (Ufa: Gilem 1999), pp. 101–08; Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, 'Prostranstvo i vremya: predstavleniya o ciklichnosti' ['Space and Time: Ideas on Cyclicality'], *Finno-ugrovedenie*, 1 (2009), 39–45; Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, 'On Structuring of Spaces and Boundaries', in *The Inner and the Outer: The Ritual Year 6*, Yearbook of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year, ed. Mare Kõiva (Tartu, 2011), pp. 141–50; Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, 'O nekotoryh osobennostyah orientazii vo vremeni i prostranstve' ['About Some Features of Orientation in Time and Space'], *Ezhegodnik finno-ugorskih issledovaniy*, 10.3 (2016), 56–61; Tatiana Minniyakhmetova, 'Symbolical Boundaries. Spatial Intimacy or Spatial Contradiction?', in *Rajaamatta. Etnologisia keskusteluja*, ed. Hanneleena Hieta et al., Ethnos-toimite 20 & Scripta Aboensis 4 (Helsinki: Ethnos & Turku: Turun yliopisto, kansatiede, 2017), pp. 276–93.

[8] E. B. Smilyanskaya, 'Rol' zapreta v sohranenii identichnosti konfessionalnoy gruppy' ['The Role of Prohibitions in Preserving the Identity of a Confessional Group'], Pre-

Hence, prohibitions contribute to and favour the functioning of community. As an integral part of many mythological beliefs and rites, they play an important role in the moral and everyday life of the people, contribute to the harmony of community relations, and connect the 'nature — human — society' continuum together. As Svetlana Tolstaya asserts, 'the material of folklore, beliefs, ritual regulations, and prohibitions make it possible to reconstruct one of the most important semantic categories of culture — the value of traditional society'.[9] Prohibitions (restrictions) and permissions (rights) are thus key mechanisms in the quest for spiritual and moral perfection, and thus intimately shape our ceremonial actions, and society itself.

People are primarily afraid to violate, convinced that punishment will follow. During a ritual — preparation, performance, and completion — it is often observed that people remark about how you should or should *not* behave. Less often, someone teaches you how to do something, how to act exactly correctly. These rules are mastered in a more inconspicuous way, by observing family members and strangers, following their behaviour, and imitating them, rather than by explicit instruction or injunction.

There are many prohibitions and restrictions, each of which has its own meaning and significance. It may seem that society itself is the main and perhaps the only regulator of ritual, but in the case of calendar practices, the calendar itself dictates and guides how and when they are enacted. Calendar rites are thus precisely and definitively related to these temporal limitations and parameters. In the case of Udmurts, the main rules around household and economic activity are defined by the solar and lunar calendars. Many rituals depend on regional weather, climatic and environmental conditions, or are vulnerable to unforeseen circumstances, however, and so the ritual cannot be organised in a completely predictable way. In some years, for example, winter prayer ceremonies and worship cannot be organised in a wood or meadow, far from a village sacred place because of large amounts of snow; spring-summer rituals may be difficult to perform in a particular sacred place due to incessant rain and floods. Thus, even sim-

sentation at the Spring School 'Historical Memory in Folklore', Centre for Typology and Semiotics of Folklore of the Russian State University for Humanities, 2007.

[9] S. M. Tolstaya, *Obraz mira v tekste i rituale* [*The Image of the World in Text and Ritual*] (Moskva: Russkiy fond sodeystviya obrazovaniu i nauke, 2015), p. 80.

ple seasonal climatic variations force people to adapt their practices and to regulate and manage the situation in their own way. Adaptation may also be demanded by private, or personal circumstances. For instance, it is sometimes impossible to perform a ritual as it should be performed due to the death of a family member or a relative, or perhaps an accident such as a fire in the village.

Highlighting taboos and prohibitions in a designated time and space affirms the values important to a society in a vivid and expressive way. That itself is a kind of testimony to the power of the social order, one that is not only inherent in ritual time and space, but that is an integral part of people's daily lives.

## The Solar Calendar

For the Udmurts, the main calendars are solar and lunar; the first more fixed than the latter.[10] The winter and the summer solstices, for example, occur annually in the same period. These dates are very fundamental to the Udmurt ritual calendar, hence significant rites occur on these dates. The lunar calendar begins by referring to the solar calendar: that is, ritual dates are calculated only after the winter solstice, starting with the first new moon after the new year that begins according to the Julian calendar. The periods between the main rituals of the year are calculated in blocks of seven weeks. Seven weeks after the first new moon of the new year comes Pancake week/Shrovetide; seven weeks later comes the Great Day (Easter), and so on. These events and their timings are well defined in tradition and cannot be changed; it is necessary to observe and adhere to them. Thus, the calendar itself is one of the main regulators of rituals associated with the passing of time and of the year.

## The Lunar Calendar

In the lunar calendar, the phases of the moon are central: new, full, and the first and last quarters. Certain rituals and ceremonies are required, or forbidden, according to these phases, and shorter periods of time are also considered, as in the case of certain days in a week, when it is either possible, or forbidden, to perform appropriate ritual actions and worship gods and spirits. Other prohibitions and rules that

[10] Minniyakhmetova, *Kalendarnye obryady zakamskih udmurtov*, pp. 7–10.

are directly related to, and dependent upon, the time of day, in connection with the movement of the sun, need to be considered, as well. For example, all ritual activities must begin in the morning or before noon, before the sun has declined to the west. In addition, activities should be conducted on a 'good' day of the week, like Monday, Friday, or Sunday, and should be done observing the phases of the moon. All these rules and prohibitions are followed when performing ceremonies, whether addressed to the gods and spirits, or to the living and the world around us.

## Dealing with the Dead

When rites are performed in honour of deceased ancestors and their souls and spirits, things are reversed. The ceremonies in honour of the departed begin after noon, in the evening, and even at night, but must be completed before sunrise. All movements in space are made counter-clockwise: the participants take places at the table 'moving against the direction of the sun', this means counter-clockwise, and must leave the table in the same way. When the table is set, all the treats are placed counter-clockwise, and all the treats for the participants are also served counter-clockwise. In addition, the distribution of the space in the house between the living and the dead is strictly observed: places for the dead are at the mouth of the stove and closer to the entrance door or to the north, and places for the living are far away from the dead.

All rituals must follow certain rules, but these can sometimes be defined by *prohibitions*, that is, when and what things must not be done, and why certain deeds and actions cannot be performed. Within these larger rituals, we must also consider 'the little things', such as the appropriate time to wash ritual clothing and objects, clean ritual dishes, or purify participants, in the ceremony before the event. This also includes the observance of rules and prohibitions in the preparation of ritual dishes at home even before departure to the sacred place. The place and time of putting on ritual clothes also matters.

## Spatial Limits

Having considered the concept of prohibitions and rules within the temporal frame, it is necessary to look at prohibitions and rules in spatial terms. It is significant that the place itself was chosen and prepared

by ancestors long ago and there is thus no need to reconsider. All of my contributors agree: the place is permanent and has been so since ancient times. But we need to take into account what is happening there now, what is prohibited, what is allowed, and what must be respected and observed. Orientation in space is omnipresent and essential: which way to turn, how to stand, what position to hold when preparing the ritual place for the rite, cleaning the house and rooms before the ritual, preparing clothes, food, cleansing oneself. As a rule, the family sits at the table before going to a ceremony; they get up from the table 'moving in the direction of the sun', i.e., clockwise, and then leave the house. It is of great importance not to break the rules when taking a first step, for example, one must step on the right foot and at least a little in direction to the south, one must not turn one's back on the ritual table, and must not touch the table with sexual organs. Having entered a sacred place, i.e., in the praying place or ritual place, everyone should know their own place and their own roles, as described below.

Traditionally, the society consisted of kinship groups which had and still have their own subdivisions that are strictly observed during the ritual period and at the ritual itself. If there is a family or a kindred

*Fig. 1. A delimited space for prayer, 2000.*
*Photo by Tatiana Minniyakhmetova*

group at home, they are in their own space. There are, however, many kindred unions gathering at public ceremonial events. To keep and preserve the order, the sacred space has subdivisions between the kindred groups. This sacred space is divided by gender: women occupy the left side, men occupy the right side, which means the female half falls to the eastern side of the space, and the male half falls to the west side. The most sacred part of the space is the southern, where the human foot does not enter; close to that is the place of the 'priests' *vös'as'* (priest of the indigenous Udmurt religion), the place of bonfires, and cooking and preparing the ritual food. This is the general structure of each sacred space. The combination of all these rules and the structural order themselves regulate people's behaviour and the integrity of the event. This procedure and the prohibitions rule people in a natural way; adults and small children gather from different streets and houses or even from various villages, and all seems to be chaotic. However, when they cross the border into the sacred space, everything falls into place. The order is established that has evolved over the centuries. After this, no movements are made and people stay in their places. Before prayer and worship begin, the participants take their places behind the priests, then the movement of people also occurs in some imperceptible way and everyone finds themselves in their places: priests, men, women, children. This is one of the important conditions for the performance of the ceremony, which is performed without fail and 'by itself'.

## Society and Participants

The ritual ceremony is not performed by itself without the participation of people, of course, and there are designated ritual actors, particular individuals who are directly responsible for organising the ceremony, its preparation, conduct, and completion.

Each Udmurtian community has its own *vös'as'* ('priest') and assistants. Their number depends on the number of kindred groups in a particular community. According to the calendar, those priests and their assistants at first discuss details of the upcoming ritual among themselves and then spread information about it to the community members. Afterwards, in each family, preparations for the ceremonies begin. The priests and assistants communicate how many and what kind of sacrifices will be necessary for the gods and spirits, who will be able to donate what kind of sacrifice, and from whom the sacrifice can

be purchased (a domestic animal and poultry). Priests or their families also clean and prepare ritual towels and dishes. Having bought animals and poultry for sacrifice early in the morning of the day of the ceremony, the priests and assistants go to the sacred ritual place. They bring all necessary things: sacrifices, dishes, towels, or even firewood.

When the organisers of the ceremony first arrive at the place, a fire is lit. It is no wonder that there is a conviction that 'during prayer ceremonies a hearth or a fireplace is considered as the centre of the ritual space'.[11] It is not by chance that in such situations the prayers are assisted by a person called the *tylas'*, who is assigned in advance and is responsible for setting, guarding, and finally extinguishing the fire before, during, and after the ceremony.

Each of the priests is responsible for a specific sacrifice, and every assistant has their own duties, such as bringing water, washing dishes at the sacred place, stabbing the sacrifice and preparing the meat for boiling, boiling meat, and cooking porridge. After all these preparations are done, they pray, distribute food, and complete the rite.

At the very end of the ritual, the *vös'as'* and his assistants rake the ashes together to the centre of the fireplace *tylzhu*, that is, walking clockwise three times around the fireplace; 'in this way the opened ritual space was again reduced to the single original point'.[12] Accordingly, the ritual is completed in terms of both time and space. Afterwards, the organisers of the ritual leave to go to their homes.

## Conclusion

The material living conditions of many communities are often very poor and without symbolic beliefs, practices, and values, community life would simply be impossible. Usually a ritual is a standardised set of actions of symbolic content performed in a situation prescribed by tradition. The words and actions that make up the ritual are determined precisely and do not change significantly. Traditions also determine who can perform the rituals. After the ceremony, participants usual-

[11] Ranus Sadikov, *Tradicionnye religioznye verovaniya i obryadnost zakamskih udmurtov (istoriya i sovremennye tendencii razvitiya)* [*Traditional Religious Beliefs and Rituals of Trans-Kama Udmurts (History and Modern Development Trends*)] (Ufa: Centr etnologicheskih issledovaniy Ufimskogo nauchnogo centra RAN, 2008), p. 112.

[12] Minniyakhmetova, 'Ciklichnost vremeni i prostranstva v tradicionnyh predstavleniyah zakamskih udmurtov', p. 107.

ly experience great emotional agitation and release. For the Udmurts, however, it is more than that. In my opinion, most of them experience a sense of responsibility, duty, and involvement in religious activities, but the act of *taking part* seems more important than the representationalism and formality of the ceremonies themselves. Perhaps it is not true, in the case of the Udmurts, that ritual is still interpreted in large measure of only in relation to beliefs.

The examples described show that the regulators of the ritual are not only the people themselves, but that the people themselves are in submission to phenomena that are not dependent on them like time (i.e., the calendar) and space (i.e., the sacred ritual place or each place for conducting a ritual ceremony), and the people are forced to adapt to them. Based on this situation, the accomplishment of ritual actions and its performance is generated by the society which is affected on some levels and preserving differences of age, sex, religious or social hierarchy, etc. The ritual, in turn, exercises the aims, expectations, standards, norms, and consolidates the members, strengthening their identity and solidarity. A deeper appreciation of rituals would enable participants to respond more consciously to traditional formats as well as to deal with the challenges of meaningful and rational participation when rituals lose their original meaning.

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# Regulating Lily-of-the-Valley (Muguet) Festivals in France on the National and Local Levels

**Abstract.** France has been home to diverse Maying customs that varied from one village or hamlet to the next, and practices enacted in more urban contexts also reflect this variability. The regulation of May Day customs such as politically oriented marches is an object of national law and this extends to rules on the gathering and sale of lily-of-the-valley, the customary flower gift for that date. On a more local level, much action is now undertaken under the heading of 'territorialisation', which often involves promoting tourist and commercial attractiveness, specifically including holiday events, such as the Lily-of-the-Valley Festival in the town of Rambouillet. The township carried out an in-depth study of the issues involved in supporting and regulating festive events generally and this 'fête' in particular. Regulation is part of the interplay between the town administration and the actors 'in the street' whose work maintains the life of the festival, an often delicate balancing act, with manifold threads that may (or may not) underwrite the continuation of such events.

**Keywords:** Festival, lily-of-the-valley, Convallaria majalis, Rambouillet, territorialisation, float-construction

From a methodological standpoint, Maying customs in France involving the use of lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*) offer very fruitful perspectives, because there is both a nationally celebrated holiday on May Day and various events on other dates in the month that involve the flower, most particularly the Lily-of-the-Valley Festival in the town of Rambouillet (population about 27,000), located mid-way between Paris and Chartres. This contrast between national and local provides a basis for comparison that raises many issues about festival events, with only the one of regulation to be dealt with here, as our conference theme.

May Day might well be considered a holiday, whatever highly varied form it takes in different countries, that requires little preliminary introduction. In view of its early history, it is easy to see that there

would be considerable effort expended today to keep it cheerily bland and prevent it from becoming in any discernible way once again a 'protestival'.[1] Both the apparently national holiday and the local festival in Rambouillet are examples of holiday or festival invention from the late nineteenth century on, the various threads of which have now converged into a bundle often fitting neatly into the contemporary term 'festivalisation' in the context of cultural and economic development.

Two buzzwords already scored, so we might as well add a third, which occupies an important place in French political discourse — 'territorialisation'. This applies to a nuanced spectrum of visible and invisible public policy utilising this cover term, which was brought in over the last twenty years, often to replace the rather negatively perceived word 'decentralisation'. The latter spoke more of letting the City of Light shed powers (and obligations) rather than granting anything new to the (logically) benighted provinces surrounding it. There is a vast bibliography on territorialisation and what it means to various stakeholders and the reactions to it, which have often been critical of the term's opacity to many of the actors involved.[2]

One source on territorial finances puts the stakes involved in perspective. 'Territorialisation as a lever of performance in public action': in a context of increasing needs for social services at a time of decreasing

[1] Graham St John, 'Protestival: Global Days of Action and Carnivalized Politics in the Present', *Social Movement Studies*, 7 (2008), 167–90.

[2] There are ample online documents on the subject covering specific fields as varied as agriculture, local services and project financing, education, etc. Cf. the following as examples for introductions with bibliographies: La territorialisation: menace ou levier de l'action publique?, http://www.inet-ets.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/rencontre-professionnelle-e.pdf [accessed 2 June 2020]; a detailed project for the Aquitaine region, Territorialisation des politiques publiques en Europe, http://www.msha.fr/msha/programme_regionaux/territorialisation/brisson-landi_partie_2_detail_web.pdf [accessed 6 January 2016, no longer accessible but available from the author upon request]; a brief critical study, Territorialisation des politiques publiques et cohésion nationale: un mariage complexe, http://www.google.fr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwj5hozTqbjJAhVEPxoKHSsSAf8QFggdMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Feso.cnrs.fr%2F_attachments%2Femergence-d-un-espace-public-en-milieu-rural-article-2-2-2-2-2-2-2%2Fdo.pdf%3Fdownload%3Dtrue&usg=AFQjCNE3FDb684bWAXzIXa-6nwymPAlelQ&bvm=bv.108194040,d.ZWU [accessed 2 June 2020]; a review of a complete book of in-depth appraisals, Alain Faure and Emmanuel Négrier (dir.), *Les politiques publiques à l'épreuve de l'action locale: critiques de la territorialisation* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2007), https://questionsdecommunication.revues.org/1636 [accessed 2 June 2020].

human and financial resources, rationalisation and optimisation have become key strategies, which involve more citizen- and actor-centred approaches based on recognising the specificities of a territory — and its component sub-territories — as the fundamental unit of action, in the stated objective of avoiding fragmentation of public policies, opacity and resultant multiplication of hidden costs. This means setting aside an older focus on activity sectors and on particular categories of the public in order to conceive more forward-looking development strategies encompassing all possible interests — that is, a more holistic and 'sustainable' approach.[3]

Among the many threads in such strategies is the promotion of festive or leisure activities, preferably permanent calendar events, that foster a local sense of identity and belonging, as well as offering clear incentives to developing tourism. This sort of 'development' is further seconded by pan-European action to promote cultural events as being emblematic of European identities — 'unity in diversity'.[4] Since giving lily-of-the-valley in France for (or close to) May Day is a custom already underwritten by a highly commercialised support and supply system, as well as being the only obligatory day off in the entire French working-year calendar, it hardly needs more recognition and is not generally regarded as a focus of territorial concern.[5] The contrary is

[3] La territorialisation comme levier de la performance de l'action publique, http://finances-territoriales.over-blog.com/article-22964378.html [accessed 2 June 2020], translated by the author.

[4] Cf. Europa Nostra, 'Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe', executive summary, http://www.encatc.org/culturalheritagecountsforeurope/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CHCfE_REPORT_ExecutiveSummary_v2.pdf [accessed 2 June 2020]; full report, http://www.encatc.org/culturalheritagecountsforeurope/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CHCfE_FULL-REPORT_v2.pdf [accessed 2 June 2020].

[5] The history of May Day in France is complex. First ratified by the French Senate as a day off (*jour chômé*) in 1919, then reconfirmed and redefined in 1941 as a *paid* day off under the Vichy government, only to disappear after the Liberation in 1945, reappear in 1947 as a day off without being declared a holiday and only called La Fête du Travail from 1948 onwards. See the French Ministère du Travail article 'L'Histoire du 1er Mai en 5 infos-clés', https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/actualites/l-actualite-du-ministere/article/l-histoire-du-1er-mai-en-5-infos-cles [accessed 2 June 2020]. See also the Wikipedia article 'Fête du travail', https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/F%C3%AAte_du_Travail#cite_ref-19 [accessed 29 June 2020] which is quite good. The present-day definition is in the Code du Travail (Work Legislation) Article L222-6, http:// legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCodeArticle.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006072050&idArticle=LEGIARTI000006647414&dateTexte=20151130 [accessed 2 June 2020].

the case for the highly local Rambouillet festival and we shall examine later the interplay of official or semi-official regulation affecting it and the freedoms for which that regulation allows.

## Lily-of-the-Valley for May Day

For most people familiar with France, there is but one icon of May Day — the lily-of-the-valley, which is given as a gift to bring happiness and good luck (as a *porte-bonheur*). A few people enjoy ignoring the custom or outright detest it, but the vast majority of folk scurry about on their way to meetings with family or friends looking for the *muguet* that suits the occasion. This may be an elaborate and expensive arrangement of rooted plants that elicits the comment, 'we never skimp on that, it's for Maman' or the ultimate in simplicity of a totally undecorated sprig of *muguet* bought hastily from a Red Cross seller at the last minute before arriving for lunch. The point is to have it with you, to express your good wishes.

*Fig. 1. Lovers with their muguet (to remain anonymous), 2009. Photo by Cozette Griffin-Kremer*

The elaborate gift will be made up by a florist or found ready-to-carry-out in the local hypermarket, a garden shop or at the grower's own outlet. These people are in business and need no authorisation to sell their wares. However, what strikes the observer is the enormous amount of street selling, where people set up stands or just sell out of pre-prepared boxes. They may combine this with presentation of other homemade products, such as gathered wild asparagus or Camembert cheese, but according to official regulation, street sellers are supposed to offer only wild lily-of-the-valley. Needless to say, this is a convenient untruth. The suburban Rungis market supplying the Paris region with food and flowers is besieged by street sellers who buy the flowers for resale and boxes marked 'Muguet Nantais' — the area around the city of Nantes produces 85% of the supply — are visible everywhere on the sidewalks. The entire regulatory system is dictated by prefectoral or ministerial decree, which allows for some latitude in local application on the part of the town halls responsible for implementation.[6]

*Fig. 2. Near Montparnasse train station, May Day Eve, 2015. Photo by Cozette Griffin-Kremer*

[6] Regulation of gathering wild plants is within the ambit of the Direction du Ministère de l'Économie, de l'Industrie et du Numérique (Ministry of Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs), http://archive.wikiwix.com/cache/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.economie.gouv.fr%2Fdgccrf%2FPublications%2FFiches-pratiques%2FMuguet [accessed 4 January 2016].

This means that on either side of a street marking the border between two townships, the Red Cross or Communist Party volunteers may be selling sprigs or even potted *muguet* with a red rose added in an attractive plastic wrapping, or — on the other side — standing there forlorn with sprigs alone, the 'naked' sprig, so to speak, with no wrapping and not even a strand of straw to tie it up. On the one hand, strict enforcement of the rules is usually an expression of the will of local florists, who believe their business is dented by street selling. On the other, many florists take the attitude 'the more, the merrier' and are quite tolerant of street sellers, although the latter can be given a fine by police, if they are within forty metres of a professional florist's shop. As a rule, the atmosphere is happy, as the day itself is generally perceived to be. However, so many people sell that there is occasionally discernible harassment among sellers over a 'best' spot, but this is not the object of any outside intervention.


*Fig. 3. Red Cross selling in Vanves on May Day, 2015. Photo by Cozette Griffin-Kremer*

The activity that partially bridges the around-May Day custom and the festival in Rambouillet is the gathering of wild lily-of-the-valley. The flower has come to be rare in many parts of the Ile-de-France around Paris and in other regions, so it may be protected by prefectoral order

*Fig. 4 & 5. Gathering wild lily-of-the-valley in the Faisanderie, the restricted area of the Rambouillet castle domain, 26 April 2015. Photos by Cozette Griffin-Kremer*

forbidding it be disturbed.[7] Nor, in theory, may anyone grow the plant at home in a garden in order to sell it.[8] The opposite is the case in the town of Rambouillet, where gathering the *muguet* for construction of the festival floats is the object of special permission to use the (formerly) presidential grounds in a closed part of the castle parklands, the Faisanderie or pheasant-raising station, open for an afternoon to the teams involved in supplying the festival float builders with flower fuel. This in itself is a rather remarkable instance of decisive encouragement as a facet of regulation.

## Origins of the Two Fêtes

A step back for a moment here — to the historical precedents for the national holiday and the local festival. There is abundant documentation of the rise of May Day as a popular holiday enjoyed as an occasion to express protest, within the bounds of the Workers' International activities and the law, but far more as a day associated with giving the sign of summer's opening as a gift, either the flower itself or as a motif typical of the proliferation of postcards, then greeting cards and today e-cards, the last often accompanied by the ubiquitous Francis Lemarque song 'Il est revenu, le temps du muguet' ('Lily-of-the-valley time has come again').[9] The origin of the national holiday is frequently cited as stemming from a custom invented by royalty. King Charles IX is said to have given *muguet* to the ladies in his court for the first time around 1560, a gesture instantly taken up by all his courtiers in hopes of ingratiating themselves with the young king.[10] As regards the workers' May Day, the flower originally used in France was the dogrose (*églantine*, *Rosa canina* or *Rosa rubiginosa*), replaced by the lily-of-the-valley in the 1940s.

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[7] Either limiting the quantity of wild lily-of-the-valley that can be gathered or outright forbidding this in many regions or administrative jurisdictions in France. Cf. for one example, Règlementation des Hautes-Alpes, http://www.florealpes.com/arr22nov1993.php?PHPSESSID=e14581ba658ee19f18a5499c80f476c8#art2 [accessed 2 June 2020].

[8] Manuel Alaver, 'Vente de muguet le 1er mai: ce qu l'on a droit de faire, ce qui est interdit', *Capital* (online edition ), 29 April 2019, https://www.capital.fr/votre-argent/vente-de-muguet-le-1er-mai-ce-que-lon-a-droit-de-faire-ce-qui-est-interdit-1336623 [accessed 2 June 2020].

[9] Francis Lemarque, 'Le temps du muguet', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ybnpn4dTHxw [accessed 12 May 2020].

[10] There are many references to this both online and in print, but it remains unverified.

*Fig. 6. Fête du Muguet Rambouillet, 1920.*
*Photo from Wikipedia Creative Commons*

The origins of the Rambouillet festival are quite well documented and the impulsion of the event around 1900 was from a troika of actors: the local duchess, the town mayor and the town shopkeepers. The lady was the Duchesse d'Uzès, first French woman to get a driver's licence, first to get a traffic ticket, aristocrat, obviously, and close friend of the anarchist and suffragette leader, Louise Michel. She was great friends with the Rambouillet mayor, long-serving Marie Roux,[11] who was great friends with the then President of the Republic. This explains why the festival got off to a stylish start, officially in 1906, and over the years was able to offer raffle prizes that could include a large Sèvres porcelain vase donated by the President, along with other valuable prizes, all in all quite a feat for a town with a population of some 6,000 souls

[11] A gentleman, who held office 1904–1919 and 1920–1935. Cf. Les maires de Rambouillet, http://www.francegenweb.org/mairesgenweb/resultcommune.php?id=337 [accessed 2 June 2020]; Jocelyne Bernard 'La fête du muguet, de l'innovation à la tradition', in *Fêtons le muguet, Journée de rencontres à La Lanterne* (Mairie de Rambouillet, samedi 24 mars 2018), pp. 28–35.

in this period.[12] The third 'player' is in the plural — the town shopkeepers, who envisioned the event as a promotional venture for their trades, and it worked. The national railway corporation (SNCF) even scheduled special trains to bring holiday-makers to Rambouillet for the Fête du Muguet and, in its more recent heyday from the 1960s into the 1980s, it attracted nationally known entertainment stars such as Claude François, Enrico Macias or Sacha Distel. Today, it mainly attracts crowds from Rambouillet itself and surrounding communities.[13]

*Fig. 7. Marc Robert Mayor with the Reine du Muguet and Dauphines. Photo by Cozette Griffin-Kremer*

## The Rambouillet Lily-of-the-Valley Festival

The Fête du Muguet — still retaining that name, but also recently termed Muguet en Fête — has had its ups and downs. Its major features

[12] According to the statistics contained in the adjunct information on the Cassini maps, the 1906 population of Rambouillet is cited as 6,165: Rambouillet notice communale, http://cassini.ehess.fr/cassini/fr/html/fiche.php?select_resultat=28583 [accessed 13 May 2020].

[13] For the festival's founding, the role played by the major and duchess, and its continuation today, see the Rambouillet website, http://www.rambouillet.fr/Fete-traditionnelle-de-Rambouillet.html [accessed 4 January 2016; no longer accessible, see above].

involve activities, some of which truly require some oversight simply to function, while others need encouragement to the most active contributors to continue. This is how it unfolds temporally. It is announced in all pertinent media from the local newspapers to the town's quarterly magazine and through shop-window painting done well beforehand, abetted by the triangular green and white street banners gracing the float parade route of the year. There is royalty — a Queen and two Dauphines — who are chosen at the January ball called La Nuit du Muguet (Lily-of-the-Valley Night) from among the candidates proposed by local associations such as the Shopkeepers and Artisans Association, the Fencing Club, Tennis Club, or the Blood Donors, among some eight to ten groups.

The festival itself is always in mid-May, scheduled as best possible not to compete with the myriad of holidays that dot (or plague, for employers) the month. This means the fun fairs are up and running by the Friday afternoon and the through streets are closed off to automobile traffic, all of which requires some light-handed policing. By Saturday, the various music groups — from rock to rap — are running full steam at several strategic points in the downtown. There is a Saturday evening band concert in the part of the château park called the Rondeau — an artificial lake with a view onto Rambouillet castle — immediately flowing into the arrival of the Queen and Dauphines by boat, motorcycle, horse and carriage, or antique car. (No one has tried a helicopter yet, but it has been suggested…). The Queen is formally crowned and receives the gift intended for her and for the people of Rambouillet — a music and fireworks display reflected in the Rondeau water. There used to be a dance following this, but everyone involved was so exhausted that it was set aside, because the Sunday is equally demanding for the young ladies and the band. Morning meeting at the square near one of the castle grounds entries, then a procession led by the same band up to the Mass in church, followed by descent to the inside-of-town small park for a cocktail party given by the town hall, with speeches, of course. Then, everyone flits away for a quick lunch to reassemble by two in the afternoon for the final event, the float parade, which wends its way through the town, joining many of its neighbourhoods in its itinerary, and on to final presentation of the floats at the castle, where they move off to the park, awaiting judgement and their prizes.

To say that all this is traffic-stopping is an understatement, but the requirements for managing the street activities are also fairly self-evi-

dent and standard procedure for the local police. What is less obvious is regulating the float-making done for the final parade — *nota bene* that the Queen and Dauphines are nearly always carried by the last of the floats. There may be 30,000 to 40,000 leaves used on a single float and there is a whole panoply of skills applied to getting them and the flowers (that is last-minute work, generally done the night before and on the early Sunday morning) firmly stuck on the float structures. In recent years, there has been a town-hall-declared theme, such as the Far West, carnivals or the 2015 cartoon characters, announced in late November, so that by early December the float-builders can begin their work on the platforms lent them by the town hall. Having a declared theme was meant to guide and encourage the builders, all the more so as one group twice mounted a clearly religion-related subject. This choice did not respect the strict *laïcité* (secularism) which is supposed to characterise any event enjoying official sponsorship or permission in the République and generated considerable public disapproval. All the float-making groups must now fill out


*Fig. 8. Detail during float construction, Scooby Doo for the Association 'Amis des Fêtes'; the 2015 theme was cartoon characters.*
*Photo by Cozette Griffin-Kremer*

a detailed description of what they intend to portray within the announced theme and submit it to the municipal associations committee for approval months ahead of the fête itself.

## How to Regulate a Local Festival Event

All this indicates that the Rambouillet Fête du Muguet is anything but a spontaneous event, in contrast to something that has become a popular (with some) custom like burning cars for New Year's Eve in Strasbourg, an activity that has been dubbed a counter-festival or might well be termed a protestival, or a bloody nuisance, or rampant juvenile criminality, depending on your standpoint. This is far from Rambouillet, to say the least, in all senses. Still, the Lily-of-the-Valley Festival, most especially the float-building, walks a tightrope between association creativity and highly planned encouragement guidelines.

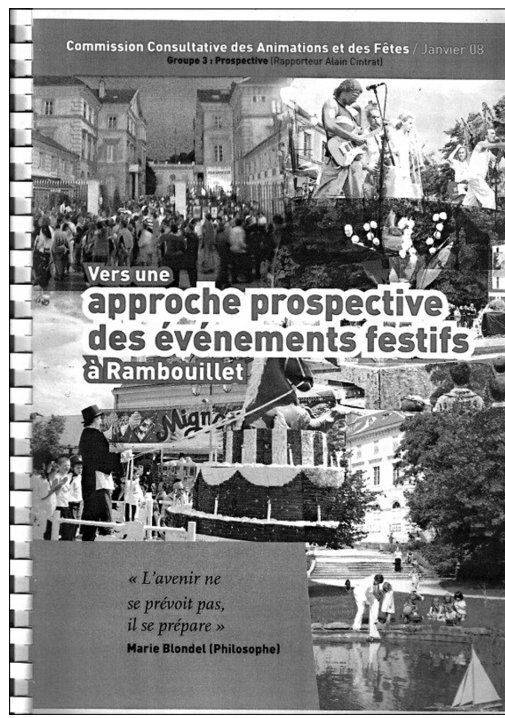


*Fig. 9. A Prospective Approach to Festive Events in Rambouillet.*

It fulfills all the requirements of territorial development and European Union cultural boosting, but it is as fragile and as strong as the commitment of its most creative participants. However, by the early 2000s, it appeared to many that the Fête du Muguet was running out of steam, to the consternation of the town hall and to many of the association folk, who deemed the event a major opportunity to express their participation in the town's yearly life cycle.

This concern gave rise to a reaction. Rambouillet township decided in December of 2006 to set up a Consulting Commission on Activities and Fêtes, presided over by the mayor and composed of three action groups of elected officials, association representatives and individuals who 'participate in the life of the *Cité*'. This commission had no decisional power, but was intended to (1) watch over events, (2) evaluate them in order to improve or develop them to the satisfaction of the citizens, and (3) reflect upon maintaining them or creating new projects in anticipation that some festive events might disappear.[14] Most importantly for us, the Commission brought out a report entitled *A Prospective Approach to Festive Events in Rambouillet*,[15] a remarkable 86-page document based on the 'prospective' precepts of the philosopher Gaston Berger which analyzes and appraises the entire panoply of town events in the year. It explicitly deals with many preoccupations, such as defining a fête, the involvement of various age groups, 'channeling' youthful energies, promoting profits for businesses in the downtown, integrating newcomers, encouraging neighborhood solidarity, as well as enumerating nearly all the classic anthropological criteria for a festive event.

The report also takes up the prickly question of how to ensure the lasting existence of a festival like the Fête du Muguet, which does not fit into a nationally foreseen slot, as does May Day, the 14th of July national holiday, or the Fête de la Musique, a recently invented and highly popular yearly event. The Lily-of-the-Valley Festival possesses a rather

[14] This definition of the 'Commission consultative des Animations et des Fêtes' is on page 3 of the document of the same title, cited above, termed hereafter CCAF Report.

[15] Commission consultative des Animations et des Fêtes, *Vers une approche prospective des événements festifs à Rambouillet*, Commission consultative des Animations et des Fêtes, Janvier 08, Groupe 3: Prospective (rapporteur Alain Cintrat). I owe a special note of thanks to M. Cintrat, not only for giving me this report, which was not widely circulated, but also for devoting considerable time to discussing very frankly the situation that gave rise to it and the hopes for lasting positive results based upon it.

unique status: it is perceived by all involved as 'traditional' — the universal term used to describe it — quite non-commercial and wholly dependent on the good will and enthusiasm of the associations that provide the royalty and the floats, as well as the shopkeepers who put up with no car parking or passage, although they profit from the crowds attracted on the Saturday, when the weather cooperates.

The Commission report carefully notes the absence of precisely this important group of actors who were at the origin of the Fête du Muguet, the shopkeepers, as well as of academics or researchers working in human and social sciences to assist in writing it up. According to the 'prospective' terminology of Gaston Berger, the working group is to establish a diagnosis of existing events, imagine various future scenarios and propose solutions to the decision-makers.[16] The methodology is summed up succinctly, with an image evoking how to look ahead: 'drive with your high beams, not the low beams, and above all, don't drive looking in the rearview mirror', so there is a considerable amount of insider pep talk involved. Perhaps we might term it regulators regulating themselves, at least giving a well-defined shape to the attitudes they expect to reign.[17] There are two major preoccupations, clearly stated: how to integrate an increasing incoming population without 'natural' identitary links to the town and how to avoid one of two catastrophe scenarios: either the abrupt disappearance of an event or the emergence of one that is uncontrollable, the example cited being rave parties.[18]

In line with the objectives of 'territorialisation' enhancement, the 'multi-directional' effects aimed at are oriented towards three entities: the public, the town (*Cité*[19]) and the economic/tourism 'pole'. Especially as regards the 'town', these effects are to play out by 'responding to political objectives in terms of territorial marketing'.[20] The Lily-of-the-Valley Festival is among seven events analyzed, takes up seventeen out of the eighty-six pages of the report, and is compared with four events in other cities deemed to be similar.[21] The report was carried out by

[16] CCAF Report 4.

[17] CCAF Report 6.

[18] CCAF Report 8.

[19] *Cité*, as in 'the life of the Cité', is often used in French as the term *polis* may be in English.

[20] CCAF Report 14.

[21] CCAF Report 'The Lily-of-the-Valley Fête', 15–32, 'file card' analysis 65–66.

a team of fifteen university students in commercialisation techniques on the basis of an inquiry involving 325 respondents and gives an idea of the investment made in the fête's two major components, the January election ball and the weekend festivities, at €71,000 in 2007.[22] At the time the report was written, the float parade was perceived as having become the weak link in the fête, signaled by the decreasing number of floats, the material difficulties (host sites for their construction, traction vehicles), financial issues (slight siphoning off of funding to other activities) and, above all, the human factor — how to recruit new people willing to spend hundreds of work-hours on building something this 'ephemeral'.[23] *Nota bene*, that in the interval since this report came out, the positive attachment of some association players and music groups noted there has been reinforced and the 'prospective' is widely perceived as once again positive.


*Fig. 10. King Kong float (Association Amis des Fêtes) moving towards the rendezvous point for departure of the float parade. Photo by Cozette Griffin-Kremer*

[22] CCAF Report 15.

[23] CCAF Report 18–19.

Among the many social effects hoped for, few were being satisfactorily met in 2007, the only possible exception being the intergenerational 'shoulder-rubbing' during the fireworks display on Saturday night. Otherwise, the Fête did not seem to be in any way the desired, if highly controlled, melting pot of old and young, commercial and social aspirations, above all, not satisfactory in terms of 'territorial marketing'. There is considerable self-criticism as regards the role of the Fêtes Committee and its over-attachment to routine and conservatism. This group had not succeeded in opening up to new blood and facing the challenge of reconciling 'Tradition and Modernity'.[24]

So, what is to be done? Comparison with the four other towns suggests the importance of defining a 'red thread' theme for the entire fête, and especially for the float parade.[25] The report's concluding remarks concern the three major town events (the Fête du Muguet, the bi-annual autumn Saint Lubin Fête, and the Music Fête), the promotion of which necessitate a change of name and outright replacing the Fête Committee with a Fête Piloting Committee. The latter must bring in new, dynamic members, 'mutualise' and 'fluidify' relations between the various actors, pinpoint human resource needs, find the right leaders, even if this means resorting to outside expertise, and 'accompany' the fêtes from conception through implementation. These actions are to include the specific strategy of 'bringing culture into the fête': responding to the evolution of the fête's meaning, regenerating traditional events, and making 'culture' accessible to the greatest number. Last but not least, developing 'territorial marketing' requires highlighting the image of the town and its dynamism, aiming effectively at the surrounding townships, improving communication, underwriting the quality of events so that the various fêtes highlight local heritage (historic, cultural and gastronomic) and, finally, getting shopkeepers and local businesses back into the game.[26]

All this regulation and autoregulation might make one think of Nietzsche's remark that it is easy to set up a festival, but harder to find anyone to come and enjoy it.[27] Yet, this at times rather daunting regu-

[24] CCAF Report 25.

[25] CCAF Report 23–25.

[26] CCAF Report 81–84.

[27] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Aufzeichnung aus den Jahren 1875/79', in *Gesammelte Werke*, IX (München: Musarion, 1922–29), p. 480.

lation has most certainly not smothered the Lily-of-the-Valley Festival, supported as it is by a panoply of attractions that are paid for by the township, such as the outside music groups and the fireworks display. The town band, a venerable institution, plays its considerable role for free, and so does the Catholic Church. The fun fair (carnival) folk pay for their parking spots and take their profit chances with the weather. To cap the fête, as its last event, the float-makers add something the regulators cannot do — supply the creativity, frequently expressed as outright funniness, the fruit of internal cohesion, often of inter-group cooperation. And they show everyone their work — hundreds of hours of work crystallised in a single 'artefact' among others, which they give to the public, their neighbours and friends, for about four hours. Nowhere in the Consulting Commission Report is the word 'gift' used, perhaps because the desire to give it can be underwritten, but not created by decree. The report, it seems, all the while stressing their importance, stops where the human resources take up, in this dynamic tension between creating and regulating. And the float-makers are the ultimate actors in self-imposed regulation. They all now toe the line on presenting subjects that pass muster officially. But further, the most demanding groups among them strive after the 'traditional' manner of attaching the leaves and the contingent high quality in design passed on by the 'old hands', the elder generation of now retired float folk. Gradually over the years, through a spirit of emulation and the joy in sharing pleasure with fellow-builders and the public, they have won over more and more of the other float-makers to greater investment of time and ingenuity. It shows in an atmosphere of confidence and the sort of gaiety which no decree ever produces.

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# Religious Feasts and the Soviet Regime: The Case of Cross-Days and May Devotions

**Abstract.** This paper looks at two Catholic spring feasts: Cross-days (three days before the Ascension Day) and devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary during the May month (May Devotions). By the middle of the twentieth century, these two feasts were celebrated in rural areas throughout Lithuania. The local community regulated and controlled both feasts by setting their start time, the ceremonial practices followed, the scenario, and the route. Both feasts experienced significant difficulties in Soviet times, during which Cross-days completely disappeared from the ritual calendar, while May Devotions were organised and celebrated secretly in private family spaces. This article addresses the question of what led to the disappearance of one feast and the survival of the other, drawing on field research data collected by the author since 2003.

**Keywords:** religious feasts, Soviet era, control, regulation

## Introduction

This paper focuses on two Lithuanian Catholic spring feasts: Cross-days or Rogation Days (three days before Ascension) and the May Devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated in rural areas across the country until the middle of the twentieth century. The majority of scholarly attention has focused on historical facts and liturgy,[1] especially the chants and psalms of the May Devotions,[2] while Jonas Mardo-

[1] Juozas Vaišnora, *Marijos garbinimas Lietuvoje* (Roma: Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademija, 1958), pp. 59–66.

[2] Alfonsas Motuzas, 'Katalikiškosios pridedamosios pamaldos Lietuvoje. Gegužinės ir birželinės pamaldos. Sekminės', *Liaudies kultūra*, 2 (2000), 14–19; Alfonsas Motuzas, 'Liaudies pamaldumo Švč. M. Marijai praktikos Lietuvoje', *Soter*, 40 (2011), 81–96; Virginija Kvasaitė, 'Marijos Nekalto Prasidėjimo Valandų giedojimo ypatumai Kartenos apylinkėse', in *Lietuvos lokaliniai tyrimai*, ed. Gintautas Zabiela and Gabija Juščiūtė (Vilnius: Versmė, 2003), pp. 920–28 (pp. 926–27).

sa has examined the May Devotions practices of Lithuanian deportees in Siberia,[3] and his is certainly the most comprehensive research on Cross-days in Lithuania, generally.[4] Mardosa concludes that the celebration of Cross-days began to decline as early as the 1920s and 30s, and that by the Second World War, the celebration had essentially ended, though he does not delve further into further changes during the Soviet era.[5]

In this article, I will compare the fate of these two feasts during the Soviet era, particularly from the perspective of regulation and control, and seek to discover why one festival declined while the other survived. My findings are based on field research I have undertaken since 2003, as well as relevant published material. While researching cross-crafting heritage in Lithuania, I began to collect information relating to the rituals connected with crosses or saints' images, and consequently I included questions about Cross-days and May Devotions. The material was collected through semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and part of the collected data can be found in my articles on cross-crafting.

## May Devotions

The Catholic Church has devoted the month of May to the honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and devotions have been a regular feature of life in many Catholic regions since the early to mid-nineteenth century.[6] These services were strictly regulated by the Church and, at first, were held exclusively in church buildings in towns and boroughs. But many rural people found it difficult to participate, both because of the intensity of springtime farm work and the great distances between remote farms and their nearest churches. People thus began to organise services in their own villages and their local May Devotions practices began to evolve without Church regulation. Eventually, these localised

[3] Jonas Mardosa, 'Lietuvių tremtinių Sibire gegužinės pamaldos (XX a. penkto dešimtmečio vidurys — šešto dešimtmečio pabaiga)', in *Florilegium Lithuanum: in honorem eximii professoris atque academici Lithuani domini Eugenii Jovaiša anniversarii sexagesimi causa dicatum*, ed. Grasilda Blažienė, Sandra Grigaravičiūtė, and Aivas Ragauskas (Vilnius: Vilniaus pedagoginio universiteto leidykla, 2010), pp. 151–60.

[4] Jonas Mardosa, 'Kryžiaus dienos XX a.: krikščioniška ir žemdirbiška tradicija', *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis*, 21 (2002), 89–106.

[5] Mardosa, 'Kryžiaus dienos XX a.', p. 97.

[6] Vaišnora, *Marijos garbinimas Lietuvoje*, p. 61.

Devotions became one of the essential forms of religious life in rural communities, regulated instead by a consensus of community members.

Each evening in May, villagers would gather in a chosen house (usually the largest in the settlement) to pray and chant to the Blessed Virgin Mary, at a small temporary altar with the image of the Virgin. In some areas, people gathered outside to pray, at a standing cross, a small chapel, or in the village cemetery.[7] In such cases, a small altar was installed at the cross, while in some West Lithuanian villages inhabitants used to pray and chant at a small chapel containing a statue of the Virgin Mary;[8] in such cases, the chapel itself played the role of an altar. During the May Devotions, people prayed mostly in the evening, or after work, but in some places at lunch time. Usually people would agree in advance when to start services and the ceremony was attended by inhabitants of all ages — parents, children, grandparents, and young people.

There was no firm structure to these May Devotions, but they usually included the singing of Marian anthems, a litany to Mary, and such like. Venerating the Virgin Mary, people would also pray, asking for good weather and for blessings for fields and crops, both of which were important for rural country life. The May Devotions served both religious and social functions, creating opportunities to meet and communicate with peers, and both close and distant neighbours. Older people discussed everyday affairs, politics, farm work, and shared experiences. On Saturdays, after the services, young people would organise dances.

## Cross-Days (Rogation Days)

Another spring religious holiday, widely celebrated in Lithuania since the sixteenth century, is the Rogation Days, observed on the Monday to Wednesday before Ascension Day.[9] As in the case of May Devotions, people soon began to celebrate the feast in localised ways, in their own villages.

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[7] Vacys Milius, 'Kryžiai ir koplytėlės lietuvių liaudies papročiuose', *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis*, 11 (1997), 207–17 (p. 213); Skaidrė Urbonienė, 'Šilalės valsčiaus kryždirbystės tradicijos', in *Šilalės kraštas*, ed. Edvardas Vidmantas (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2006), pp. 558–73 (p. 573).

[8] Urbonienė, 'Šilalės valsčiaus', p. 573.

[9] Vaišnora, *Marijos garbinimas Lietuvoje*, p. 136.

The main element of the ceremony was a procession around the village's outdoor crosses, hence the common alternate name of 'Cross-days', and the performance was again regulated by a consensus among community members. They would decide the start time, the order in which the procession would visit the crosses, and so on. The Cross-days scenario was similar across Lithuania and most members of the community were involved. Before each event, women and girls would decorate all the destination crosses with foliage and flower-wreaths. In some places, ceremonies were performed in the morning, before breakfast; in others, at lunchtime, or the afternoon. The beginning of the gathering and procession was marked by an audible signal — the sound of tin sheet or board being beaten, the sound of a drum, blowing trumpets, or horns. If the village or town had a church, crosses would be visited after the Mass, with the priest in attendance. In smaller villages, the processions were held without a priest. Sometimes, the community invited a priest to consecrate fields where crosses could be found, but in many cases, they were blessed by villagers themselves sprinkling holy water without the help of a clergyman. The route of the procession would depend on the number of crosses, their location in the area, and other factors. In some places people visited only three crosses, one a day for three days, but in general, during this feast, the procession visited, prayed, and chanted at all crosses included in the route. The ritual finished in the village cemetery, where believers would chant the Litany of Saints and remember the dead.

Cross-days were important to the rural calendar cycle. As in other Catholic countries, they are designated as harvest supplication days. In other words, the Cross-days, and associated prayers, were held to regulate the weather — rain, drought, hail — and, by extension, to ensure a good harvest.

## The Impact of Soviet Occupation

Soviet occupation changed May Devotions and Cross-days practices. It was an extremely unfavourable period for religious life overall: atheist ideology was strongly inculcated, and people were prevented from conducting religious ceremonies. Soviet authorities actively tried to suppress and exterminate religious rites, including the Cross-days and May Devotions, and public religious rites were especially condemned. Consequently, during this period, public religious celebra-

tions became much rarer and moved to either the Church's domain or to private quarters.

As public religious practice was quite dangerous in the Soviet period, it was easier for traditions to survive if they could be performed in a private space. This suited May Devotions better than Cross-days. In the post-war period during the month of May, local communities would stop to pray and chant together in one house or outside at a cross or chapel, but May Devotions continued in homes, with only family in attendance, throughout the Soviet period. According to Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė, this enabled families to 'preserve a significant portion of the old traditions'.[10] The services, supported by family members, the community, and the Church, brought together all ages, including children, and thus became one of the main mechanisms of religious upbringing, greatly strengthening children's and young people's religious identity in the face of Soviet atheist principles, and developing Lithuanian patriotism in response to the hegemonic regime. According to Jonas Mardosa, Lithuanian deportees in Siberia also organised such May Devotions services, sometimes with songs of patriotic character.[11] This sacred service in exile thus contributed to the preservation of links with the homeland and became a form of resistance there, too.[12]

Nevertheless, due to very active atheistic policies, Soviet authorities partly managed to divert people, especially young, from religious life. Jerry Pankhurst has pointed out some of the more important social control mechanisms favoured by the Soviet state, including: forbidding formal religious education for children; hampering the participation of children in religious activities; controlling baptism rites; actively seeking out believers and attempting to 're-educate' them; publishing and disseminating antireligious propaganda, and more.[13] Most attention was paid to children's atheist education with, in Lithuania for example, weekend dances held in schools and houses of culture, deliberately organised by local Soviet authorities to distract young people from May

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[10] Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė, 'Šeima ir kalendorinės šventės sovietinėje Lietuvoje', *Lietuvos etnologija: socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, 16 (2016), 9–34 (p. 34).

[11] Mardosa, 'Lietuvių tremtinių ', p. 158.

[12] Mardosa, 'Lietuvių tremtinių', p. 160.

[13] Jerry Pankhurst, 'Religious Culture: Faith in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia', in *Digital Scholarship at UNLV* (2012), ed. Dmitri N. Shalin, pp. 1–32 (pp. 22–23), https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/russian_culture/7/ [accessed 14 May 2020].

Devotions. According to some respondents, the Soviet government succeeded in implementing their target and young people gradually abandoned May Devotions rituals, preferring to go to the programmed dances instead of praying together with their parents at home or in church. As one respondent has noted, 'These dances seduced young people'.[14]

Public space was occupied by communist ideological feasts and events, with new traditions ('invented', in Hobsbawm's terms[15]) carefully designed to replace the old Christian ones. This was the case in other republics of the Soviet Union[16] as well as other countries in the Soviet bloc.[17] Under the Soviet regime, many religious people effectively lived double lives. As Anna Lubecka has noted in her research on the ritual year in Poland, 'At home, traditional Polish values were cherished, and religious and patriotic rituals were celebrated, while in the public sphere new holidays and celebrations enacting the communist ideology were observed'.[18] By suppressing the old and creating (or inventing) new holidays, Soviet ideologists sought to control the lives of ordinary people. However, that was possible only with holidays enacted in public spaces as it was difficult to control any holiday celebration in the private family space. Religion disappeared from public life, while religious expression assumed a 'domesticated' character, to

[14] Male respondent (born 1923), Duokiškis town, Rokiškis municipal district, 2005.

[15] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1–14 (p. 1).

[16] Žilvytis Šaknys, 'Politics and festivals: Lithuania's Shrove and Midsummer', in *Politics, Feasts, Festivals*, ed. Gábor Barna and István Povedák (Szeged: Department of Ethnology and Cultural Antthropology, 2014), pp. 136–50 (p. 139–42); Mare Kõiva, 'Calendar Feasts: Politics of Adoption and Reinstatement', in *Estonia and Poland: Creativity and Change in Cultural Communication*, ed. Liisi Laineste, Dorota Brzozowska, and Wladislaw Chlopicki (Tartu: ELM Scholarly Press, 2013), pp. 59–82 (pp. 67–75), www.folklore.ee/pubte/eraamat/eestipoola2/koiva.pdf [accessed 5 July 2017]; Pankhurst, 'Religious Culture', p. 22.

[17] Bożena Gierek, 'Interference of Politics in Celebrating "Dożynki" — The Harvest Festival in Poland in the 1950s', in *Politics, Feasts, Festivals*, ed. Gábor Barna and István Povedák (Szeged: Department of Ethnology and Cultural Antthropology, 2014), pp. 171–92 (pp. 171–88); Anna Lubecka, 'Polish Ritual Year — A Reflection on Polish Cultural Policy', in *Estonia and Poland: Creativity and Change in Cultural Communication*, ed. Liisi Laineste, Dorota Brzozowska, and Wladislaw Chlopicki (Tartu: ELM Scholarly Press, 2013), pp. 83–98 (pp. 89–92), www.folklore.ee/pubte/eraamat/eestipoola2/anna.lubecka.pdf [accessed 5 July 2017].

[18] Lubecka, 'Polish Ritual Year', p. 92.

use Tamara Dragadze's term, describing the shift of religious practice from public to private, from outside the home to its interior.[19]

These domesticated traditions — communal meeting and chanting during May Devotions, sometimes the singing of patriotic hymns and songs — embodied a resistance to the Soviet regime which quite strongly motivated some individuals (especially those who returned from exile or were very religious, or who had connection with perished partisans or close relatives in exile) to perform services. Thus, despite the external regulations imposed by Soviet authorities to prevent people from taking part in religious rituals, May Devotions were practised throughout the entire Soviet period, though mostly because of the efforts of the older generation.

Cross-days were more troublesome. The peculiarity and essence of this ritual was its public face, namely, publicly conducted processions visiting crosses in a certain area. Soviet authorities managed to suppress this tradition by various repressive regulatory measures, such as a prohibition against organising processions and leaving work to take part in them. According to some scholars, the Cross-days had already begun to decline in the 1920s and 30s, when after the land reform, villages were divided into single farmsteads.[20] Despite this, Cross-days were celebrated as before in many places in Lithuania. Many of the respondents remembered them from their childhoods in the first half of the twentieth century and even from the early years of the Soviet period. According to my data this tradition persisted in some villages until the end of the 1960s.[21] Cross-days in small towns also gradually vanished from the streets and took place exclusively inside churchyards. In some areas the practice lasted a little longer, in others, less, but in the early 1970s the festival disappeared even from churchyards; it could not be performed in the limited churchyard space as one of its main goals was to attend crosses in the fields and pray for the harvest.

In some places the ritual survived somewhat longer due to the attitude of local officials. According to my respondents, government

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[19] Tamara Dragadze, 'The Domestication of Religion under Soviet Communism', in *Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Local Practice*, ed. C. M. Hann (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 148–56 (p. 150).

[20] Mardosa, 'Kryžiaus dienos XX a.', p. 97.

[21] Skaidrė Urbonienė, 'Kalendorinės šventės', in *Viduklė*, ed. Antanas Pocius (Kaunas: Naujasis lankas, 2002), pp. 1042–51 (p. 1049); Skaidrė Urbonienė, 'Kryždirbystė Juodupės valsčiuje', in *Juodupė. Onuškis*, ed. Jonas Šedys, Venantas Mačiekus, and Edita Korzonaitė, 2 vols (Vilnius: Versmė, 2012), pp. 1323–32 (pp. 1331–32).

officials differed in their positions on this religious ceremony. Some of them very strictly controlled the behaviour of residents during the Cross-days, others looked more leniently upon the ritual. One respondent recalled a situation when the district chair, who was Russian, learnt about a procession and came to see it. Observing it, he said, 'That's nothing, a nice custom'.[22] Thus, during his time of leadership, people were able to visit the crosses without interruption.

Respondents also had their own opinions as to why the celebration of Cross-days disappeared from the ritual calendar. According to one, the custom was abandoned not because of direct regulation by the Soviet authorities, but because of (1) the disappearance of the villages themselves when, after the massive melioration of lands, people from the old villages were moved into newly built urban settlements and small towns, and (2) the tradition being supported mostly by the older generation. When older people passed away, or were not able to coordinate the procession, and there were no enthusiasts who would make the effort, there was no one who would take responsibility for organising it. Respondents attributed this process to the weakening of religiosity: 'the faith disappeared', or 'the belief was suffocated'.[23]

The disappearance of the Cross-days in the 1960s corresponds with the Soviet Union's most active period of campaigning against religion. According to Atko Remmel, there were three main mechanisms: (1) the stifling of church activity by administrative, legal, and economic means; (2) a propaganda war through the media; and (3) the disruption of religious traditions through the creation of secular equivalents.[24] According to Arūnas Streikus, the general course of anti-religious politics was mitigated in Lithuania after the death of Stalin, but the struggle against the folk faith and participation in Church rituals nevertheless began to strengthen at that time[25] and atheistic pro-

[22] Male respondent (born 1923), Lapieniai village, Rokiškis municipal district, 2005.

[23] Male respondent (born 1925), Leliūnai town, Utena municipal district, 2013.

[24] Atko Remmel, '(Anti)-Religious Aspects of the Cold War: Soviet Religious Policy as Applied in the Estonian SSR', in *Behind the Iron Curtain. Estonia in the Era of the Cold War*, ed. Tõnu Tannberg (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), pp. 359–92 (p. 390), https://www.etis.ee/Portal/Publications/Display/d99831d2-41d2-4fdd-9f49-0b3668a0dc03 [accessed 22 June 2017].

[25] Arūnas Streikus, 'Atlaidai Žemaičių Kalvarijoje ir Šiluvoje: jų pobūdis bei reikšmė sovietmečiu', *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis*, 28 (2006), 339–44 (p. 340).

paganda reached its peak of intensity.[26] During this period, significant decline and even disappearance of Cross-days practices can be seen.

## Concluding Remarks

Both feasts discussed in this paper experienced significant difficulties in the Soviet period. The format of the May Devotions allowed them to be performed both in private and public spaces, while the Cross-days festivals vanished, their public format making it impossible to conduct the visitations to crosses. During the Soviet era, Cross-days thus completely disappeared from the ritual calendar, while May Devotions were secretly organised and celebrated in family circles throughout the entire period. The Soviet time saw the intervention of external regulation — ideological (atheistic propaganda) and physical (land melioration destroying villages and traditional community life) — as well as other methods of control — various prohibitions directed against the conduct of religious rituals — which made a significant impact on these ceremonies. One festival moved from public space into the private space; the other died out.

After the restoration of the independent Lithuanian state in 1990, there was a small revival of May Devotions. At the same time some local communities tried to revive Cross-days processions, but these attempts failed. Currently, May Devotions exist only in the Church space; only a few elderly respondents admitted that they pray at home every evening on May month. Why these two festivals have not been revived on any large scale and are not alive in community and family life today is a question for future research.

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[26] Arūnas Streikus, 'Antireliginė propaganda Lietuvoje 1944–1970 metais', *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 14 (2004), 88–99 (p. 97).

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# Bell-Ringers of the Northern Adriatic: Local Croatian Tradition as World Heritage

**Abstract.** This essay describes the importance of a popular Carnival ritual — bell-ringing — as a contemporary symbol of local culture, visible at a time when many other markers of identity have vanished. Since the tradition's inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity changes have begun to occur in which it has gained visibility, but also an unwelcome notoriety. A ritual that has historically served primarily to tighten the bonds of community has been transformed into a global cultural asset, and the bell-ringers' activities are portrayed and interpreted by individuals and groups outside their communities, often resulting in misunderstandings and frustration.

**Keywords:** Carnival traditions, bell-ringers, local identity, UNESCO, heritage

## Introduction

Children scream with fear as a hundred or more bell-ringers, men wearing terrifying animal masks, brandishing clubs, and wearing loud bells, march close by them. Women withdraw from the first row of onlookers and try to hide when a bell-ringer 'little devil' or 'bear' (common masks in the huge bell-ringers' group) cannot be controlled by two 'soldiers'. These characters often approach women bystanders, hugging them or lifting them into the air, or even knocking them to the ground. Many are impressed by these expressions of raw masculinity and basic instinct. Thus bell-ringers showcase their traditions during Carnival season in both large cities and small rural villages, with some groups performing for tourists and others outside Carnival season. Regardless of time or place, most onlookers agree that the bell-ringers reflect basic and primordial, but completely natural and authentic qualities of men in that region, and perhaps even men in general.

*Fig. 1. Bell-ringers from Rukavac in the circle, the crescendo of their performance, 25 January 2009.*
*Photo by Lidija Nikočević*

## A (Re)construction of Primordial Significance

Widespread interest in all things natural, ecological, and 'authentic', together with a fascination with the supernatural, fantastical, legendary, and magical, promoted by global media in recent decades, serve as an ideal basis for the mythification and positive perception of bell-ringers and their traditions. In fact, their practices are modern-day successors of ancient late winter rituals. Centuries ago, many similar customs were well known and widespread throughout Europe, especially in regions that once belonged to the ancient Roman Empire. These rituals live on today, practised actively in the northern Adriatic area, especially in the hinterland of the harbour city of Rijeka and the tourist destination of Opatija on Kvarner Bay.

According to ancient beliefs and traditions, the ringers were entering into contact with the supernatural, wearing large, hand-made bells

and chasing away evil spirits with their noise and appearance. As interpreted by anthropologists such as Niko Kuret, their masks enabled them to come close to these spirits, scare them away, and at the same time, protect the wearers, who remained safely covered and unrecognised.[1] Protection was important: it was crucial to protect sheep in the early springtime when they were about to leave for fresh, new pastures. It was equally important to protect people from curses and spells, to ensure the fertility of fields, animals, and humans, and to stimulate spring growth in general. The bell-ringers' long marches (up to sixteen kilometres) through their territory have been, and still are, patterns of closed circles, within which nature and people remain 'protected'.

The Bell-Ringers of the Croatian North Adriatic — more precisely, the Kastav area — have preserved most of the magical practices and objects associated with this tradition. Some groups wear masks, others have specific headgear that consists of multicoloured paper flowers and green branches symbolising vegetation that functioned in the context of imitative magic centuries ago. The sheepskins in which they are clothed are turned inside out, since wearing something thus has long been considered to protect against evil spirits. The massive wooden clubs they carry and wave about are also threatening to evil, as are shouting and an animated way of marching which causes the bells strapped around their waists to ring loudly. The bell-ringers' role in stimulating fertility is still reflected today in the phallic shape of their clubs, the ash-filled socks they swing to gently hit onlookers below the waist, and their aggressive attitude toward women, all of which have obvious sexual connotations. Furthermore, traditional names, such as *stari*, *stara* (the old one), for the bell-ringers may suggest that their ancestors' spirits played an important role in the ritual.[2] It is no wonder that such phenomena and practices inspire today's urban population, nurturing ideas and fantasies about a tradition unspoiled by modern civilisation, connecting to the natural world and rural life as they supposedly once were, and connecting with an interest in the supernatural perpetuated in the popular media.

But there is another cultural dimension that has led to perceptions of the bell-ringers as bearers of 'authenticity': a groundswell of inte-

[1] Niko Kuret, *Maske Slovenskih Pokrajin* [*Masks of Slovene Regions*] (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva Založba, 1984), p. 49.

[2] Kuret, *Maske Slovenskih Pokrajin*, p. 58.

rest in, and revival of, local culture in its traditional forms. The idea of belonging to a local culture has become increasingly important alongside, and in response to, globalisation. This, in turn, fosters a kind of elitism that plays an important role in distancing local community members from newcomers and members of out-groups. The great number of songs using local dialect and the festivals that promote this genre of music have given an additional impetus to this expression of local identity. The importance of using local dialect is also echoed in everyday communication; complemented by poetry and fiction, it contributes to a keen sense of nostalgia for the old traditions and a way of life as it once might have been.

Many characteristics of the traditional way of life have disappeared, their memory preserved only in old songs and poetry, and generations-old traditions have disappeared, or now remain only in traces, except for this one: the bell-ringing. Many emotions and practices tied to otherwise forgotten traditions and expressions of local identity are concentrated and coalesced around their practices. Obviously, they serve and nurture the need for markers and symbols of local identity; they are triggers for nostalgia, at the same time inspiring fantasies about the supernatural on one hand and very natural, basic, and authentic traits on the other. Being aware of these facts, the bell-ringers endeavour to serve all of these purposes. Many today would say sincerely that their aim is to 'chase away the winter' and fight against evil spirits, echoing the way ethnographers and the media explain and interpret their activities. However, there are other significant reasons why there are some fifteen active groups of bell-ringers in the area today.

## New Significance of the Bell-Ringers' Practice

Bell-ringers are not insensitive or indifferent to the fact that they are attractive to observers outside their home territory and to the media. They like to see their photos and videos on the internet and in the press. Nonetheless, their most compelling motivations are to represent their villages and families, to bond with other male friends, to strengthen connections within their villages and with other local communities, and, in general, to have fun.

Undertaking a long march around their own and surrounding villages from dawn till late into the night and marching in their specially exaggerated way requires being in top physical condition. Thus,

bell-ringers in most cases are young, healthy, and fit men. They represent their villages and are watched by everyone on performance days, making their villages, families, and girlfriends proud. It is little wonder that bell-ringers are considered desirable by local women and girls. At the same time, they thoroughly enjoy bonding with their male counterparts, claiming that this bonding within an all-male group has a special meaning and quality.

In addition to gaining personal affirmation, they compete with other groups as representatives of their villages. Locals closely analyse which group does a better job of marching and performing each Sunday between 17 January and Ash Wednesday. During this time, each group marches and performs their pageant on a specific Sunday, according to a schedule set more than forty years ago. In this way, everyone can see all the groups over different Sundays, since their routes often partially overlap. A bit like a sporting team, everyone tries to be the best, meaning the strongest and mightiest, full of energy but also disciplined, since they must appear as a unified force. If someone were to fall, or fail to march the full distance, or get heavily drunk, it would bring shame on that person, his family, friends, and his whole village; the story would be remembered for decades. Who was better, whose tradition is the oldest, whose tradition is the most authentic — these are topics of hot-tempered discussions during the season, in local pubs and private wine-cellars filled with men. At other times of the year, in contrast, most people have occupations outside their villages and their personal and social lives in recent decades are much more private and individualistic than they were half a century ago.

The wine-cellars where they gather are decorated with objects associated with quotidian life, old hand-powered coffee grinders and other kitchen utensils, agricultural tools, pots and jugs, traditional musical instruments, bell-ringers equipment, and other memorabilia that turn conversation to topics of the past. Frequently they talk of the 'good old times', legendary bell-men who have passed away, stories of those who lost control when marching, and many themes within the sphere of domestic life, history, and tradition. In this way, the men are the ones who constantly create and re-create the history of the community at that time of year. As people socialise throughout that period more than at any other time, this is undoubtedly a time when each community grows closer, rebuilding a kind of common denominator of qualities that are characteristic for that particular group and that

keep them together as a cultural and social unit. More than ever, despite many hot-tempered discussions, they (both bell-men and the local community in general) feel the ties among them more intensely than at other times in the calendar year. In this way, bell-ringers foster cohesion within their local communities and contribute to social survival, much as they contributed to prosperity and fertility many centuries ago by fighting against evil spirits. Where they previously fostered man-to-nature relationships, in modern times they foster man-to-man relationships.

*Fig. 2. Bell-ringers from Bregi, 15 February 2010. Photo by Lidija Nikočević*

## Bell-Ringers as Heritage

After UNESCO introduced the Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001,[3] several anthropologists at Croatia's Ministry of Culture began working on the theme,

[3] UNESCO, 'Proclamation of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (2001–2005), https://ich.unesco.org/en/proclamation-of-masterpieces-00103 [accessed 13 October 2020].

leading to the development of the Department for Intangible Culture and the Advisory Committee for Intangible Cultural Heritage, founded in 2004. As one of the members of that committee since its founding, I advocated for the term 'intangible culture' as more appropriate and flexible than 'intangible cultural heritage', but UNESCO's approach was consistently followed, and our terminology adjusted to fit. Regardless of confusion over the term 'heritage', we emphasised repeatedly that our work was about 'living traditions', not about historic or moribund ones, or those alive only on stage. One of the paradoxes of the heritage paradigm is that if a phenomenon is alive, it probably does not require preservation and, if it has vanished, preservation will not help it. The word 'protection', repeatedly used in our Advisory Committee discussions, led to many misunderstandings among the bell-ringers following eventual inscription on the Representative List, which uses UNESCO's preferred term, 'safeguarding'.

The Croatian Minister of Culture had an ambitions to propose a remarkable number of cultural phenomena for inclusion on UNESCO's Representative List in the space of just one year and the bell-ringers were one of sixteen candidates. Personally, I felt ambivalent. Having worked with bell-ringers for decades, my position as an ethnologist became more complex because I was no longer only a researcher, but now also the person assessing and evaluating a tradition according to externally imposed criteria. Gradually, I became quite critical of UNESCO's concept of intangible culture,resenting the 'top-down' approach and the fact that local communities were only marginally involved in the process.

One could also ask what I wanted to achieve with my work on the Committee. As a researcher dealing with intangible cultural phenomena, I was interested in whether this initiative would lead to petrification and alienation from living social and cultural origins, and whether this approach to specific assets would also stimulate the invention of traditions and other processes. I was also interested in what happens to phenomena of intangible culture once they become politicised through international and national governmental 'protection' programmes. It seemed that almost everywhere, such regimes are mainly about the pride of national governments, as the number of cultural phenomena on the list gives outsiders an impression of the wealth of cultural heritage of a particular state, while at the same time, the *bearers* of those cultural traditions seemed to be of lesser importance. Last, but not least, I realised that it was not easy for someone educated as

an ethnologist to judge the value of an isolated cultural asset, since ethnologists, folklorists, and anthropologists insist on contextual cultural analysis.

At the UNESCO conference in Abu Dhabi in late September 2009, the Kastav region bell-ringers were inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, along with six other intangible cultural assets from Croatia. The inscription included all of the traditional bell-ringer groups from Bregi, Brgud, Frlanija, Halubje, Mučići, Mune, Rukavac, Zvoneće, Žejane, Vlahov Breg and Korensko.[4] I learned of this one day before leaving for a trip abroad and shared the information with bell-ringers, especially the group leaders. While abroad, I monitored national and local press on the internet for reactions to the news. I incredulously read the articles on a local newspaper's website, which reported that only Halubje bell-ringers had been inscribed on the list, and that this was the result of their own long-term effort.[5] The community of Halubje bell-ringers is the only group that wears masks, they are more than two hundred in number, and, thanks to their travels and dominance in the media, they are best known to the wider public. They are thus considered typical, the 'real' bell-ringers, and an interview with their leader was published in which he proudly claimed the same.[6]

Only a day later, another article was published discussing how it was possible that only one group was included on the Representative List while the others were not. I regretted being away as the misunderstandings kept piling up, culminating in discontent and conflict. I was faced with the dilemma of whether I should contact the newspaper and explain that all groups are indeed included on the list and also stress that this was not a matter of protection, but of inscription on a list, which instead implies safeguarding, care, and a certain acknowledgment of value. Later that day, I found an article, 'We are the Exclusive Bearers of the Protection', which included a statement by the president of the Halubje bell-ringers,

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[4] Republic of Croatia, Ministry of Culture, 'Annual Carnival Bell Ringers' Pageant from the Kastav Area, Nomination, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ivAc77gJgg [accessed 13 October 2020].

[5] Slavica Mrkić Modrić, 'Koji su to zvončari s podruičja Kastva?', *Novi list* (Rijeka), 1 October 2009.

[6] Kristina Danilović Prijić, 'Halubajski zvončari na listi UNESCO-a', *Novi list* (Rijeka), 27 September 2009.

*The fact that we are inscribed on the UNESCO list means also that we have the prerequisites to embark on the process of the protection of intellectual property, which will give us control over the usage of the Halubje bell-ringer mask for commercial or other purposes.*[7]

It was difficult to believe that no one from the Ministry was able to explain to the media what had actually been happening by simply referring to the document. It remains unclear whether it was a matter of poor communication, of the media's tendency to construct an intrigue, and/or the insistence of the Halubje bell-ringers that they were the only ones to be included on the list. At the same time, many of my old doubts and criticisms concerning this type of evaluation of living traditions, or 'intangible cultural heritage', were intensified. I was surprised at the deep antagonism evident between the different bell-ringer groups. In this case they were divided into two blocks, those from the western and those from the eastern part of the Kastav area. However, the crescendo of tensions was yet to come.

Before I sent an explanation to the editors of the newspaper, which, as the journalist later wrote, 'solved all the dilemmas relating to which bell-ringer group is inscribed on the UNESCO list',[8] the White Sunday (Bela nedeja), a three-day long traditional fair, had started in Kastav. On this occasion, a tourist agency printed T-shirts with the following text: 'I am also a bell-ringer from the UNESCO list', with UNESCO's logo in the middle. The function, they thought, was twofold: to provide an additional affirmation for the Halubje bell-ringers, who were indeed on the list, and to allow others to express their wish to be included on the same list by wearing the T-shirt. Even though those who designed the T-shirt claimed it was just a joke, the bell-ringers from the western part of the area who were at first not mentioned in the media and who also frequented that fair, saw this as the ultimate provocation and attributed it to the Halubje bell-ringers. 'I wanted to tear it to pieces!' said an angry bell-ringer from Mučići,[9] remembering that a fight nearly broke out between groups from the western Kastav area and the Halubje bell-ringers, who were sponsoring a beverage booth at the *Bela*

[7] Slavica Mrkić Modrić, 'Mi smo isključivi nositelji projekta', *Novi list* (Rijeka), 2 October 2009.

[8] Slavica Mrkić Modrić, 'Svi zvončari halubajskog i matuljskog kraja pod zaštitom', *Novi list* (Rijeka), 4 October 2009.

[9] Interview with bell-ringer D. G. from Mučići, 10 February 2010.

*nedeja* fair. Several months after the event, another bell-ringer said to me indignantly,

> *Whom did you ask!? I am against us being under UNESCO. Who signed it in our name, anyway? Now they expect money from it […] It is dividing people, it's what brought us against one another. How can you explain UNESCO to a half-literate man? They don't know what to expect now, they think a bunch of people will come here, they are afraid of that […] We have no use for it, it is destroying the old bell-ringers, who are disappearing as it is. There will be war with the Halubje bell-ringers too […] They should all just leave us alone; we don't need that. We would gladly un-inscribe ourselves. It's not ours anymore […] Now that it is protected, it is everyone's. Globalised.*[10]

I did not have many arguments to dispute his doubts and statements, because I shared his opinion to a certain degree. Moreover, his words partly reflect the views of many anthropologists and ethnologists dealing with negative effects and aspects of UNESCO's cultural policy relating to intangible cultural heritage.

After my explanation had been printed in the newspaper, tensions among the western bell-ringers subsided, but the topic re-emerged several months later in a meeting where I was invited to talk to representatives of the majority of bell-ringer groups inscribed on the List. To the repeatedly asked question, 'Why does anyone have to protect us? The people from Paris?', I answered that it is not a matter of protection, but rather of safeguarding, recognition, and the possibility of being more visible, that no one would protect them against their will, and that probably nothing overly dramatic would happen. I pointed out that this status enabled them to apply for national and international financial support for organising exhibitions, printing materials and books, making films, or designing programmes as needed, and that this would not necessarily disturb their usual Carnival practices. Some of the bell-ringers were positive about it and it seemed that their number has increased over time:

> *It's an honour. We should know how to make use of it. People see you differently — they see that you are worth something. It is not like — you've come up with something and now you go around doing mischief. Now we are regarded as culture.*[11]

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[10] Interview with bell-ringer A. J. from Mučići, 15 April 2010.

[11] Interview with bell-ringer D. M. from Halubje, 27 February 2010.

*Fig. 3. Halubje bell-ringers known for their impressive animal masks, 23 January 2010. Photo by Lidija Nikočević*

The Carnival practices of groups gain a new, serious significance in their respective local communities when inscribed on the UNESCO list. This is no laughing matter. In the words of a member of the women's Carnival group that used to mask themselves as caricatures of bell-ringers, making fun of their virile appearance,

> *We didn't mask as bell-ringers this year; we thought about it but not everyone was in favour, so we didn't. We can't joke about it; we don't want to, and we can't, especially now they are in the UNESCO list. The criteria are different now; they are protected.*[12]

This surely reduces the potential number of different creative interpretations — one doesn't joke about such a serious thing as heritage.

The form and content of the bell-ringers' Carnival practices has, for a number of years, shown a tendency to codify, standardise, and 're-traditionalise'. Many rules that regulate this custom are much stricter today than in the past. For example, all the participants within a group

[12] Interview with S. M., a girl from the female Carnival group Kunpanija z Halubja from Viškovo, 8 April 2010.

must have exactly the same headgear and other equipment, whereas earlier rules were not so inflexible. Obviously, this is not the result solely of new rules, but of other processes as well, such as a perceived need for recognisable features by which to delineate individual groups, used for identification among themselves.

It is well-known that local culture is frequently converted into economic capital, useful for regional and national representation, particularly by the tourism industry. When it comes to living traditions, these spheres emphasise the performative, public aspects of cultural phenomena, instead of their private and intimate meanings. The bell-ringers' saying, 'Carnival is for poor men and drunkards', suggests an attitude that the practice should stay on the margins, self-contained, and away from strangers, which is obviously no longer the case.

The realisation of tradition-as-heritage represented a challenge for one of the most important local traditional practices — collective negotiation and conflict resolution within the community. Outsider perspectives of community are often idealised, as Dorothy Noyes clearly observed in her Catalonian examples where there were elements of urban romanticism in which communities are often perceived as solitary and economically indifferent, while internal relationships and power balances are overlooked.[13] Cultural bureaucracies that are not a part of local communities impose themselves on the process of evaluation and interpretation of living traditions. Outside observers know little of local realities and their activities, which often results in intervention in the form of commercialisation, corruption and control — intervention because something must be done with the tradition to demonstrate activity and safeguarding, which in turn implies that tradition cannot continue without 'management' (which is also a condition for inscription on the UNESCO list). In this way, the establishment of a bureaucratic mechanism perpetuates itself through the commercialisation of cultural phenomena, and the process easily leads to the development of individual interest and a concentration of power.

And yet, bureaucrats are only one of the interest groups desiring to use bell-ringers' traditions for their own purposes. In the socialist period during which Croatia and five other republics existed within the

[13] Dorothy Noyes, 'In the Blood: Performance and Identity in the Catalan Transition to Democracy', *Narodna Umjetnost* [*Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research*], 40 (2003), 65–80.

framework of Yugoslavia, folklore ensembles were very popular and local associations aimed to inspire city youth with folk culture. Many songs and dances, along with some customs and rituals, were performed on stage. In the 1960s, the state folklore ensemble Lado even staged a short bell-ringers' programme that was soon forgotten. That culture was anonymous and decontextualized; virtually no one was thinking critically about cultural appropriation, or the ramifications of interpreting someone else's cultural traditions. Folklore ensembles are still popular in the area and some of them perform Croatian traditions all over the world.

The broadening of our understanding of folklore to include ideas of intangible culture or intangible cultural heritage has accentuated and included the bearers and holders of particular traditions. They are empowered within this new approach, as it became clear that a conscious, self-aware, and proud community is a prerequisite for the successful survival of a living cultural tradition.

In January 2020, these two ways of understanding and approaching folk culture clashed. For the International Green Week in Berlin (an international exhibition of food, agriculture and gardening industries), the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture decided to send bell-ringers as a special attraction. When they contacted bell-ringers from Halubje and from Brgud, they asked them to send a couple of men each to Berlin. The bell-ringers replied that they are a group and cannot be reduced to just one or two pairs since they cannot perform and show the ritual in that way; like a sports team, one or two members are not enough. The organiser did not contact them again but instead invited a 'folklore ensemble' and asked them to provide four men who would act as bell-ringers. The Ivan Goran Kovačić ensemble was able to find and put together costumes and went to Berlin. The event was reported in the media and the bell-men were extremely offended, furious, and embittered. They engaged an attorney to defend their rights. The case got a lot attention in the media, while ethnographers, folklorists, and anthropologists organised a panel discussion on the rights of communities over their own cultural traditions. The secretary of the Kovačić ensemble said that if it was forbidden to show intangible cultural heritage on stage they would have to disband, since every single tradition has a corresponding source group or carrier. Some ethnographers contended that it is not the same as a song that is known in a vast number of communities and could be understood without much contextualisa-

tion, as opposed to a bell-ringers' ritual that should be contextualised and that loses its sense when staged in an extremely reduced way. The representative of the ensemble disagreed, claiming that every song has its context too, and that Croatian cultural heritage — especially that on UNESCO's list — is for everyone in Croatia and around the world.

The discussion stopped at the stage of identifying and outlining various attitudes and views of the participants, but it is expected to continue. Hopefully it will, because many questions remain open, among them the extent to which it is beneficial to follow the UNESCO paradigm for intangible culture. Even though evaluation of intangible cultural heritage through UNESCO's framework has already been imposed, to what extent it is possible to rule it out or ignore it? What rights do holders have over their living traditions? Can and should they control what is happening in the wider world with something that is very intimate, that they regard as their own? Is it better for some traditions to remain 'marginal' and less visible, or even to cease? These are complex issues demanding thoughtful answers, answers that will shape future policies regarding intangible culture that will shape the lives of generations to come.

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# The Development and Management of a Transnational Tradition: The Case of Diwali in Leicester

**Abstract.** Many customs and traditions originating from outside of the United Kingdom are now becoming integrated within the identity of certain areas. This can be observed in Leicester, a city of 330,000 in the East Midlands of England. Leicester is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the UK, with fifty per cent of the population now ethnic 'minority', with Indians making up the largest element, the highest rate outside of London. The culture and heritage of these groups are observed in different ways, and a notable example is Diwali. Also known as The Festival of Lights, Diwali spiritually signifies the victory of light over darkness, and is traditionally celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains. The Diwali celebrations in Leicester are some of the biggest outside of India, with up to 40,000 people attending the switch-on of lights and Diwali Day. The festival now occurs over a two-week period, with a firework display, Ferris wheel and live cultural entertainment including dance exhibitions and classes, storytelling workshops and cooking demonstrations. This paper focuses on how the Diwali celebrations in Leicester have developed over time from a small local event in 1983 with a few lights on display, to becoming a celebration of Leicester's multi-cultural heritage, and the revamp of 2015, with over fifty events. These changes are explored through an examination of Leicester City Council's Festival and Events Unit.

**Keywords:** tradition, transnational, Diwali, Leicester, multi-cultural

## Introduction

There are many traditions and customs in the United Kingdom which have a long history, embedded in their local communities for generations. There are also traditions which have originated in a different country and have migrated to the UK as populations move and adapt. From a UNESCO perspective, traditions, also expressed as intangible cultural heritage (ICH), are defined as 'practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills [...] that communities, groups and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage, and is transmitted

from generation to generation'.[1] How does this focus on traditions and community evolve in a multicultural country such as the United Kingdom? As UNESCO indicates 'many multicultural States do not restrict themselves to the expressions and practices of the most widespread culture but rather undertake, from the start, to consider the intangible cultural heritage of minority groups'.[2] According to social anthropologist Kate Fox, 'Resident immigrant minority cultures can shape the behaviour, customs, beliefs and values of the countries in which they settle.'[3] An example of this can be found in the city of Leicester in the East Midlands of England. It has one of the most multicultural populations in the country, and as such for the past thirty years the heritage, traditions, and festivals of the city have transformed to include a diverse array of diasporic cultural events, such as the Mela, Caribbean Carnival, and Diwali. It is the last of these festivals on which I have focused attention. Through my research into ICH safeguarding in the East Midlands, I arranged a collaboration with Leicester City Council (LCC), whereby I took the lead in a Festivals Review for 2016 to 2020. This entailed working alongside the Festivals and Events team, which is part of the Arts and Museums Services. My position over the following months allowed me to gain privileged access to the busy activities of the LCC Festivals and Events unit, and their management of various traditional events in the city. The Festivals Review process started in the summer of 2015 and culminated with the interviews of thirteen external festival providers, including An Indian Summer, and six interviews covering the festivals directly managed by the Festivals and Events team. The largest of these were the Diwali celebrations which take place in autumn each year. Through the interviews and working alongside the council team, it became apparent that the Diwali celebrations of Leicester stand out as an example of national importance and increasing awareness from the council of the pre-eminence of the festival in promoting tourism and adding value to the council's objectives.

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[1] UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17716&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html [accessed 16 June 2016].

[2] UNESCO, Drawing up Inventories (2016), http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/drawing-up-inventories-00313 [accessed 24 May 2016].

[3] Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), p. 17.

## Immigration in Leicester

In the second half of the twentieth century huge societal and population changes occurred in Britain, transforming major cities such as Leicester. The diaspora, which according to Lowenthal 'are notably heritage-hungry', brought a richness of traditions.[4] According to Vertovec, 'diaspora' is the term often used today to describe practically any population which is considered 'de-territorialised', or 'transnational', that is, whose cultural origins are said to have arisen in a land other than that in which they currently reside.[5] In addition, Stuart Hall states that 'the Diaspora experience [...] is defined [...] by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity'.[6] Flusty argues that this 'hybridity is neither new nor distinct, but an omnipresent underpinning of cultural formation' as 'all cultures are hybrids of other culture's influences and always have been'.[7]

According to Visram, in 1932 there were 7,128 Indians living in the United Kingdom,[8] not all of whom would have been Hindu. By the 1950s, there were approximately 70,000 Indians in Britain, again divided between Hindu, Muslim, Sikh.[9] By 1977, there were approximately 307,000 Hindus living in Britain,[10] many of whom were living in Leicester, having made the city their home in the early 1970s. The Hindu population of Leicester saw its biggest transformation after the expulsion of Asians in Uganda by Idi Amin in 1972. Leicester City Council, afraid that it could not cope with a large influx of Asians, placed advertisements in Ugandan newspapers urging the Asians to stay away from

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4 David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 9.

5 Steven Vertovec, *The Hindu Diaspora*: *Comparative Patterns* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 141.

6 Stuart Hall, Cultural Identity and Diaspora, in *Identity: Community, Culture, and Difference,* ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222–237 (p.235).

7 Steven Flusty, *De-Coca-Colonization: Making the Globe from the Inside Out* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p. 122.

8 Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain 1700–1947* (London: Routledge. 2016) p. 190.

9 Burghart (ed.), *Hinduism in Great Britain*, p. 7.

10 Burghart (ed.), *Hinduism*, p. 8.

Leicester.[11] However, according to city mayor Sir Peter Soulsby, 'The ad was gloriously counterproductive [...] it brought Leicester to the attention of people who had never thought of coming to the city.' As a result, 5,000 Ugandan Asians moved to Leicester, nearly one in five of the 27,000 who came to Britain.[12] The Ugandan Asians were predominantly Hindus, originally from Gujurat in India. By 1978, it was estimated that approximately 42,000 Asians lived in Leicester, comprising about 15 per cent of the total population. Of these, many were East African Asians (comprising Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania — 19,500, or 46.5 per cent of the Asian population).[13]

In the forty years since,

> *Leicester has become the poster city for multicultural Britain, a place where the stunning number and size of the minorities — the 55 mosques, 18 Hindu temples, nine Sikh gurudwaras, two synagogues, two Buddhist centres and one Jain centre — are seen not as a recipe for conflict or a millstone around the city's neck, but a badge of honour.*[14]

This multiculturalism has resulted in the 2011 Census showing Leicester with a White British minority (45 per cent). Furthermore, of the 330,000 population, Leicester now has the highest proportion of British Indians (28 per cent), compared with the rest of the East Midlands as a whole, in which Indians represent 3.7 per cent of the population.[15] This high Indian population in Leicester means that the city has the third highest percentage of Hindu people in England and

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[11] Keith Somerville, 'Ugandan Asians — Successful Refugees', *BBC News*, 8 November 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/2399549.stm [accessed 23 December 2015].

[12] Peter Popham, 'We're all in this together: How Leicester became a model of multiculturalism (even if that was never the plan…)', *The Independent*, 26 July 2013, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/were-all-in-this-together-how-leicester-became-a-model-of-multiculturalism-even-if-that-was-never-8732691.html [accessed 4 January 2019].

[13] Deborah Phillips, 'The Social and Spatial Segregation of Asians in Leicester', in *Social Interaction and Ethnic Segregation*, ed. Peter Jackson (London: Academic Press, 1981), pp. 101–121 (p. 104).

[14] Popham, 'We're all in this together'.

[15] Palash Ghosh, 'The Golden Mile: Could Leicester, The Most Ethnically Diverse Place in Britain, Become UK's First Asian-Majority City?' *International Business Times*, 19 February 2014, https://www.ibtimes.com/golden-mile-could-leicester-most-ethnically-diverse-place-britain-become-uks-first-asian-majority [accessed 13 November 2015].

Wales (15 per cent). Peter Winstone talks of phases of ethnic minority involvement in Leicester, from a phase of conflict in the 1970s, to a constructive phase in the 1980s, to one of maturity and cultural aspiration at the time he was writing in the mid-1990s: 'By this we mean that second and third generations of […] people born and growing up in Leicester want to celebrate their "dual heritage" as British people of Asian […] descent'.[16]

However, Seán McLoughlin provides a detailed critique which contextualizes the complicated institutional rhetoric concerning Leicester as a successful multicultural and multi-Asian city.[17] It is important to note that the lived experiences of Asians immigrating to Leicester and those growing up there, may be in direct contrast to the notion of Leicester as a 'poster city for multicultural Britain'.

## What is Diwali?

Diwali is an important festival, celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. In the sacred text Ramayana, Diwali marks the return of Rama to his kingdom after defeating Ravana, the demon king who ruled Sri Lanka and kidnapped Rama's wife, Sita.[18] It also celebrates Krishna's victory over Narakasura, the demon of ignorance. Diwali is called the Festival of Lights as people light their houses to celebrate the victory of good over evil (light over darkness). The word itself is a short form of the word Deepawali, meaning 'cluster of lamps'. Similar to Easter, the date of Diwali changes each year. This is because it is determined by both the position of the moon and the Hindu lunisolar calendar and varies in the Gregorian Calendar between 17 October and 15 November every year.[19]

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16 Peter Winstone, 'Managing a Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Cultural City in Europe: Leicester', *International Social Science Journal*, 48 (March 1996) 33–41 (p. 39).

17 Seán McLoughlin, 'Discrepant representations of multi-Asian Leicester: institutional discourse and everyday life in the "model" multicultural city,' *Writing the City in British Asian Diasporas*, S. McLoughlin, W. Gould, A. J. Kabir, and E. Tomalin, E., eds (London and New York: Routledge). pp. 89–113.

18 Diwali: Celebrating the Triumph of Goodness, https://www.hinduismtoday.com/pdf_downloads/pagers/Hindu-Festival_Diwali_broadsheet-color.pdf [accessed 13 December 2015].

19 Deepavali 2020, http://www.deepavali.net/calendar.php [accessed 3 June 2020].

## Diwali in Leicester

Described by the *Telegraph* as 'an Indian adventure on British soil',[20] the tradition of celebrating Diwali in a public sphere in Leicester started in 1982 with a stage outside the Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre and a small fireworks display. In 1995, the stage was moved to the Belgrave flyover site and managed by LCC Highways Contracts Team as the road closure was considered to be the most important management element of the event for the council. This position changed in 2002 when the management of Diwali was taken over by Leicester City Council's Festival and Events Unit. The celebrations have consisted of a Diwali light switch on event and a Diwali Day event, involving fireworks display on Cossington Recreation Ground. In 2006, LCC spent nearly £100,000 on new decorations, including 6,000 light bulbs. Leicester City Council directly delivers the Diwali celebrations with a budget of £88,000. This is aided by the Diwali Working Party, which includes representatives from Leicester Hindu Festival Council, an umbrella body for all Hindu organisations in Leicester. For both of these events the Council's Festivals and Events team have provided payment to the Leicester Hindu Festival Council to cover the costs of organising a programme of performances on the main stage.

## Leicester City Council Festivals and Events Unit

The Diwali Switch On celebrations occurred on 1 November 2015, with the switch on of 6,500 lights, the twenty-fourth year of the event between Belgrave Road and Cossington Street Recreation Ground. Attendance in 2015 was 35,000 for the Switch On, on 1 November, and 41,000 for Diwali Day. Such a large event takes many months of preparation and careful planning, and this is the responsibility of the Festivals and Events Unit, within the Arts and Museums Service of Leicester City Council. The festivals team start work on Diwali early in the year, though in 2015 the commemorations for the reburial of Richard III meant that the start of Diwali preparations was delayed. In reality,

[20] 'What is Diwali and what are the best ways to celebrate the 2015 festival in the UK tonight?' *Telegraph*, 10 November 2015, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/festivals-and-events/Diwali-festival-of-lights-what-is-it-and-when-does-it-take-place [accessed 13 November 2015].

meetings occur immediately after the previous Diwali to discuss the outcomes and to produce action plans for the following year. In 2015 the traditional Diwali celebrations saw a shift towards a bigger showpiece, over two weeks. Leicester City Council have been aware of the need to improve the offering and make changes after years of stagnation. As Sarah Levitt, Head of Arts and Museums Service at LCC from 2006 to 2018, stated:

> *Diwali at that time was very popular but very bound by its own traditions in Leicester and the way in which it was delivered. We all knew it needed to be relaxed and changed and developed, so we commissioned a piece of research into what we should do with Diwali, which pointed us in a direction where we came up with a plan for how we might change it. And we began it this year and incremental […] but by golly it's been difficult.*[21]

The piece of work commissioned by the council to research Diwali was produced by Johal Strategic Services and the New Art Exchange, a Nottingham based arts space, the largest gallery in the UK dedicated to culturally diverse contemporary visual arts.[22] They produced 'Switched On', a confidential discussion paper for the council. An audience survey was also carried out in late 2014 in the Belgrave area by the Arts and Museums Service, for which 292 completed questionnaires were returned. The results from these reports led to a Culture and Neighbourhoods Services Briefing report entitled 'Changes to the Leicester Diwali Celebrations', authored by Simon Brown, who worked as the Cultural Programme Coordinator at Leicester City Council. In early 2014, Arts Council England awarded the council £200,000 for the Sustaining the Momentum programme, in recognition of its work on the City of Culture bid. The UK City of Culture was designed to build on the success of Liverpool's year as of European Capital of Culture in 2008, which had significant social and economic benefits for the area, and is given to a city in the United Kingdom for one year. Leicester was one of four shortlisted cities which bid for the 2017 title, but it lost out to Hull. The Sustaining the Momentum funding was established in order to ensure the hard work of putting together the bid would not

[21] Sarah Levitt, personal communication, 19 February 2016.

[22] New Art Exchange, http://www.nae.org.uk/page/who-are-we/3 [accessed 12 May 2020].

go to waste. A portion of this money was put towards a Culture Fund Project, which was a programme to enhance cultural activity across the key events in 2015. This culminated in a £20,000 grant across four projects and match funding from Arts Council England.

Four projects were chosen: Digital Sparklers; Live Rangoli Art; Constellation: Installation and Drop-In Printmaking Workshops; and Ram Lila. The Digital Sparklers occurred at the Diwali Switch On. Run by Inspirate, it was a large-scale digital art interactive installation, held in tandem with the firework display on Cossington Park. Using an object that shines light, such as a torch, phone, or glow stick, young people and families had the opportunity to draw or write a special Diwali message on a 15-foot giant screen. The second project was the Live Rangoli Art, in which international rangoli artist, Janak Chauhan demonstrated his rangoli skills by creating intricate patterns made from coloured sand on the floor. On Diwali Day, ten days after the switch on event, another project, Ram Lila, saw dancers perform on Belgrave Road. The fourth project occurred before the start of the Diwali celebrations. Constellation designed and led by artist printmaker Serena Smith, which celebrated Diwali's themes of light, friendship and festivity. She had led Light Up, a series of workshops teaching printmaking to young people at Moat Community College, Sparkenhoe Primary School, Highfields Library and St. Denys Church. The workshop participants made colourful lanterns and produced objects used by the artist to form the artwork Constellation. The final piece was installed in Leicester Print Workshop's new building in Leicester's Cultural Quarter.[23]

On 1 December 2015, the final part of the Festivals Review process occurred, when Maggie Shutt, Festivals and Events Manager at LCC, was interviewed for the Diwali section of the review mentioned above. The same questions were asked about Diwali as were presented to the organisers of the other festivals and events in the review process. The first section of questions referred to funding, both from the council and in-kind support. As previously stated, the City Council has an allocated budget of £88,000 and income generated from the Wheel of Light. When questioned about in-kind support, Maggie Shutt replied that LCC receives in kind support from a variety of sources, such as

[23] Light Up: A Project to Celebrate Friendship, Festivity and Light, http://www.leicesterprintworkshop.com/exhibitions-and-projects/projects/light_up/ [accessed 13 May 2020].

BBC Radio Leicester, and the Leicester Hindu Festival Council (which produces the stage programme). Furthermore, Kumar and Pravin Mistry from the Leicester Belgrave Mela managed and coordinated two stages on the weekend in between Switch-On and Diwali Day. Furthermore, Belgrave Business Association promote and advertise the event to persuade people to attend. In the last three years there is also other funding, such as sponsorship, Western Union providing £10,000, income from advertising in the Diwali Guide (the income returns to the Council, though a different department to Festivals and Events), and free advertising in national brochures.

Another question posed to Leicester City Council related to the economic benefits of the festival to Leicester citizens. In reply, the benefits to businesses were discussed, especially on the Golden Mile. Although the actual income generated has not been officially calculated, it is likely to be a huge amount and of great importance to businesses in the area. There is also a financial knock on effect to the Greater Belgrave area, and the city centre, as people go to the city centre for shopping, eating and leisure as part of the overall experience. The Diwali Guide signposts visitors and locals to other linked activities or shopping, and there are the benefits of using the park and ride, and extra business for hotels, travel companies, restaurants, and cafes throughout Leicester.

As important as the economic benefits are, the social benefits to Leicester citizens are equally important. Maggie Shutt was keen to emphasise that the Leicester Diwali lights are renowned throughout the United Kingdom. This is a major part of the celebration and adds to the pride and prestige for Leicester and its citizens. It is also a family event, it is free for all, open and accessible, and the change to the programme has given more choice and options to participate, such as work done in schools (Rangoli, Diwali tool kits), and music and dance workshops. Diwali in Leicester meets several of the Council's aims and objectives, such as 'building a strong future' and 'teaching of the heritage of Leicester', which has been achieved through workshops in neighbourhood centres and schools and through youth programming. There is an understanding of young people's desire to enjoy Diwali in a different way which the changes in 2015 reflected.

Leicester City Council considers the efficiency and effectiveness of the festivals it delivers as very important, and this question is asked to all the organisers. For the LCC, Diwali is now attracting a new audi-

ence — lots of students, tourists and people from outside of Leicester who are staying with family members. The Diwali Lights Switch-On was recognised at the Asian Media Awards 2015 in the Best Live Event category.[24] This shows that Diwali is being successfully and effectively managed and the award is added prestige for Leicester City Council, and the city as a whole. Maggie Shutt emphasised that the LCC is not resting on its laurels, but is looking to expand the Diwali offer and increase its profile both nationally and internationally. It has attempted this through consultations. A revision has been the change from the Diwali Working Party to a Diwali Advisory Panel. This is chaired by Councillor Singh Clair but brings in a wider input from LCC agencies and external agencies, commercial activity, wider programming and marketing. An extended Diwali Guide brings in local businesses and advertises shops on the Golden Mile. This has also allowed for wider community business and organisations to be involved in the celebrations. The Belgrave flyover, which in the past has acted as a barrier between the city centre and Belgrave Road has been removed, and a roundabout re-landscaped. Belgrave now has better connectivity with the city centre, and it allowed in 2015 an extension of the lighting towards the city centre and offered the possibility of the successful Big Wheel for the first time.

A Diwali Leicester Plan 2015–2018 looked at marketing, programming and funding. Marketing of Leicester Diwali celebrations appears to be of paramount importance for LCC. The Diwali Plan makes clear that additional marketing opportunities are needed for raising the profile of Diwali. This includes the development of the celebrations into the city centre to expand and connect it to Belgrave Road, and also to develop city centre packages with the county. Linked to this is the desire to create a Diwali Leicester 'brand' and logo. The Diwali Action Plan has ambitions to extend the programming, with an exploration to possibly add to the festival lights beyond the Belgrave roundabout into the city centre. It also seeks to develop the stage programme and have a wider contribution of events over the two week programme. Finally, the development of funding opportunities saw the Festivals unit hoping to develop links with Leicester's Re-imagine India projects with

[24] Asian Culture Vulture, 'Asian Media Awards 2015: Triumph for "India's Daughter"', 31 October 2015, http://asianculturevulture.com/portfolios/asian-media-awards-2015-triumph-for-indias-daughter/ [accessed 26 May 2020].

the Curve and Attenborough Arts, who had both received funding from Arts Council England.

The changes over the past few years are seen as a necessary step by the LCC to avoid complacency with the Diwali offerings from the council, but to stimulate new ideas, especially to attract younger generations and tourists to the area. However, this has occurred with occasional opposition, and according to one LCC employee, the Leicester Hindu Festival Council has been resistant to change. Nevertheless, there are other organisations linked with the Hindu community in Leicester which are keen to explore innovations. One such entity is Inspirate with their arts and culture festival, An Indian Summer.

## An Indian Summer

Although the city council plays the biggest role in managing Diwali in Leicester, there are other groups and individuals who are involved in implementation, one of which is a young company called Inspirate. It was set up by Jiten Anand and Sean Carroll in 2011 to inspire, educate and challenge people through 'creativity'. This happens through events, such as An Indian Summer (AIS), and other projects, seminars, talks or workshops. According to Inspirate, An Indian Summer is a South Asian culture and arts festival, celebrating Indian culture designed to educate about culture and arts, and create a platform for people of all ages (Inspirate 2015).

I interviewed Jiten Anand and Sean Carroll at their base at Phoenix in Leicester's Cultural Quarter in December 2015, having already met them during the LCC Festivals Review process for An Indian Summer at the City Hall. During the review meeting and subsequent interview, it was apparent that the company has a good working relationship with Leicester City Council, and the individuals who work in the Festivals and Events Unit. This good working relationship has seen Inspirate play a larger role in the Diwali celebrations in Leicester, most noticeably with the Digital Sparklers event. During the interview with Jiten and Sean it became evident that they would like to see An Indian Summer become an integral part of the Diwali celebrations of Leicester for the foreseeable future. They saw that 'change is necessary, and it needs to be innovative', but also that it needs to be 'as organic as possible', which they felt had been the case with the changes in 2015.[25] The ques-

[25] Jiten Anand, personal communication, 7 December 2015.

tion arose whether the changes to the Diwali traditional event were too extreme, but the response was a perception that the 'show wasn't stolen', and that the celebrations are 'best done in collaboration'. Anand and Carroll were honest enough to admit that not all the events put on by Inspirate were as successful as others, and this self-awareness is key to their success as it helps to inspire fresh ideas and ambitions, and to be 'focusing on what's hot — and what's hot is Diwali'.[26] The desire to have an impact in the city has meant that Inspirate have been willing to capitalise on resources and partners. They understand the need to work with other organisations including artists, the LCC (both the Festivals Unit and the politicians with their agendas), and the Leicester Hindu Festival Council. For Anand and Carroll, it is about inspiring the next generation and getting them excited at a local level.

## Conclusion

Ghosh references an article in the *Deccan Herald* in 2006 that states, 'the world has actually become a global village but what's fascinating about Indians is that wherever they go they take with them a baggage of beliefs and culture that refuses to be set aside.'[27] In Leicester, this has manifested itself in one of the largest celebrations of Diwali outside of India. City mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, notes that, 'The spirit of Diwali echoes that of Leicester as a whole. Our culturally diverse city brings people together in a spirit of friendship, just as Diwali does.' Other cities in the UK are culturally diverse, so why has Leicester been successful in celebrating an adopted tradition? Firstly, it is the history of immigration in Leicester, different from so many other ethnically diverse cities in the UK, which appears to explain why 'the year in Leicester is punctuated with events that are celebrated by one community but enjoyed by all'.[28] Kate Fox suggests that any attempt to define Englishness, by definition, includes ethnic minorities. She observes, 'the extent to which immigrant populations adapt to, adopt and in turn influence the culture and customs of their host country, particularly over several generations, is a complex issue.'[29] Complex it may be, but in

[26] Jiten Anand, personal communication, 7 December 2015.

[27] Ghosh, Palash, 'The Golden Mile'.

[28] Winstone, 'Managing a Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Cultural City', p. 39.

[29] Fox, p. 16.

Leicester, the Hindu population has successfully integrated the tradition of Diwali into the wider culture of the city, and as Fox rightly suggests, this has occurred over several generations. The original migrant community brought their traditions with them, and through nostalgia and pride recreated the celebrations for themselves, their families and their community. The younger Hindu population, born and raised in Leicester, have looked to modernise the celebrations, with Inspirate an example of a young multicultural team showing entrepreneurial and business zeal, good at attaining funding and delivering original artistic content.

Lastly, although the specifics of immigration in Leicester and the changing nature of generational aspirations are important, the Diwali celebrations could not be as successful without the aligned aims and objectives of Leicester City Council. It is seen as an opportunity, motivated by financial, business and tourism gain, but also additional recognition for the city from the rest of the UK and internationally. It is seen as a unique selling point, and increasingly part of the identity of the city. Sarah Levitt asserts that,

> *We must enable the whole city to enjoy it, of whatever background, that in itself is going to be challenging [...] the challenge of getting everybody to value each other's heritage and then to share it, and to share the pleasure in it, and feel that all of those heritages become a part of one heritage. That is the core of what we do. It's enabling people's identity and enabling people to feel proud of their identity, like it or not, they are part of a city of many different things.*[30]

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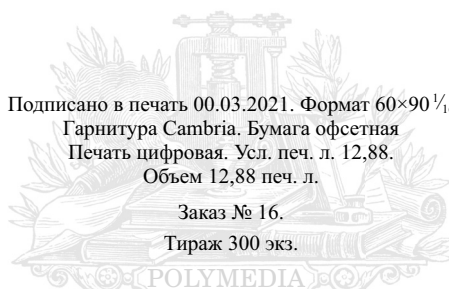


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