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Sultan Muhammad, Tahmuras Defeats the Divs, folio 23v from Firdawsi's Shahnameh (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, watercolor, 28.3 × 18.6 cm, 1525 AD, Tabriz, Iran. Metropolitan Museum of Art, No. 1970.301.3. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452112.

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Enhancing Oral Tradition in Fiji for the Study of Archaeological Remains. The Case of the Hillforts in the Nadroga-Navosa Province

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The Fiji Islands offer a compelling case for cross-cultural research integrating archaeology and oral tradition. Fijian society still practices oral transmission, preserving diverse stories with cultural significance. Many legends and beliefs are tied to past settlements, considered sacred due to their symbolic role. In June 2022, fieldwork in Nadroga-Navosa (Viti Levu) as part of the Environmental Changes and Heritage in the Fijian Islands project, explored hillforts and oral traditions through archaeological surveys. Findings from sites like Tabuqutu and Old Tau reveal that landscapes and remains are deeply embedded in local memory. Stories of origins, place names and beliefs about hillforts as ancestral homes highlight the enduring role of oral tradition in shaping historical knowledge. This paper presents these findings, emphasizing the value of oral tradition in interpreting archaeology within Fijian society.

KEYWORDS: oral history, oral tradition, Fiji Islands, archaeology, Pacific Islands, hillforts

Fidžijski otoki so posebej zanimiv primer za medkulturne raziskave, ki združujejo arheologijo in ustno izročilo. Fidžijska družba še vedno ohranja ustno prenašanje znanja, s čimer ohranja raznolike zgodbe s kulturnim pomenom. Številne zgodbe in verovanja so povezane s preteklimi naselbinami, ki so zaradi svojega simbolnega pomena pogosto obravnavane kot svete. Junija 2022 so v okviru projekta Okoljske spremembe in dediščina na Fidžijskih otokih na območju Nadroga-Navosa (Viti Levu) potekale terenske raziskave, ki so s pomočjo arheoloških pregledov preučevale utrjena hribovska naselja in ustno izročilo. Ugotovitve s krajev, kot sta Tabuqutu in Stari Tau, kažejo, da so krajine in arheološki ostanki globoko vtkani v lokalni spomin. Zgodbe o izvoru, krajevna imena in verovanja o utrdbah kot prednoških domovih poudarjajo trajno vlogo ustnega izročila pri oblikovanju zgodovinskega vedenja. Prispevek predstavlja te ugotovitve in izpostavlja pomen ustne tradicije pri interpretaciji arheoloških podatkov v fidžijski družbi.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: ustna zgodovina, ustno izročilo, Fidžijski otoki, arheologija, pacifiški otoki, utrjena hribovska naselja

INTRODUCTION

The Pacific islands provide an ideal context for examining how oral memory – whether in the form of oral history, folklore, myths and legends, or traditional knowledge – can yield valuable insights into local history, population movements and territorial occupation. This perspective complements archaeological data and fills gaps where primary sources are lacking, either due to the absence of written records from the period or because historical biases have undermined the archaeological reliability of certain territories. By contrast, oral transmission often proves to be highly effective. As we will see, when analysed with a rigorous methodology, it can establish unexpected connections and relationships while also confirming and expanding upon existing knowledge in both human and environmental history. Oral transmission also includes narratives that take the form of myths, and historiography has already recognized their potential to convey significant information – not only about past environmental events, including catastrophic ones, but also about mitigation and adaptation strategies employed by past societies. Furthermore, the analysis of oral memory does not merely contribute to data collection; as the direct voice of local communities, it also enhances the understanding and interpretation of these data.

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate the value of oral tradition in studying the past through a specific case study in Fiji. This analysis is based on fieldwork conducted in June 2022 as part of the IEA ECHAPH project (*International Emerging Action on Environmental Changes and Heritage in Atlantic and Pacific Hillforts*).

The project focused particularly on abandoned former settlements located in inland upland areas found across most of the major Pacific islands. Over the course of their history, it has been suggested (Kumar et al., 2006) that shifts in settlement patterns were linked to climatic changes, particularly fluctuations in sea levels. This phenomenon has been analysed by integrating archaeological survey data, excavations, geomorphological data and oral traditions. This research aimed to investigate the hillforts in the southwestern sector of Viti Levu Island, within the province of Nadroga-Navosa. The project is part of a well-established field of research seeking to shed light on this lesser-known aspect of Fiji's prehistory, which predates European colonization but not the Lapita phase. The study also aimed to clarify several unresolved issues, such as the chronology and mode of site occupation, the classification of site typologies to identify settlement patterns, the relationships and potential conflicts between sites, and the social and hierarchical structures associated with them. Furthermore, it sought to understand how these hillforts serve as indicators of broader societal transformations, potentially mirroring environmental changes, and to assess the role of anthropogenic factors in these dynamics.

Data acquisition relied on non-intrusive methods, including surveys and oral inquiries. The primary objective was to create a catalogue and a map of fortified sites – an essential first step in the study of hillforts – highlighting which locations deserve further archaeological investigation, identifying key research challenges, and proposing an interpretative model. Integrating oral tradition into this research was indispensable, as it allowed for a

fuller understanding of the archaeological findings.[1] Oral narratives (*talanoa*) and legends (*tukuni*) provided crucial insights into the topography and history of the sites that would otherwise remain unknown.

This paper will demonstrate how oral tradition remains deeply embedded within traditional Fijian communities and continues to be the primary vehicle for transmitting knowledge related to land connections, identity issues, and traditional expertise. We will argue that a holistic and multidisciplinary approach offers the most promising methodology for research in regions where communities maintain an intangible yet significant historical connection to their ancestral landscapes – one that may not always be immediately perceptible through Western scientific frameworks.

PART 1: CHRONOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

The Fiji Islands are a volcanic archipelago located in the southern Pacific Ocean. The two largest islands are Viti Levu, home to the capital Suva, and Vanua Levu.

Fiji was first settled by humans around 1000 BC by Lapita voyagers, who migrated from Papua New Guinea, moving west to east and eventually populating most of the Pacific Islands. The Lapita culture is primarily *an archaeological construct* (Kirch, 1997: 13), defined by a shared material culture, particularly dentate-stamped pottery.

Following the first archaeological excavations conducted by Gifford (1951), a chronology based on ceramic typology and radiocarbon dating was proposed by Green (1963) and later refined by Frost (1979). This chronology defines four phases in Fijian prehistory, beginning with the Sigatoka Phase (*Lapita* – 1100/100 BC), characterized by the presence of decorated Lapita ceramics. The initial date of this phase has been widely debated, as it corresponds to the first Lapita settlements. Early archaeological research suggested dates around 2950–3050 cal. BP (Clark, Anderson, 2009). However, more recent studies indicate that the earliest Lapita site should be Bourewa, dated to approximately 2866–2771 cal. BP (Nunn, Petchey, 2013), while Matanamuani on Naigani Island dates between 3070–2770 cal. BP (Irwin et al., 2011). This was followed by the Navatu Phase (100 BC–1100 AD), marked by carved-paddle impressed ceramics, as well as ceramics with incised, appliqué and other surface modifications. The Vuda Phase (1100–1650 AD) saw a decline in paddle-impressed ceramics and an increase in incised, appliqué and finger-pinched surface decorations. Frost also associates this phase with the appearance of fortifications on Taveuni. Finally, the Rā Phase (1650–) is characterized by more complex incised and appliqué patterns, as well as a wider variety of ceramic forms, reflecting increased contact with Europeans.[2]

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[1] Following a paradigm applied in other studies, see for example Nunn, 2019.

[2] However, it is important to note that these periodizations have been reassessed in light of new excavations and recent studies on pottery. A good summary can be found in Cochrane, 2018.

The 1300 event and the Hillforts
The study of ceramics reveals a shift in population movements during the post-Lapita phase, while maintaining connections between groups (Cochrane, 2018). These movements are also evidenced by petrographic analyses of ceramics (Dickinson, 2006).

A period of significant change occurs around 1300 AD, when a combination of factors leads to transformations in settlement patterns and subsistence strategies. Patrick Nunn's studies indicate that around 1300 a climatic shift occurred (Kumar et al., 2006; Nunn et al., 2022), characterized by a drop in sea level during the transition from the Little Climatic Optimum to the Little Ice Age. This change, accompanied by tropical cyclones, droughts, and disruptions to the marine ecosystem, forced local populations to seek new resources and adapt to a different way of life.

Coastal settlements, which had been characteristic of the previous phase, were no longer sustainable, making it necessary to detach from marine resources. The subsequent crisis led to conflicts, societal breakdown, territorial and resource competition, and ultimately warfare. Beyond environmental factors, Field (2004) also highlights the impact of socio-economic phenomena such as population growth and social stratification, which led to the emergence of chiefdoms. These newly established political entities quickly sought to consolidate control over territory and resources. As a consequence, settlement patterns changed and people moved inland and upland (Field, 2005), to ensure better protection and to be closer to new sources of subsistence.

Studies reveal the widespread emergence of fortified sites, some located near agricultural resources, while others – likely serving as refuges – were situated on mountain peaks or ridges (Field, 2005). Additionally, many settlements were associated with rockshelter caves, which may have played a crucial role in food storage (Nunn, 2012a), while others were linked to lookout points (Nunn, 2013). The spread of hillforts, particularly during periods of environmental stress between the Little Climatic Optimum (LCO) and the Little Ice Age (LIA), with peak phases around 1400–1500 and again around 1700 (Nunn, 2013; Field, Lape, 2010), reflects a phenomenon observed throughout the Pacific region. Between 1600 and 1700, new groups arrived from the north of Viti Levu and from Tonga (Kumar et al., 2006). Towards the end of the Vuda phase, there was a gradual return to the lowlands, yet European travellers' accounts from the 19th century still describe ongoing conflicts and the continued presence of settlements on hilltops (Nunn, 2012b).

The study area
The situation in the Sigatoka Valley, as highlighted by Field (2003), appears to reflect the general trend in which settlement patterns are influenced by environmental changes. Our research, conducted at selected sites in the province of Nadroga-Navosa, aimed to confirm or challenge this hypothesis. We draw attention to some unresolved issues that the selected hillforts were intended to shed new light on: some sites appear to have changed function and the extent of their occupation over time; others seem to be linked – perhaps occupied by the same people for different purposes or during different periods; some were likely part of the same network; others are difficult to date; and some had long-lasting occupations but were only used occasionally. This area was particularly promising due

to the high density of elevated sites conducive to fortification, and, above all, because no archaeological research had previously been dedicated to this type of site in the region. The study of maps, aerial photographs, and toponyms allowed for the selection of several potential sites. The northern area of the province was chosen due to the hypothetical presence of sites located only short distances from one another, which not only contributed to the effectiveness of the mission but also enhanced its coherence. As we will see, these sites are interconnected, providing a representative sample. The selected sites are Tabuqutu, Kavukavu, Old Tau, Nakaro, Vasilaulau and Koromani.

PART 2: FIELDWORK IN THE PROVINCE OF NADROGA-NAVOSA – FIJI: BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The oral tradition
Oral tradition is the collection of skills, knowledge, practices, stories, values and ideas that form the traditional cultural background of a society. Built up over time, this knowledge continues to be enriched by the accumulation of experiences and observations, and is passed down through oral stories, myths, legends, songs, dances and artistic representations.[3] Traditional culture, transmitted through oral means, notably contains information useful for understanding the environment and how to face natural risks.

Its potential for contributing to the development of adaptation and resilience strategies for communities was officially recognized for the first time in the Fourth IPCC Report ("Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change")[4] in 2007. Every community has its own environmental culture, which is inherently rooted in the territory, and each territory faces its own specific challenges, requiring tailored solutions. This is why traditional knowledge is sometimes an indispensable resource for formulating locally appropriate, culturally shaped solutions.[5] It also promotes an exchange where scientific data aligns with local needs and priorities, particularly in dialogue with local authorities. This exchange respects complex and formalized social hierarchies, to ensure that the early warning system is effective (Fletcher et al., 2013). Traditional culture also transmits knowledge about precursor signs that can serve as early warnings. For example, abnormal waves, unusual sounds and changes in the smell of water can act as warning indicators.[6] Oral tradition also preserves valuable expertise regarding construction techniques (such as the Fijian *bure* and the Samoan *fale*), which are more resistant to natural disasters (Campbell, 2015).

Oral tradition also preserves other categories of information. Numerous studies have shown that it can encode memories of past events (Vitaliano, 1973; Piccardi, Masse, 2007), including records of environmental crises, natural disasters and descriptions

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[3] With regard to oral tradition in particular, see Kelly, 2015; Vansina, 1985; Goody, 2010.

[4] United Nations body responsible for assessing scientific data related to climate change: https://www.ipcc.ch/.

[5] In this regard, it is important to mention the recent collective work of Panda et al., 2023, which includes various contributions analyzing theoretical aspects and presenting practical case studies on the revitalization and use of traditional knowledge. In the same perspective, the works of Shaw et al., 2009, also fit.

[6] For the warning signs, see Janif et al., 2016.

of specific landforms. These accounts are often conveyed through myths and legends, which allow for the transmission of knowledge by reshaping it into a narrative form. By incorporating supernatural forces and a more entertaining surface, these stories become more accessible, comprehensible, and easier to remember (Barber, Barber, 2004).

Research has demonstrated that, when subjected to rigorous analysis, certain myths reveal detailed information about natural phenomena, complementing geological data. The use of oral tradition as a methodological approach to studying the environment, disasters and historical changes has been successfully applied in the Pacific. By integrating oral traditions with archaeological and geological data, scholars have reconstructed events such as volcanic eruptions (Lancini et al., 2023; Cashman, Conin, 2008; Blong, 1982) and long-term processes, including shoreline changes and sea level rise (Nunn, Reid, 2016; Nunn, 2018).

Oral tradition, particularly in societies that have not developed writing, also serves as a repository of historical memory. It plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage transmitted over time, which forms the basis of collective identity. As Vansina states (Vansina, 1985: 119, 224), the transmission of oral tradition contributes to the stabilization of collective culture: every personal acquisition is absorbed and integrated into the shared heritage of transmitted customs. Furthermore, memory studies support the concept of collective memory. Halbwachs' research (Halbwachs, 1950), in particular, explores the ways in which a community constructs and communicates a shared vision of the past, highlighting the role of places and objects as vectors for preserving collective memories.

As demonstrated by the long-standing tradition of historiographical studies in the Pacific, the analysis of oral histories preserved within tradition proves to be a valuable and indispensable tool for historical reconstruction. These narratives preserve memories of genealogies, voyages, migrations and inter-village relationships (Tuimaleali'ifano, D'Arcy, 2023).

Moreover, this approach has the advantage of supporting an *emic* perspective on history, in which oral traditions provide an insider's representation of culture and society (Mercer, 1979). When applied with the necessary precautions and the rigor of historical methodology (Curtin, 1968), this perspective can contribute to a more faithful reconstruction of the past.

Fortunately, the Fiji Islands present favourable conditions for exploring the oral tradition, since Fijian society still retains many contexts where the oral transmission of knowledge is practiced. Before the European colonists' arrival in Fiji, writing did not exist, and oral transmission and memorization were the only tools that ensured the maintenance of cultural traditions. Nevertheless, in some areas, traditional culture has been preserved through various means: the high cost of medical care makes traditional medicine practices flourish, and tourism, among other things, has contributed to the preservation of crafts. Similarly, dances (*meke*) and traditional songs are now performed primarily to entertain tourists. However, the introduction of Western customs, Christianization, school education and writing have contributed to creating a new lifestyle during the 20th century, inevitably leading to the loss of many aspects of traditional culture. As highlighted by other studies, this erosion of tradition reinforces the importance of working to preserve it, and more especially the oral histories that constitute a vital part of it (Parke, 2014: 47–53). Indeed,

oral histories are a great reservoir that contains the most diverse and varied stories: stories of ancestors, stories of foundation, stories of origins and migrations, prodigious stories and historical accounts.

It is essential to take into account the caveats highlighted by Mecer (1979), who examines how oral tradition can provide historical evidence for reconstructing the past in the Pacific. Caution is needed to avoid the risks of manipulation and sociopolitical bias when interpreting official traditions, and we also need to assess the distortions that unofficial popular traditions may have undergone through oral transmission over time. This is why these sources must always be handled with discernment and the critical perspective intrinsic to historical analysis.

One significant challenge must also be acknowledged: there is a general mistrust and reluctance in sharing oral histories with researchers, partly due to past negative experiences with scholars who failed to respect traditional practices. This issue underscores the necessity for researchers to adopt an ethical methodology – one that respects the shared data and prioritizes the establishment of trust as a fundamental prerequisite.

The methodology

All these considerations led us to integrate the collection of oral traditions into our research. We sought to determine whether local communities still retained memories of their past, as well as traditional practices and folklore. Our goal was to assess whether oral histories preserved traces of the hillforts, what information was associated with them, how they connected to present-day villages, and when and how they were inhabited.

This required a rigorous methodology, building upon the foundational principles outlined by Curtin (1968). After presenting our project to the relevant institutions and obtaining the necessary permits, the involvement and mediation of staff members from the Fiji Museum became essential. They accompanied us during archaeological surveys, interviews and village presentations, helping to establish an atmosphere of trust and dialogue. Their presence also facilitated the interpretation and respect of local norms and conventions, creating an environment that was as familiar and conducive as possible for oral expression.

The interviews concerning oral traditional knowledge took place during the official presentation – which included the authorisation to visit the lands – and especially during the *sevusevu* ceremony, which is governed by a very rigid and codified protocol. It involves presenting an offering of kava (or *yaquona – Piper methysticum*) to the chief, his delegate (*headman*), the spokesman and the other leading men of the tribe (*mataqali*). The offering is accompanied by an official request to be welcomed in the village, to be able to visit the sites, and to be able to ask questions about the stories (*talanoa*) and the legends (*tukuni*). In particular, permission had to be requested from the *mataqali* who owns the land where the site is located, and one or more members of the tribe were invited to join the ceremony. The initial exchange was entirely expressed in the local Fijian dialect and according to a very precise formal language. This is one of the reasons why it was necessary for us to be accompanied in the villages by three local mediators, who guaranteed the full success of the exchanges, respect for protocols and accurate

Fijian-English translation. Culturally and linguistically grounded, they were able to ensure exchanges and translations that were perfectly accurate and appropriate.

The mediators were Saula Nagata, headman of our host village Vusama; Elia Nakoro, Manager of Archaeology; and Nikolau Tokainavatu, Field Archaeologist working for the Fiji Museum. Once the presentation was finished and the authorization received, the kava drink was prepared and while drinking it with the locals, it was possible to start the investigation. We therefore visited the village of Nabu for the site of Tabuqutu;[7] the village of Navutu for the site of Vasilaulau;[8] the village of Tau for the sites of Kavukavu and Koromani;[9] and the village of Malomalo for the Korelevu site.[10] The interlocutors were generally one or more leading members of the tribe, along with one or more individuals from the tribe that owns the land where the hillforts are located. These individuals were therefore likely to be the best holders of the information most relevant to our research. The exchanges took place in Fijian (local dialect) and English, were recorded, and subsequently translated literally through the work of the Fiji Museum. In interpreting the data, we considered the context and circumstances of each interview, the audience present, and, whenever possible, the background of the narrators. To ensure consistency and homogeneity in our dataset, we decided to present all interlocutors with the same set of questions.

During each visit, we initially followed the same set of questions, and then we adapted them based on the answers received to obtain more details. The questionnaire aimed to learn especially about two aspects of the oral tradition: 1) stories concerning the history of fortified sites; and 2) legends about traditional deities that were associated with them, checking if the inhabitants of the village still preserve them.

Here is a sample questionnaire:

- Do you know the site of …?
- Do you know its origin?
- Do you know the meaning of the name?
- Does it have any importance for you and your clan/tribe? Is it sacred?
- Is this site somehow linked to your village?
- Do you know any ancient stories related to this site?
- Have you ever visited it?
- Is it possible to reach the site? How?
- Do you know how old the site is or which generation inhabited or abandoned it?
- Can you remember if there are any pottery shards, shells or remains of walls, foundations or ditches?
- Do you know why this site was created/why people moved there/why people abandoned it?
- Do you know if this site is linked to these other sites? Are there any relationships between the clans?

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[7] Where our interlocutors were T. N., I. N. and M. N.

[8] Where our interlocutors were S. L., P. N. and S. N.

[9] Where our interlocutors were I. V. and P. N.

[10] Where our interlocutors were R. T., V. R., A. T. and S. T.

- Do you know any old stories of the ancestors?
- Are you aware of any legends concerning the ancient gods (*Vu*)?
- Which is your totem god? Are there any stories?
- Which is the most frequent natural catastrophe in the area?
- Do you have any traditional way of forecasting it?
- What do you do when this happens?

The objectives of our work were always clearly stated, and the integration of traditional knowledge and oral histories was conceived as part of a reconstruction of the past, as we will discuss in section "Insights from oral tradition" below. One aspect of the work also involved tracing archaeological data through preliminary surveys.

PART 3: RESULTS

The Nadroga-Navosa Hillforts: dataset from the archaeological survey
We present below the relevant archaeological data collected during exploratory surveys at Tabuqutu, Kavukavu, Old Tau and Nakaro (Fig. 1). It is important to first outline the conditions under which these surveys were conducted: each mission was always led by our three aforementioned mediators, accompanied by local guides for each site. Adverse weather conditions frequently hindered or even compromised some of the planned explorations. We were unable to collect certain ceramic and shellfish samples; however, we managed to geolocate some of them in order to document their presence. Additionally, in many areas, dense vegetation made travel more challenging and obscured visibility of traces. Despite these difficult conditions, some data were successfully gathered and analysed.

Tabuqutu: This site is in the form of a small rocky outcropping with a flat surface at the top. To the west, the view is unobstructed and allows a clear view of the coast and the high points of Kavukavu and Koromani hillforts (Fig. 2). Significant natural escarpments defend the site to the south and east. Constructions built by the Fiji Pine Company at the top of the spur prevented any identification of archaeological remains. Only a few blocks in secondary position were identified in the eastern part, but it is impossible to know whether they came from constructions that could be attributable to the Vunda chronological phase. Extensive flattening with a bulldozer in recent times has levelled and likely destroyed almost all the remains that may have existed on the top of the spur. In the southern portion, a coring test confirmed the presence of archaeological levels extending above the level of bedrock alteration. No coal or pottery was discovered and only the presence of rare exogenous tubers could support the hypothesis of ancient human occupation. Scattered remains of low stone walls were also identified further north, outside the site along the access road, but the dating of these remains is unclear. Moreover, as the roads had been widened by bulldozers, it is possible that these structures were intended to stabilize the edges leading to steep escarpments. Apart from the information collected through local oral traditions, no archaeological remains were identified at the site.

Kavukavu: Like Tabuqutu, this site has been largely destroyed by modern development. While its overall shape – defined by natural escarpments – remains recognizable,

the interior has been completely altered and disrupted by human construction. Given that the entire internal area of the hillfort is now occupied by modern buildings, it is highly unlikely that any archaeological remains are still visible. This site serves as a clear example of the vulnerability of archaeological heritage in this province.

Old Tau: This site covers approximately three hectares (Fig. 3) and has the recognizable overall shape of a spur. Although no significant toponym is associated with it, its proximity to Kavukavu suggests it may have been part of the same fortified site. The name "Old Tau" is therefore used provisionally, in the absence of a recognized toponym identified during our discussions and surveys. The hillfort could also correspond to the old village of Tau, now located just a few hundred meters downhill to the west. During a survey conducted in the direction of Kavukavu, the route taken allowed the team to pass by this site twice. Heavy rains at the time had triggered significant sediment slides, exposing numerous pottery sherds and malacofaunal remains. In addition, several features identifiable as the remains of huts were observed along the escarpments of this small spur, positioned outside the fortifications. They were visible through the vegetation and generally consisted of stone foundations forming dwelling units measuring approximately 4 × 5 metres. When these features were identified on-site, local guides suggested they could have been hut-platforms for warriors responsible for defending the fortified settlement. This would explain their location outside the main fortifications.

The site is defended by a rampart comprised of medium-sized stone blocks. This fortification is approximately 2 metres wide, 0.5 metres high, and at least 50 metres long (Fig. 4). When viewed from outside the site, the rampart appears massive, and its state of preservation is good, making it a site of significant archaeological potential for future research. An additional survey conducted within the enclosed area revealed stone terraces, probable hut-platform remains, and a larger structure measuring approximately 5 × 10 metres. This rectangular building, with levelled walls, is positioned on a high point of the spur, overlooking the Nakaro cave. Based on the pottery sherds discovered in situ, the main phase of occupation appears to correspond to the Vunda period.

Nakaro: This cave is located below the previous site. Known to local people and the inhabitants of Tau, it had never been the subject of archaeological surveys. The team's first exploration led to the discovery of large quantities of pottery and malacofaunal remains associated with a hearth structure in one of the cave's first chambers. The ceramics are consistent with the Vunda period, like the archaeological remains on the spur. In one of the last chambers, a probable burial was also identified, characterized by bone remains on the surface, including fragments of ribs, teeth and other undetermined bones. The strong fragmentation of the human remains may reflect a disturbance of this structure by animals that entered the cave (burial or deposit?). An important sequence of archaeological stratigraphy seems to be preserved under the surface remains, offering potential for meticulous excavation. The current findings suggest the cave may have been used as a burial site, given the location of the remains in the last chamber of the cave and in a slightly elevated corner. Although no other traces of human remains were identified during our investigation, the possibility of more graves elsewhere in the cave cannot be ruled out.

Figure 1: Location of Nadroga-Navosa Province, along with the hillforts and villages investigated in the archaeological survey and mentioned in the paper. (Author Hervé Duval)

Figure 2: View of the Tabuqutu site from the west, showing Koromani and Kavukavu in the distance. (Photo Hervé Duval)
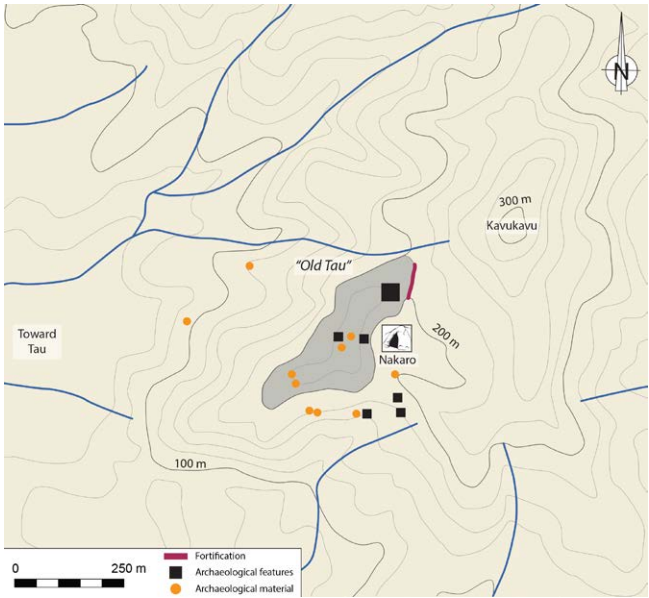
Figure 3: General plan of the "Old Tau" hillfort and the archaeological remains in the site's immediate surroundings. (Author Hervé Duval)

Figure 4: View from the south showing the remains of the fortifications protecting the "Old Tau" hillfort. (Photo Hervé Duval)

Insights from oral tradition: understanding hillforts and their history

The interviews provided some promising results. In every village, the discussions made it possible to pinpoint the exact locations of the ancient fortified sites and even trace their origins. The locals were able to describe which remains were still visible, whether the site was linked to a water source, if pottery sherds or shellfish remains could be found, and knew how to access these areas. This information proved invaluable in accessing the sites – since the routes were sometimes unclear, only the presence and knowledge of the local people allowed us to locate them. It also helped us optimize our survey time, making it easier to identify house mounds, foundations and lookouts.

Thanks to their traditional knowledge, we also learned which kinds of plants can indicate former human settlements, even where the foundations are no longer visible – as is the case with Tabuqutu, where the presence of turmeric, or with Old Tau, where the edible plant Vasili confirms past habitation. The oral enquiries revealed that a significant number of hillforts had been affected by the local company in charge of managing forest areas, disrupting the area with plantation development and bulldozing. Infrastructure built by a local telephone company also caused damage, particularly in Tabuqutu and Korolevu. This information allowed us to exclude certain sites like Korolevu from the investigation and thereby save time. However, we still visited Tabuqutu and Kavukavu to assess the extent of the destruction and, unfortunately, we could confirm that the impact had been severe.

All the villages agree that the primary reason for settling on elevated ground was warfare, and they remember the ancient hostilities between clans – for example, between those of Tabuqutu-Kutuma and Vasilaulau. This is interesting for many reasons: not only do they keep the memory of the role played by secondary settlements, but we also confirmed that the fortified sites were part of a much more complex system. These summit hillforts were also associated with slope settlements and caves – for example Kutuma cave served as a shelter for the women and children of Tabuqutu, while Nakoro cave was used by the people of Kavukavu. Such insights help interpret the archaeological remains. Another example is Koromani, considered by the Tau people as merely a temporary refuge, while Tabuqutu was the meeting place of all the 24 tribes. Moreover, local people still remember stories about the foundation of the hillforts and their mutual relationships, which helps to explain the rationale behind their locations. For example, one legend says that people from Tabuqutu wanted to find new land near the coast (fitting the model highlighted by Nunn (2011) which would date this event to around 1750–1800). To avoid detection by their enemies in Vasilaulau, they sent two women to search for new land and they distracted the other village by showing their breasts and bottoms, allowing them to pass by Vasilaulau and discover the site of Kavukavu. The entire population later migrated there as the site was ideal: it was visible from Tabuqutu, but hidden from Vasilaulau – a detail confirmed by our survey.

All the villages trace their origins back to their fortified sites, sometimes also referring to earlier locations. The founding of the modern village is closely linked to the abandonment of the fortified site, often following an intermediate stage of temporary occupation at other locations. By integrating the information collected from all the villages, it was possible to establish a relative chronology of the settlements, which appears to consist
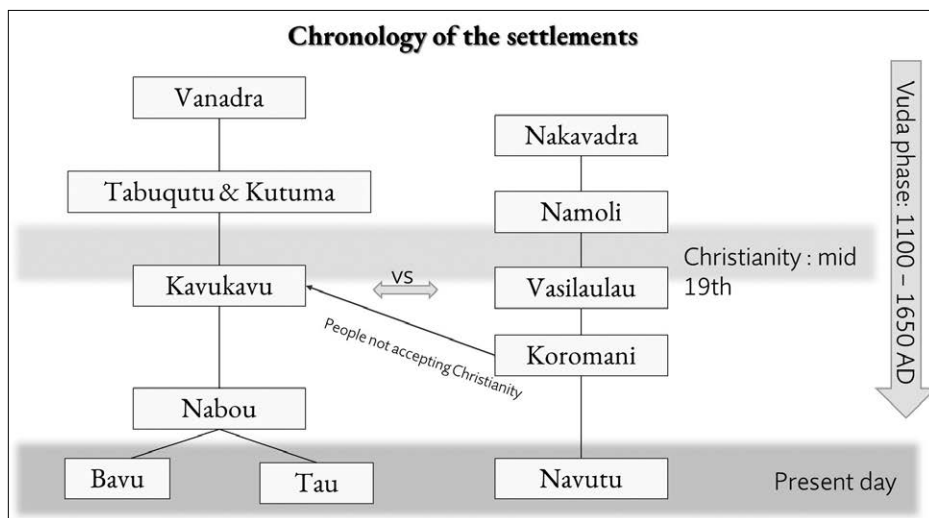
Figure 5: Relative chronology of the occupations mentioned in the paper. (Author Loredana Lancini)

of two interrelated groups. In the first, people from Vanadra moved to Tabuqutu. Later, following the arrival of Christianity and Europeans, they migrated to Kavukavu. In more recent times, they relocated to Nabou, which eventually gave rise to the two settlements of Bavu and Tau. Meanwhile, the site of Nakavadra led to the foundation of Namoli. However, with the arrival of Europeans, people moved to Vasilaulau, which was in conflict with Kavukavu. Subsequently, a group from Vasilaulau founded Koromani, while those who rejected Christianity joined Kavukavu. The present-day settlement of Navutu traces its origins to Koromani. The chronology (see diagram, Fig. 5) was established by aligning different oral histories – which never contradicted one another but rather complemented each other – forming essential pieces of the puzzle. This highlights the importance of conducting research that is both geographically focused and methodologically comprehensive.

In some cases, people were able to recall settlements from more distant periods. The inhabitants of Malomalo remember that their ancestors came from the Lau Islands, specifically from Kaba – a migration possibly prompted by the arrival of warriors from Tonga. Before settling in Korolevu, they could recall two previous settlements, Cuvu and Kaba, both named after their original homeland.

All the informers were able to link the end of the hillforts and the foundation of new lowland villages to the arrival of the Europeans and Christianity. They gave us many details about how they accepted or were prompted to embrace the new religion and customs.

The hillforts are considered sacred places – the dwelling places of the ancestors – which is why it was important to ask for permission before visiting them. Their sacredness is reflected in local etymology: Tabuqutu means "it is not permitted to set fire". The etymology also provides other useful information: Koro means hilltop, and Kavukavu is an expression of astonishment, reportedly uttered by the two ladies sent to find a new, suitable location.

The interviews also confirmed the continuity of traditional knowledge regarding the early warning signs of potential cyclones – a major hazard in the region. Our informants affirmed that this knowledge had proven crucial on several occasions. For instance, the presence of a particular bird species (*Manmanu ni cagi*) circling the village, indicates an impending flood. Similarly, when hornets build their nests below ground level (instead of high up as they usually do), it signals an approaching natural disaster. Additionally, when small ants can be seen forming lines and climbing to seek shelter at higher levels, it suggests an incoming flood or heavy rainfall. Other indicators can also be revealing, such as an unusually abundant fruit yield on certain plants – like breadfruit – during an atypical season.

PART 4: DISCUSSION

The ECHAPH mission was conceived as an initial exploratory survey aimed at highlighting the potential of a multidisciplinary approach to the study of hillforts and identifying the most promising cases for more targeted research. It is important to acknowledge some key challenges that raise critical issues regarding the use of oral tradition, while also increasing awareness of the need to act for the protection of these lands and the preservation of oral knowledge itself. In addition to the damage caused to archaeological remains by certain local enterprises, two major issues must be highlighted. First, it is essential to be aware of potential distortions in orally transmitted narratives (Amugo, 2020). Moreover, people were uncertain about the absolute dating of the hillforts. As a result, they could only provide approximate information – for example, the people of Bavu suggested that Tabuqutu was established 4–5 generations ago, while the people of Tau were more inclined to suggest 7–8 generations, and the occupation of Kavukavu was estimated at 6–7 generations ago.

While reconstructing a chronology and attempting to determine absolute dates through oral histories is a challenging task (Nunn, 2019), the information gathered from different villages proved to be complementary and mutually reinforcing. This data can indeed provide an initial framework for understanding the history of the sites and their interrelationships. Moreover, the study highlighted varying degrees of oral memory preservation across different villages. The second issue, already noted in previous research (Nunn, 2013), is that recent historical memory is sometimes obscured by a form of self-censorship, leading people to refer to their past simply as "the age of cannibalism".

We encountered greater resistance in collecting legends about the deities associated with the hillforts. However, we were able to document the story of the two protective goddesses of the village of Tau, as well as some accounts of totem deities. Additionally, we gathered information on traditional methods of interpreting natural signs that signal the arrival of cyclones. Oral tradition has proven to be not only useful but also an invaluable tool on multiple levels. It has provided extensive information on the history of the sites, as well as more specific insights, allowing us to confirm certain paradigms already highlighted in previous research regarding site distribution and their interrelations. Some sites appear

to be interconnected, while others are independent; some were used during periods of conflict (Field, Lape, 2010; Kumar et al., 2006; Nunn, 2012a; Goff, Nunn, 2016), while others, though belonging to the same group, were employed for different purposes. In some cases, sites acquired a symbolic significance over time (Nunn, 2019).

Furthermore, while Smith and Cochrane (2011) argue that inter-site visibility is not a crucial factor, our fieldwork – supported by observations from our interlocutors – corroborates Field's findings (Field, 1998), emphasizing the role of visibility in compensating for the lack of physical defences. This aspect is likely related to the specific topography of the Sigatoka Valley.

There was also great interest and enthusiasm in sharing these stories. In several instances, interviewees expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to recall old tales, and even other community members – especially young people – joined the kava ceremony, drawn by the discussion. We understood that, while stories from the past are still occasionally shared, such occasions have become increasingly rare. Just two generations ago, elderly men would regularly gather all the children to recount these stories. Some informants even admitted that, in their youth, they took these ancient narratives for granted, only now realizing their true value. This is a clear indication of the widespread risk of losing traditional knowledge and cultural heritage, reinforcing the need for further research in this field. Developing more projects aimed at safeguarding oral traditions – while taking into account local conditions and cultural requirements – would be particularly relevant.

We believe it is crucial to emphasize the importance of supporting contexts that are traditionally linked to storytelling and dialogue. Every evening, the most respected men of the village still gather around the kava to share what has happened during the day. During our stay in Vusama village, we also shared with them the stories we had collected from other villages, contributing to the preservation and circulation of knowledge while reaffirming the connections between clans in the surrounding communities.

This also highlights the potential of oral tradition: the connections between sites and territories perceived as ancestral are still present. Promoting both the preservation and the study of oral traditions could help develop more suitable strategies, as they would be conceived and perceived as personal and locally rooted. This, in turn, could play a crucial role in safeguarding archaeological sites by providing alternative solutions when large companies need to intervene. Indeed, fieldwork has shown the high vulnerability of these sites due to modern construction and agricultural consolidation during the second half of the 20th century. As a result, several sites – such as Kavukavu and Koromani – have been significantly damaged or even destroyed by human activity. This loss of cultural heritage also deeply impacts local communities, for whom these sites hold strong emotional value, being closely tied to the memory of their ancestors, as we observed during our oral inquiries. Therefore, protecting these sites emerges as a key factor to consider for the future. Immediate actions must be taken to safeguard and preserve those that have not yet been affected by modern anthropic activities. Furthermore, referencing oral histories could also support relocation strategies (Janif, 2016) in cases where climate change necessitates such measures, drawing upon a locally embedded tradition of migration preserved through collective memory.

CONCLUSION

Our research thus demonstrates that oral tradition is not only a valuable tool for interpreting local history without distortion or imposition but also for restoring its proper value. We recognize that investigating oral tradition is inseparable from fieldwork, as these lands are still inhabited by the descendants of those who lived there in the past. These communities remain the custodians of knowledge and historical and social memory – an invaluable heritage that cannot be replaced by archaeological finds or scientific technologies. At the same time, oral tradition must be handled with caution and critical judgment and should be complemented by other data sources.

The loss of cultural heritage deeply impacts local communities, for whom archaeological sites hold strong emotional value, being intrinsically linked to the memory of their ancestors. According to the results of our oral inquiries, the populations surveyed express a strong desire to reclaim forgotten elements of their own culture. From this perspective, new participatory research initiatives and protective measures for the hillforts should be implemented.

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VALORISER LA TRADITION ORALE AUX FIDJI POUR L'ÉTUDE DES VESTIGES ARCHÉOLOGIQUES : LE CAS DES SITES FORTIFIÉS DE HAUTEUR DANS LA PROVINCE DE NADROGA-NAVOSA

Les îles Fidji constituent une étude de cas stimulante pour la recherche interculturelle combinant l'archéologie et la tradition orale. En effet, elles offrent des conditions favorables à l'exploration de la tradition orale, la société fidjienne conservant de nombreux contextes où la transmission orale du savoir est encore pratiquée. La tradition orale locale comprend des récits variés et diversifiés, porteurs de contenus précieux pour la communauté et qui méritent d'être enregistrés. Il existe également des histoires, des légendes et des croyances liées à d'anciens sites autrefois habités et considérés comme sacrés en raison de leur rôle symbolique. Leur mémoire est préservée à travers des pratiques rituelles et demeure vivante dans l'esprit des populations locales grâce aux récits traditionnels.

En juin 2022, les auteurs ont mené un travail de terrain aux Fidji, dans la province de Nadroga-Navosa (Viti Levu, Fidji), dans le cadre du projet Environmental Changes and Heritage in the Fijian Islands. Ce projet visait à étudier les sites fortifiés de hauteur ainsi que les traditions orales des populations locales, en combinant des enquêtes archéologiques et orales. Les données recueillies sur les sites de Tabuqutu, Kavukavu, Old Tau, Nakaro, Vasilaulau et Koromani montrent que le paysage et les vestiges archéologiques sont profondément intégrés dans les mémoires et croyances locales. En effet, les habitants ont une bonne connaissance des types de vestiges archéologiques présents sur ces sites. De plus, nous avons pu recueillir des récits d'origines et de fondations encore très vivaces dans la mémoire des villages, et comprendre que les toponymes sont directement liés à des éléments historiques et topographiques. Enfin, le rôle symbolique des sites fortifiés de hauteur en tant que demeures des ancêtres est profondément enraciné dans les croyances traditionnelles.

Cet article vise à présenter les résultats des enquêtes orales menées aux Fidji et à mettre en lumière la valeur de la tradition locale pour la compréhension de l'archéologie dans une société où la tradition orale constitue le principal outil de mémoire sociale.

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The Moorish Tradition in Portuguese Archaeology

——————Alexandra Vieira——————————————————

This study aims to synthesize the multifaceted presence of the Moors in the Portuguese landscape by analysing archaeological remains, toponymy, legends and popular beliefs, all supported by historical documentation and studies on Portuguese oral tradition. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, I seek to bridge the tangible aspects of material culture with the intangible heritage of oral narratives, exploring how these elements inform and reinforce one another. This involves establishing connections between archaeological evidence and the rich corpus of oral traditions and folklore, which often reinterpret or preserve the memory of these archaeological vestiges. Through this analysis, I aim to demonstrate how these pre-existing materialities can be understood as remnants of the past and as living elements of "our tradition", continuing to shape identities and the collective memory. This synthesis offers new perspectives on the enduring legacy of Moorish influence in Portugal's cultural landscapes.

KEYWORDS: landscape, archaeological remains, Moors, place names, legends, beliefs

Z delom želim povzeti večplastno prisotnost Mavrov v portugalski krajini z analizo arheoloških ostankov, toponimije, zgodb in ljudskih verovanj, pri čemer se opiram na zgodovinske vire ter študije portugalske ustne tradicije. Z interdisciplinarnim pristopom skušam povezati oprijemljive vidike materialne kulture z neoprijemljivim izročilom ustnih pripovedi ter raziskati, kako ti elementi medsebojno učinkujejo in se dopolnjujejo. To vključuje vzpostavljanje povezav med arheološkimi dokazi in bogatim korpusom ustnega izročila in folklore, ki pogosto reinterpretirata ali ohranjata spomin na te arheološke sledove. S to analizo želim pokazati, kako je mogoče te predhodno obstoječe materialnosti razumeti kot ostanke preteklosti in hkrati kot žive elemente »naše tradicije«, ki še naprej obliku-jejo identitete in kolektivni spomin. Ta sinteza ponuja nove poglede na trajno dediščino mavrskega vpliva v kulturnih krajinah Portugalske.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: krajina, arheološki ostanki, Mavri, krajevna imena, legende, verovanja

INTRODUCTION

This study explores how the Moors are perceived in Portuguese collective memory and how their presence is manifested in both the landscape and oral tradition. The key objective is to understand how material and immaterial heritage – such as archaeological

remains and folklore – interact to preserve and reinterpret the traditions associated with the Moors, offering insights into their relevance for contemporary cultural identity.

The presence of the Moors in Portugal represents a significant chapter in the country's history, leaving a lasting imprint not only on the physical landscape but also on its cultural heritage. From architectural remnants and place names to enduring legends and beliefs, Moorish influence continues to shape how history and tradition are perceived and expressed. To fully understand the depth and diversity of these traditions, it is imperative to adopt a multidisciplinary approach that allows for the comprehensive integration of material and immaterial evidence.

This study takes an interdisciplinary approach, combining archaeology, historical research, linguistics and folklore studies to examine Moorish influence. Through the analysis of archaeological remains, place names, legends, popular beliefs and historical documents, the research integrates tangible evidence with intangible cultural expressions. This synthesis allows for a comprehensive analysis of how these diverse sources contribute to interpreting historical vestiges and preserving social memory. Key references include scholarly publications and studies on Portuguese oral tradition and folklore, which provide a theoretical framework for this multidisciplinary investigation.

Among the various cultural manifestations analysed, legends stand out as central elements of intangible heritage, offering a unique perspective on how place names and oral traditions preserve and reinterpret the legacy of the Moors. Legends occupy a central place in intangible heritage, transmitting values, beliefs and collective memories that shape the identity of communities. These oral narratives are more than stories; they represent a symbolic interaction between people and the surrounding environment, creating a continuous dialogue between the present and the past. Thus, by exploring legends that emerge from a landscape, it is possible to uncover layers of cultural and historical meaning, which root communities in their territories and strengthen the sense of belonging.

In the specific case of legends associated with the Moors, these stories offer a unique tool for interpreting and valuing archaeological sites. Narratives about the Moors perpetuated by oral tradition enrich intangible heritage and build bridges to a deeper, more contextualized understanding of the material remains we find. Exploring these legends allows us to reflect on who the Moors were and the cultural imprint they left over the centuries, providing new perspectives on the encounter between history, archaeology and collective memory.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comprehensive methodology to investigate the presence and legacy of Moorish culture in Portugal, integrating historical documentation, toponymy and oral tradition. The methodology used to combine landscape analysis with oral tradition – focusing on legends and traditions associated with the Moors in Portugal – was based on a bibliographic analysis of documents, publications, historical maps, military maps and other relevant sources.

For this study, an inventory was made of archaeological sites in Portugal whose names are associated with Moors or Moorish women, or which are located in areas whose toponyms are linked to the Moors. These place names were analysed to identify recurring patterns. Based on this survey, a structured database was created to organize and systematize the collected information.

Based on this data, a map was created to visualize the spatial distribution of the identified archaeological sites. This information was then cross-referenced with specialized bibliographical sources and databases of Portuguese legends, allowing for a comparative analysis between the inventoried archaeological sites and the traditional narratives associated with the Moors.

Historical documentation played a central role in contextualizing the archaeological sites and interpreting the legends tied to these locations. The Parish Memoirs (Memórias Paroquiais) of 1758, a nationwide survey conducted after the 1755 earthquake, is particularly valuable for its records of local histories, geographical descriptions and popular narratives about archaeological remains. This document and other historical and military maps help trace the persistence of Moorish heritage in the Portuguese landscape.

From the vast corpus of traditional oral literature in Portugal, we highlight the legends relating to the Moors and Moiras of the Iberian Peninsula. They are significant because they can be linked to archaeological remains, and because they constitute an excellent instrument for analysing the landscape (Alves, 2001), revealing how communities project their beliefs and social order onto their surroundings (Reboredo, 1999). There are currently several authors whose work focuses on legends – either in general or specifically on the Moors – covering works in the field of oral literature, Portuguese culture and anthropology. They include Amália Marques (2013); José Joaquim Dias Marques (2014; 2021); Maria Manuela Casinha Nova (2012); Maria de Lourdes Cidrães (2013; 2014); Alexandre Parafita (2006; 2007); Fernando Alonso Romero (1998); Buenaventura Aparicio Casado (2004); Rafael Quintía Pereira (2016; 2020; 2021). Oral traditions, especially legends about the Moors and Moiras, were examined through two key Portuguese projects that are especially relevant to this research. The first is the Portuguese Archive of Legends (Arquivo Português de Lendas – APL, 2022), which is dedicated to the "study of oral tradition (intangible cultural heritage), in its various genres, namely tales, legends, novels, songs and proverbs" (Centro de Estudos Ataíde Oliveira, 2022). The second is the Digital Archive of Traditional Oral Literature[1] (ADLOT, 2022).

THE DATA

The data collected in this preliminary phase of the study is presented on this map. It illustrates the geographical distribution of archaeological sites whose names are associated with the Moors.

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[1] Arquivo Digital da Literatura Oral Tradicional – ADLOT.
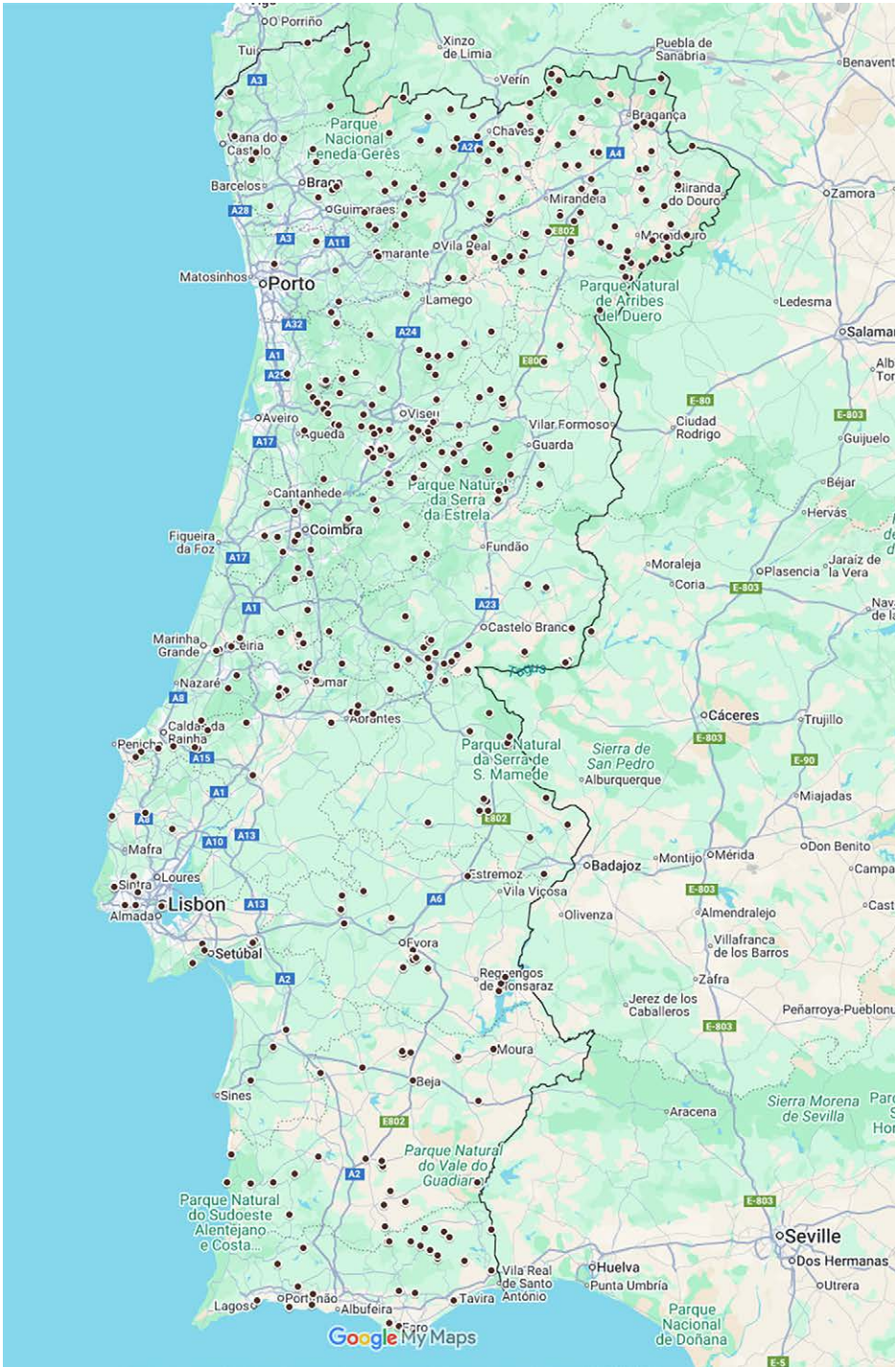
Figure 1: Archaeological sites with names associated with the Moors. (Google Maps)

In addition, a sample image of the database contains detailed information on each identified site, including its name, description, location, access, toponyms, legends, and associated rituals.

Nº de inventário	Designação	Topónimo	Topónimo/Lugar	Freguesia	Concelho
562	A-de-Moura//ES-TÁTUA-MENIR De A-DE-MOURA	A-de-Moura	Tapada	ADÃO (GUARDA)	GUARDA
2201	Crasto/Alto da Moura	Alto da Moura		CANEDO DE BASTO (CELORICO DE BASTO)	CELORICO DE BASTO
1815	Povoado fortificado do Alto dos Moiros, ou Outeiro dos Mouros	Alto dos Moiros/ Outeiro dos Mouros	/Parada da Ribeira	PEDRAÇA (CABE-CEIRAS DE BASTO)	CABEC-EIRAS DE BASTO
952	Alto dos Mouros/Mourão// Castro do Mourão	Alto dos Mouros	Alto dos Moiros/ Outeiro dos Mouros	CERVA (RIBEIRA DE PENA)	RIBEIRA DE PENA
271	Buraco da Moura	Buraco da Moura	Buraco da Moura/Fragas Donas	MILHÃO (BRAGANÇA)	BRAGANÇA
438	Medorra/Cabecinho dos Mouros	Cabecinho dos Mouros	Medorra/Cabec-inho dos Mouros	VILA DE ALA (MOGADOURO)	MOG-ADOURO
439	Medorra/Cabeço de Pena Palim//Medorra/Cabecinho dos Mouros	Cabecinho dos Mouros	Medorra/Cabeço de Pena Palim	VILA DE ALA (MOGADOURO)	MOG-ADOURO
1632	Medeiros//Castro de Medeiros/Cabeço dos Mouros	Cabeço dos Mouros		CHÃ (MONTALE-GRE)	MONTALE-GRE
2438	Serra das Vinhas/Cabeço dos Mouros//Serra da Vinha	Cabeço dos Mouros		PENA LOBO (SABUGAL)	SABUGAL
2310	Cama do Mouro	Cama do Mouro	Soutelinho do Mezio	TELÕES (VILA POUCA DE AGUIAR)	VILA POUCA DE AGUIAR
730	Campo dos Mouros	Campo dos Mouros	Serra de Santiago	SOBROSA (PAREDES)	PAREDES
1183	Casa da Moura	Casa da Moura	Alhões	ALHÕES (CINFÃES)	CINFÃES
1419	Casa da Moura (Orca do Gato)	Casa da Moura		TOURO (VILA NOVA DE PAIVA)	VILA NOVA DE PAIVA
537	Dólmen do Carapito I/ Casa da Moura//Dólmen 1 do Carapito//Carapito 1	Casa da Moura	Casa da Moura	PENA VERDE (AGUIAR DA BEIRA)	AGUIAR DA BEIRA
1384	Orca de Pendilhe/"Casa da Moura"	Casa da Moura	Orca	PENDILHE (VILA NOVA DE PAIVA)	VILA NOVA DE PAIVA
1354	Orca do Porto Lamoso ou dos Moinhos de Rua//Orca, Casa da Moura de Porto Lamoso, Casa da Moura dos Moinhos da Rua ou Corga Sintineira.	Casa da Moura	Alhais	ALHAIS (VILA NOVA DE PAIVA)	VILA NOVA DE PAIVA

Table 1: The database of Archaeological sites associated with the Moors (place names).

To date, 659 archaeological sites have been inventoried across various regions of the country. However, there is an apparent lower incidence in certain areas, a pattern that requires confirmation through additional research.

Many identified sites have multiple designations, reflecting the nomenclature attributed by local populations and the names recorded in national databases, scientific articles and archaeological monographs. Archaeologists often document sites without prior knowledge of their popular names, making it challenging to systematise this information. Therefore, the data presented here should not be considered an exhaustive survey, but rather as the beginning of an inventory process that aims to deepen our understanding of the archaeological sites and the oral tradition associated with the Moors. This process will later be expanded to include archaeological sites associated with legends.

PLACE NAMES

Toponymy serves as a crucial link between the geographical landscape and the historical presence of the Moors in Portugal. When we register toponyms related to Moors and Moiras, we are dealing with *mythotoponyms* (names derived from mythological entities), a subtype of *hierotoponyms*, which reflect various beliefs. These toponyms were recorded in modern documentation, namely in the Parish Memoirs of 1758. There are numerous references to the Moors throughout the country, frequently associated with ancient buildings. A similar phenomenon can be observed in Spain, particularly in Galicia: "The northwest of the Iberian Peninsula offers us a good example of this process of cultural appropriation of elements from the past: the many popular traditions that link mythical characters (mouros and mouras of the Galician peasantry) with prehistoric monuments such as megalithic mounds and forts /…/" (Fábrega-Álvarez et al., 2011: 326). This appropriation of elements from the past is evident in some descriptions dating from the late 19th to early 20th centuries – for example, at the site of Cividelhe or Cividade (Basto), where a well was said to lie under a rock. When Martins Sarmento visited the site, the well had already been filled with stones, yet it remained rich in traditions involving enchanted Moors. About 1000 metres northeast of this well, lies the hill known as *Campas dos Mouros* [Graves of the Moors], a toponym that existed even before the graves were discovered. Near these remains, there is the *Fonte da Moura*, which never dries up, a small valley called *Corgo da Moura*; and amid the ruins, a rock with a visibly artificial flat top, which can be climbed by rough steps, is called *Cama da Moura* (Sarmento, 1878: 66). As we can see, in a relatively small area, the presence of the Moors is mentioned numerous times.

There are dozens of place names in Portugal usually associated with megalithic monuments – such as dolmens and mounds – some of which are associated with the Moors. Examples include House of the Moors, Little House of the Moors, Moorish Barn, Moura Cave, Cave of the Moors, Moorish Corral, Oven of the Moors, Moorish Oven, Moorish Table, Moorish Stone, Moura Rock and Moors' tomb (Jorge, 1982: 393). The architecture of megalithic tombs has led them to being interpreted as houses, ovens or caves.

Figure 2: *Castro de Ribas* or *Cerca dos Mouros*; Argeriz, Valpaços. Walls of the hillfort. (Photo Alexandra Vieira)

However, they were not just seen as any houses – they had names like *Casa da Moira*, *Forno do Moiro*, or *Pedra dos Mouros* (Vasconcelos, 1897: 257). Martins Sarmento refers to the *Casa da Moura*, in Vila Chã, Barcelos, as the "largest antella" he knows (Sarmento, 1888: 113, fn. 1). The *Orquinha dos Juncais* (Queiriga, Vila Nova de Paiva) is locally known as *Forno da Moira* and is situated approximately 150 m to the W.S.W. of the *Orca dos Juncais* (Cruz, 2001: 370). Not only are dolmens and megalithic tombs regarded as houses, but caves are also described in similar terms: "In our country, we have many caves called *Covas da Moura* and *Casas da Moura*, which are referred to in popular legends and superstitions" (Vasconcelos, 1897: 47).

According to José Leite Vasconcelos, the legends associated with the Moors indicate the existence of fortified hillforts: "Whenever there is a hill, or a simple rise in the land, bearing names such as *Crasto*, *Castello*, *Cêrca*, *Cividade*, etc., and connected to legends or vague traditions of *Mouros* and *Mouras*, it is reasonable to suspect that we are dealing with a *Castro* (an Iron Age hillfort)" (Vasconcelos, 1895: 5). The *Cerca de Ribas* is located north of the village of Ribas, in Argeriz, Valpaços, at an altitude of 750 metres (Freitas, 1989: 336). This site is also called *Castro de Ribas*, *Alto da Cerca*, and *Cerca dos Mouros* (PA). It is a large hillfort with a well-established defensive system consisting of four lines of walls (Silva, 2010: 33–34). The walls appear to reflect distinct periods of construction, ranging from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages (PA). The site is considered a sizeable fortified settlement with a well-preserved defensive system and a deep ditch dug into the rock to the northwest – its most accessible side – along with a second open ditch at the northern end. The width of the walls varies and can reach more than four metres. Several entrances have been identified at different points in the settlement (Lemos, 1993: 523–525). During the first archaeological intervention, two rectangular houses were discovered in an area outside the walls (Silva, 2010: 33–34). The site also features two rock-cut wine presses and three boulders with rock engravings (PA).

The most common place names associated with fortified settlements include the terms castle, old castle or Moorish castle, castelejo or castrilouço, old tower or tower, and wall or wall of the Moors. However, according to Sande Lemos, the most frequent expression – at least in Trás-os-Montes – is castle of the Moors. Its use dates back to the

Middle Ages (Lemos, 1993: 143). Three toponyms bearing the name *Castelo dos Mouros* are recorded in the municipalities of Sabugal and Almeida, as noted in Joaquim Manuel Correia's *Antiguidades do Concelho do Sabugal*: "/…/ Near Cardeal, a small village belonging to the parish of Rendo, there is a hill that the people call *Castello dos Mouros*, and there are others that bear the same name near Vale de Espinho. /…/ We must also mention *Castello dos Mouros*, the name of a hill in the parish of Parada, municipality of Almeida, which borders Sabugal. A large granite sink opens up at the summit, certainly artificial" (Correia, 1906: 134–135).

Terms such as house, castle, residence, city and mine are used to designate these constructions. The *Castelo dos Mouros* in Algoso (Vimioso), is a fortified Iron Age settlement located on a hill known as *Cabeço dos Moiros* (Carta Arqueológica de Vimioso, 2015: 5). The *Castelo dos Mouros* or *Moiros* in Adeganha (Torre de Moncorvo) is situated on a hill located at the northern end of a spur. Below it, within a broader perimeter, remnants of two small parallel walls are preserved, delimiting the mountain to the north-northeast and west. It appears to be a small fortified settlement (PARM, 1993) where undecorated fragments in poor condition were recovered (Rodrigues and Rebanda, 1997/1998: 113). In 1993, it was considered vulnerable due to stone extraction and the activity of "treasure hunters" (PARM, 1993).

The expression *Cabeço do Mouro* (or *dos Mouros*) has also been recorded several times in the Archaeologist's Portal (PA). It is associated with archaeological remains – mostly fortified villages. The site of *Serra das Vinhas*/*Cabeço dos Mouros* (CNS 25721) is a fortified settlement with evidence of occupation ranging from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age. It is located in the municipality of Sabugal. Regarding the *Cerca dos Mouros* in Landeira, Mário Cardoso says that the hill is called *Cabeça do Muro*, and that the walk to the top is challenging because of the steep climb. At the top of *Cabeço do Muro* [Head of the Wall], he came across "the remains of a large collapsed wall, which surrounded the top of the hill, forming an oblong enclosure, with its longest axis running north-south measuring approximately 150 metres, and about 80 metres along the perpendicular axis. The site is called *Cerca dos Mouros* [Fence of the Moors]" (Cardoso, 1975: 147).
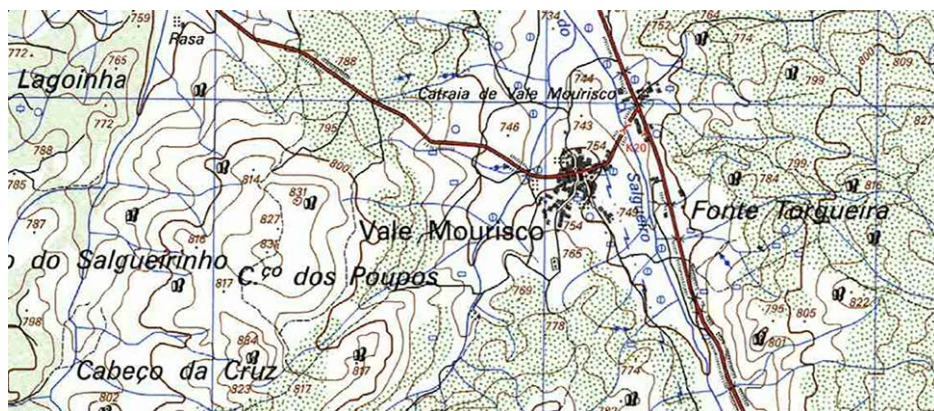
Figure 3: In Guarda District, near the town of Sabugal, there is a place named Vale Mourisco
Carta Militar de Portugal (esc. 1:25,000). (Editor: Instituto Geográfico do Exército)

Figure 4: Pias dos Mouros, Argeriz, Valpaços. (Photo Alexandra Vieira)

The toponym *Cabeço do Muro* suggests the existence of some stone structure – specifically a wall – and there is indeed a walled enclosure. Another example is *Valle Mourisco*, where, according to local tradition, a settlement once stood (Correia, 1906: 133). In fact, in Vale Mourisco (CNS 5280), in the municipality of Guarda, an oven of undetermined chronology has been recorded, where bricks and tiles were found (PA).

Martins Sarmento refers to the *Pias dos Mouros* in Valpaços, which reminded him of the "lakes" of Panoias (Sarmento, 1878: 24) – cavities carved into the rock that the people also call "presses of the Mouros" (Sarmento, 1878: 77). Nowadays we know that the "lakes" of Panóias (Vila Real) or the *Pias dos Mouros* in Argeriz (Valpaços) are not wine presses, but places of worship – pre-Roman or Roman sanctuaries – where various rituals were performed. The *Pias dos Mouros* rock sanctuary (CNS 3699) is located in the parish of Argeriz, municipality of Valpaços. It is a small rock sanctuary, similar to that of Panóias, and is probably of Roman origin. On the surface of a granite outcrop, at ground level, there are two rectangular cavities positioned parallel to each other, flanked by two sets of almost parallel steps – one on each side. The outcrop also has some notches, which could have been the foundations of a former structure. Two inscriptions are reportedly present on one of its faces (PA). A local legend tied to Argeriz speaks of enchanted Moors – both men and women – who emerge when the sun's rays warm the rocky slope, laying out their treasures to tempt the greed of mortals. There are said to be skeins of golden thread that can only be seen from afar. Yet, when, someone tries to approach – whether to take possession of the treasure or simply to observe it up close – everything disappears, as if by magic (Freitas, 1978: 265).

LEGENDS AND MYTHS ABOUT THE MOORS

There are hundreds of legends associated with archaeological remains referring to the Moors – both the enchanted figures of folklore and the "historical" Moors – of which only a few are presented here.

Martins Sarmento lists some springs in the Serra da Estrela region that are associated with the Moors: "The Torrozelo spring [Seia] belongs to the Moors, and there are hidden treasures there, according to legend. The Valentine's Fountain in Três-Povos belongs to the Moors. Gold bars have appeared in the Pena Lisa fountain. In Santiago, opposite Seia, at the "Mourinha fountain", a Moura has been seen washing gold. When surprised by an observer, she makes a face and disappears in a flurry of wool flakes" (Sarmento, 1990: 14).

The Lorga de Dine (Vinhais) was known in local tradition as the "house of an Enchanted Moura", believed to guard "Pots of Gold". As Harpsoe and Ramos report (1985: 202), the work carried out confirms the local accounts that it was the habit of young people in the region to go looking for the "pot of gold", thus disturbing the archaeological layers to find whole vases. According to the legend, the vases had to be broken to reveal the treasure.

The Legend of the Fraga dos Corvos (Macedo de Cavaleiros): "There is also a large crag in Vilar do Monte, which they call the Fraga dos Corvos. The ancients said that the crag holds back an arm of the sea beneath the Bornes mountain range and that on the day the world ends, the sea will burst forth and flood everything within a radius of seven leagues. The Moors used to live in this crag, and they created an underground passage to the village of Chacim, about four kilometres away, which allowed the Moors of Chacim and Vilar do Monte to meet. No one has ever managed to enter this passage because if anyone tried, the light used to show the way would immediately go out (Parafita, 2006: 258). The Abade de Baçal states that the underground passage connected the Moors of Vilar do Monte with those of Balsamão, four kilometres away on the other side of the Serra de Bornes, near the town of Chacim (Alves, 2000 [1934]: 494–495).

The two "pigs" of Almofala (Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo): "Within the walled enclosure of Monte de Santo André, on either side of an iron gate that closes the path to the chapel, there are two granite pigs on top of the wall, facing each other". These are two *berrões* (Iron Age wild boar sculptures), although locals consider one of them to be a bull. There is a belief in Almofala that there is a great treasure on Mount Saint Andrew, a belief expressed as follows: "On Mount Saint Andrew, between the pig and the bull, there is a great treasure belonging to the Moorish king" (Santos Júnior, 1975: 397).

Santo André, Almofala (CNS 4085) is a settlement spanning the Iron Age, Roman and Medieval periods, located in Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo. Situated on the top of a prominent hill, close to the Águeda River, it offers a wide view over this watercourse and possesses good natural defences, particularly to the north and east. The ruins of a line of walls are still visible. In the vicinity of the chapel, fragments of a column and a Roman funerary inscription have been found, along with a likely Gothic pulpit, suggesting a medieval occupation of the site (PA).

According to the Parish Memoirs, in Algoso, Vimioso: "There is no Plaza 'de Armas' in this town, but there is a castle [Castelo de Algoso] above it, said to be of Moorish origin,

Figure 5: Pottery from Lorga de Dine, Vinhais. (Photo Manuel Santos, Museu de Arqueologia D. Diogo de Sousa)

Figure 6: Santo André, Almofala, Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo. The Church of Saint Andrew. (Photo Jaime Grandes)
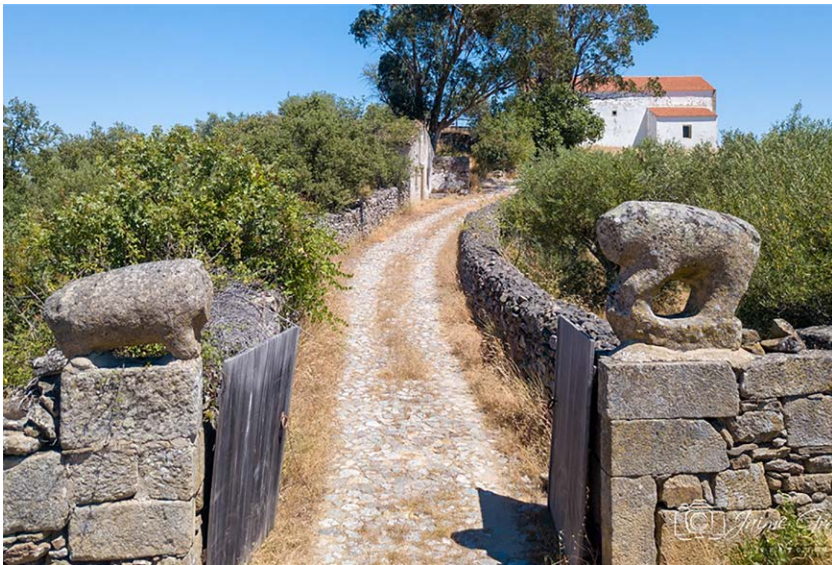
Figure 7: Santo André, Almofala, Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo. The *Berrões*. (Photo Jaime Grandes)

built on the edge of a rock /…/" (Capela et al., 2007: 71). Algoso is steeped in legends. An example that is connected with the Moors is the Legend of Algoso Castle:

> It is said that the castle of Algoso, in the municipality of Vimioso, was inhabited by a Moorish king who exercised great tyranny over the villages in the area. He had a daughter who fell in love with a Christian nobleman and helped the Christians when they tried to recapture the castle. The Christians thus managed to defeat the Moorish king and he soon discovered his daughter's betrayal. And so, as punishment, he cast a spell on her, turning her into a serpent and leaving her in the castle's underground chambers to guard a valuable treasure. He himself escaped through a mine, hoping to return one day to recover his treasure.

Local people say that this mine goes through the Penenciada mountain. They also believe that on the night of Saint John, a very beautiful maiden with her hair loose has been seen sitting by a nearby fountain, crying. At the first light of dawn, she vanishes – only to be replaced by a huge snake with a large head of hair, which slithers away before it too disappears. For this reason, no one dares enter the mine to look for the treasure there. The spring is known as the "Fonte de São João Batista", and it is believed to cure certain illnesses. For this reason, it is visited by many pilgrims, especially on Saint John's Day. A chapel dedicated to this saint stands beside it (APL 3752[2]).

THE *PALA DA MOURA* DOLMEN (VILARINHO DA CASTANHEIRA)

Martins Sarmento, a Portuguese archaeologist from the nineteenth century, was informed by local people of the remains of dolmens in the region of Vilarinho (da Castanheira, Carrazeda de Ansiães), which were called *Pala dos Mouros* (Sarmento, 1878: 77, fn. 179). In Portuguese toponymy and popular traditions, *pala* can refer to a cave, rock shelter, or stone ledge. In this case, the local people refer to the dolmens as the "Moor's Ledge" or "Moor's Shelter".

Name	CNS	Municipality/Parish
Anta de Zedes (Casa da Moura I)	995	Carrazeda de Ansiães/Amedo e Zedes
Casa da Moura II	2375	Carrazeda de Ansiães/Amedo e Zedes
Casinha da Moura da Samorinha	16941	Carrazeda de Ansiães/Carrazeda de Ansiães
Pala da Moura	3078	Carrazeda de Ansiães/Vilarinho da Castanheira
Pala da Moura	16961	Carrazeda de Ansiães/Castanheiro e Ribalonga

Table 2: Five dolmens in the municipality of Carrazeda de Ansiães whose names include references to female Moors.

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[2] Interview. Year: 2001. Place of collection: Algoso, Vimioso, Bragança. Informant: António Augusto Fernandes (M), 72 y.o. https://lendarium.org/en/apl/springs/legend-of-the-castle-of-algoso/.

Figure 8: Pala da Moura, Vilarinho da Castanheira, Carrazeda de Ansiães. (Photo Alexandra Vieira)

There are five dolmens in the municipality of Carrazeda de Ansiães, and they are all associated with the Moors. Their names all contain the term *Moura*, which refers to a female Moor. Three are interpreted as houses, and the other two are seen as small shelters. The *Anta de Zedes*, known locally as *Casa da Moura*, is located southeast of the village of Zedes, in the parish of Zedes and the municipality of Carrazeda de Ansiães. This megalithic monument, known since the end of the 19th century, dates to the late Neolithic or Chalcolithic period (Portal do Arqueólogo, 2025).

The dolmen of Vilarinho de Castanheira, also known as *Pala da Moura*, belongs to a typology frequently observed in megalithic funerary architecture. Although the tumulus has not survived, the structure consists of a polygonal chamber made up of eight megaliths, including the headstone. It also has a capstone and a corridor oriented to the east. Four stones from this original corridor appear to remain in situ. On the inner face of one of the megaliths, faint traces of a primitive pictorial composition are visible, although difficult to interpret. Like the other four monuments, it was built in the Late Neolithic or Chalcolithic period (CNS 3078, Portal do Arqueólogo).

According to popular legend, the *Pala da Moura* table was placed there by a Moorish woman who carried it from a great distance on her head, while spinning on her spinning wheel and holding her little son in her arms (Lage, 2004: 62). Otília Lage has also collected the following information about this group of dolmens:

> The most noteworthy antiquity in this town (three leagues from Carrazeda) consists of three *Antas*, commonly referred to by the locals as *Pala Mouras*.

Figure 9: A map indicating the location of Pala da Moura, in the north of Portugal. (Google Maps)

> According to tradition, tithes were burned there during the time of the Written Law. However, the most discerning observers of antiquities have concluded that these *Antas* were altars used by pagan priests to perform blood sacrifices to their false deities (Lage, 2004: 72).

DISCUSSION

These legends about the dolmens of Carrazeda de Ansiães reveal how the perception of these dolmens has evolved from mythical interpretations to scholarly debates on their original purpose. The coexistence of these narratives reflects the enduring cultural significance of these monuments and their role in shaping local identity. The first legend, which tells that the "house" was built by a Moorish woman carrying a stone table on her head while spinning and holding her child, emphasizes the supernatural and heroic elements often embedded in oral traditions. The Moors are portrayed as the creators of magnificent buildings, endowed with extraordinary and supernatural gifts. This narrative not only highlights the strength and resilience of the female Moura but also imbues the monument with a sense of mysticism and otherworldliness, linking the physical structure to the enduring presence of the Moors in the cultural imagination. Spinning has often been metaphorically linked with fate and the passage of time.

In contrast, interpreting the dolmens as altars where pagan priests performed sacrifices introduces a more ritualistic understanding of these sites, aligning them with ancient practices that predate both Christianity and Islamic influence. However, the mention

of tithes being burned there during the "Written Law" suggests a transformation of the site's role, merging older religious practices with later legal and social customs, perhaps as a way of reconciling past beliefs with present religious and cultural structures. By analysing these different perspectives, it becomes clear that the dolmens are not simply relics of a bygone era but living symbols, continuously shaped by evolving cultural values and beliefs. These legends show how the past is reinterpreted, adapted and integrated into the cultural fabric of later generations, remaining relevant through the centuries.

Local communities associate the Moors with ancient times. The female Moors (*Mouras* or *Moiras*) are associated with treasures, gold, and enchantments or spells. According to Martins Sarmento, the people attribute all the ancient buildings to the Moors, the relics of which abound in our hills and valleys: "Many monuments attributed to the Moors were already in ruins before the Arabs passed through our country" (Sarmento, 1881: 105–106). As shown, oral narratives serve as valuable tools for contextualising and reinterpreting these archaeological sites, offering insights that may not be evident from material evidence alone. Local stories and legends often provide alternative perspectives on the purpose and history of archaeological sites. For instance, legends surrounding Moorish castles or ruins frequently offer unique interpretations of their functions or origins, bridging gaps in historical understanding. They also allow us to examine how Moorish vestiges were absorbed and reinterpreted within the post-Reconquest Christian landscape. The persistence of Moorish cultural elements in the landscape has been integrated into local narratives. Legends and myths played a key role in shaping the perception of Moorish remnants, influencing how they were understood and valued within the Christianized cultural framework.

To grasp the "temporal thickness" of the landscape – the accumulation of meanings, uses and memories over time – it is vital to conduct a comprehensive analysis of local beliefs. Legends and place names not only aid in the discovery of archaeological sites but also offer insights into how structures and landscapes can be interpreted. They can challenge existing understandings, providing new perspectives on how such sites were perceived and used throughout history. The traditions and toponyms associated with the Moors and the enchanted *mouras*, the *mourama*, and similar concepts point to locations of potential archaeological interest, functioning as "instruments of archaeological topography" (Hrobat, 2007: 31–32).

I believe that toponyms associated with the Moors may reflect fixed oral expressions that have endured through time and space, some of them preserving elements of oral tradition. Some authors argue that it is possible to rescue the memory of a place – or an archaeological site – by analysing and interpreting toponyms (Carvalhinhos, 2003, 2004, 2007; Mayor, 2007; Soutou, 1954). Therefore, we believe that popular beliefs associated with archaeological remains may have persisted over time in a particular geographic space through toponyms. As Fernández (2011: 139) notes, "/…/ where oral tradition invested spaces with a certain symbolic importance or a certain mythological charge, archaeologists usually identified some vestige of human occupation" – as seen in the examples involving caves, tunnels, wild boars and treasures.

Contrary to the scepticism shown by early archaeologists and historians in Portugal towards the legends of the Moors, this study demonstrates that oral traditions, even in their legendary forms, possess remarkable complexity and richness and can provide valuable insights. It is essential to approach these legends as multi-layered phenomena that require exploration from various perspectives. It is precisely in this exploratory process – opening pathways to new ways of understanding the territory and the landscape – that their significance and relevance lie. These are not merely "old Moorish legends" relegated to the past; they are an integral part of the daily life of specific communities. These communities have sought to explain the origins and architecture of ancient remains, linking them to their ways of life, fears and historical memories. The legends reflect a continuous effort to make sense of the surrounding environment, blending cultural memory with local identity. Considering these narratives as part of the broader cultural fabric, we can uncover how they inform our understanding of the relationship between people and the landscape. Rather than dismissing them as relics of superstition, we recognize their role as tools for interpreting both the material and immaterial aspects of archaeological sites that are believed to be the work and legacy of the Moors.

The legends associated with the Moors can be divided into two major categories. On the one hand, the legends of Enchanted Moors and Mouras delve into the realm of the supernatural and the fantastical. On the other hand, some legends are rooted in the Arab occupation of the Iberian Peninsula and the Christian Reconquista – a centuries-long struggle between Christians and Moors, often framed as good versus evil, oppressors versus the oppressed. These legends appear to weave together historical elements from the Reconquest with local narratives, blending broader historical events with the specificities of regional history and social coexistence. The result is a complex interplay of historical, local and mythical spheres, giving rise to oral traditions passed down through generations. Passed from neighbour to neighbour and through the years, these stories echo the past while adapting to the needs and circumstances of everyday life. By examining these narratives, we gain insight into how communities perceive and interpret their heritage, not only as a reflection of historical events, but as a living, evolving part of their cultural identity. This interweaving of facts and folklore enriches our understanding of the landscapes they inhabit, highlighting the dynamic relationship between memory, history and the physical world.

The *castros* (ancient hillforts) are often associated with legends of enchanted *mouras*, hidden treasures left by the Moors, and various superstitions. These include miraculous holy springs, trees endowed with supernatural powers, or rocks believed to produce powders capable of curing specific ailments. Sometimes, the afflicted would process around these sites or lie upon them in the hope of being healed. References to such phenomena are not uncommon in the Constitutions of Portuguese dioceses, in pastoral letters from bishops, and in the canons of medieval councils – especially those of Braga and Toledo, which are of particular relevance to this region. These documents contain directives aimed at abolishing superstitions tied to sacred springs and trees. However, Christianity, unable to eradicate entirely these deeply rooted beliefs among a population fiercely attached to tradition, skilfully redirected such practices. Churches, chapels and temples were erected on or near the ruins of *castros* or other sites marked by traces of ancient civilizations.

By doing so, the Church "Christianized" these locations, substituting pagan gods with saints from the Christian calendar. In the understanding of the local population, these saints often inherited some of the protective and healing powers previously attributed to their pagan predecessors. With little more than a name change, these figures continued to hold sway, at least in the popular imagination, as evidenced by the festivals and processions that persist to this day. This phenomenon explains the presence of chapels on hilltops near ancient settlements, and the processions that still take place in many villages to specific sites within their territories. These sanctuaries also serve as valuable indicators for archaeological research, guiding explorations and shedding light on the cultural layers that connect the pagan past with Christian traditions (Alves, 2000 [1934]: 173–174).

Oral traditions often carry centuries of knowledge passed down through generations, either through place names or legends. These can offer insights into the significance of archaeological sites beyond what is visible in artefacts or structures. For instance, local myths, legends and stories can explain a site's original use or cultural importance, such as why a particular location was regarded as sacred or chosen for settlement. In some examples, legends or place names explain the origins of sacred landscapes and provide a deeper understanding of why a specific site has religious or spiritual significance – even if there is no written or material evidence to support it – just by being associated with the Moors. The presence of enchanted Moors, some of them cursed and many guarding treasures or concealing gold, imbues the landscape with many meanings.

Archaeological evidence, while invaluable, is often fragmented or incomplete. Oral narratives and toponyms help bridge these gaps by preserving the collective memory. For example, legends about an ancient castle might describe its founding, cultural practices, or important events not reflected in the surviving ruins or artefacts. Material evidence such as pottery, carvings and tools may be complex to interpret without understanding the culture and symbolism behind them. Oral traditions can clarify the meanings behind these objects, offering insights into their intended use, symbolism and significance. A sculpture of a wild boar (or bull), for instance, may be interpreted differently with the help of oral narratives that describe its role in ceremonies, the deity it represents, or the ritual practices associated with it. These narratives about ancestors or deities provide insights into religious practices or social organisation that are not evident from the physical remains of a site, as illustrated by the case of the *Palas Mouras*.

Legends play an essential role in understanding the temporal dimension of archaeological sites, providing a historical perspective beyond material evidence. Although archaeology can provide data on the chronology and arrangement of artefacts and structures, oral tradition allows these elements to be contextualized in time and space, providing a broader and often more detailed timeline – such as that relating to the period when the historical Moors lived in the Iberian Peninsula. The toponyms, myths and legends passed down from generation to generation act as living testimonies that can fill in temporal gaps in the archaeological record. Oral histories can often describe events or cultural changes that occurred when physical evidence is either unavailable or has not been preserved. In addition, oral tradition also explains the sequence of events – how certain practices and traditions evolved over time – and establishes connections between different layers of history.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim was to explore the relationship between the Moors and the archaeological remains scattered across the Portuguese landscape. We have presented several cases to demonstrate how Portuguese communities have reinterpreted and resignified Moorish vestiges, integrating them into their cultural identity through toponymy, legends and social practices. This approach highlights how material and immaterial heritage interrelate in the context of local memory dynamics. By analysing these elements, archaeologists can better understand how landscapes, monuments and ruins are perceived and integrated into collective memory. This perspective underscores the importance of considering both tangible and intangible heritage when studying the past, bridging the gap between physical evidence and the stories that bring it to life.

This study has demonstrated that the Moorish presence in Portugal is reflected in archaeological remains and is deeply ingrained in the cultural landscape through toponyms and oral traditions. Place names linked to the Moors and their associated legends reveal how historical memory is preserved in everyday language, serving as enduring markers of a past that is continuously reinterpreted. These toponyms, often associated with sites of archaeological interest, reflect how local communities have integrated and adapted Moorish heritage into their own identities.

Legends about Moors and enchanted Moiras further reinforce this connection, offering symbolic narratives that explain and give meaning to the material vestiges scattered across the Portuguese landscape. These stories, shaped over centuries, function as bridges between tangible and intangible heritage, transforming ruins and ancient sites into living elements of cultural memory. Through them, historical remnants are not merely preserved but actively woven into the fabric of Portuguese identity, sustaining a dialogue between past and present.

The coexistence of these elements – toponyms that silently record the past and legends that bring it to life – demonstrates how memory is constructed and transmitted. Studying these interactions enriches our understanding of Portuguese cultural history and highlights the importance of oral tradition in shaping perceptions of heritage. Future research should further explore regional variations in these narratives, their connections to local landscapes, and the evolving role of these cultural markers in contemporary society.

Today, we recognize that ethnographic records documenting these traditions and narratives are invaluable to archaeologists. They provide essential tools for analysing and reflecting on how local communities shaped, understood and reimagined landscapes over time. Toponymy and oral traditions, therefore, are not merely supplementary resources; they are integral to the study of landscape archaeology, bridging the material and the symbolic, the tangible and the intangible.

Recognizing and preserving the interplay between toponymy and legend is essential for a deeper comprehension of Portugal's historical identity. By valuing these expressions of collective memory, we ensure that both the spoken and written traces of the past remain essential to cultural heritage, enriching how history is perceived and lived today.

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LA TRADITION MAURE DANS L'ARCHÉOLOGIE PORTUGAISE

Ce travail explore les multiples traces de la présence maure dans le paysage portugais, en croisant vestiges archéologiques, toponymie, légendes et croyances populaires, étayés par des sources historiques et des études sur la tradition orale. Grâce à une approche interdisciplinaire, l'étude met en lumière les liens profonds entre patrimoine matériel et immatériel, en montrant comment les communautés portugaises ont réinterprété et réintégré les vestiges maures dans leur identité culturelle.

En analysant divers cas concrets, l'auteur montre que les noms de lieux, les récits issus de la tradition orale et les pratiques sociales ne sont pas de simples souvenirs du passé, mais des marqueurs vivants d'une mémoire collective en constante évolution. Les toponymes associés aux Maures ainsi que les légendes de Maures enchantés, contribuent à expliquer, à donner du sens et à maintenir une présence symbolique autour des ruines et des monuments. Ces récits oraux, façonnés au fil des siècles, transforment les vestiges matériels en éléments actifs de l'identité culturelle locale.

Cette coexistence entre des noms de lieux porteurs d'une mémoire silencieuse et des légendes qui les animent témoigne de la richesse du dialogue entre le tangible et l'intangible dans la construction de la mémoire collective. L'étude souligne ainsi l'importance de prendre en compte la tradition orale et les perceptions locales dans l'analyse archéologique des paysages. Elle invite à une lecture plus complète et plus humaine du passé, en intégrant les récits et symboles qui donnent vie aux traces matérielles.

Enfin, l'auteur appelle à une reconnaissance accrue de ces interactions entre toponymie, légendes et vestiges dans les recherches futures. Loin d'être accessoires,

ces éléments sont essentiels pour comprendre comment les communautés ont imaginé, interprété et transmis leur patrimoine. Préserver ces expressions de la mémoire collective, c'est aussi garantir que les voix du passé continuent de résonner dans la compréhension contemporaine de l'histoire et de l'identité portugaise.

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Graves of Saints on the Mountains of the Southern Urals: Traditional Beliefs and Modern Perception

—— Ainur I. Tuzbekov, Albert T. Akhatov ——

This article examines the historical development of the cult of sacred mountains on the basis of field materials gathered by the authors during archaeological and ethnographic research on Mount Awliya Tau in Kugarchinsky District, Bashkortostan in 2023, and on the works of contemporary researchers devoted to orolatry (veneration of mountains) in the Southern Urals.

The research used a synergistic approach, integrating archaeological, ethnographic, and social media data with geoinformation mapping. The results reveal similar patterns and trends in the formation and development of sacred spaces associated with some mountain tops. Awliya Tau's significance extends beyond traditional Muslim pilgrimage and tourism; it's also integrated into contemporary religious and psychological practices, etc.

KEYWORDS: Awliya Tau, cult of mountains, cult of saints, archaeology, ethnography, Southern Urals

Članek preučuje zgodovinski razvoj kulta svetih gora na podlagi terenskega gradiva, ki so ga avtorji zbrali med arheološkimi in etnografskimi raziskavami gore Awliya Tau v okrožju Kugarchinsky v Baškortostanu leta 2023, ter na podlagi del sodobnih raziskovalcev, posvečenih orolatriji (čaščenju gora) v Južnem Uralu. Raziskava je uporabila sinergijski pristop, ki je združeval arheološko, etnografsko gradivo in podatke z družbenih omrežij z geoinformacijskim kartiranjem.

Rezultati razkrivajo podobne vzorce in trende pri oblikovanju ter razvoju svetih prostorov, povezanih z določenimi gorskimi vrhovi. Pomen gore Awliya Tau presega tradicionalno muslimansko romanje in turizem; vključena je tudi v sodobne verske in psihološke prakse.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Awliya Tau, kult gora, kult svetnikov, arheologija, etnografija, Južni Ural

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Russian society, where religion profoundly influences many aspects of human life, studying its practices and institutions remains highly relevant. Researchers are particularly drawn to cult sites and sacred places, which are associated not only with the revival of once-forgotten traditions of veneration and worship, but also with active engagement in contemporary socio-cultural and ritual practices.

In this regard, special attention should be paid to the study of the territory of the Southern Urals, a significant part of which is located within the modern administrative borders of the Republic of Bashkortostan (hereinafter RB). Due to its geographical location and unique historical and ethnic development, the region is considered a special ethno-cultural zone. The formation of the Bashkir people unfolded over a long period of time, and after their integration into the Russian state in the mid-16th century, there was an active resettlement of various national and religious groups. The on-going ethno-cultural processes and interactions in the region have given rise to distinct ethno-confessional stereotypes, many of which are associated with sacred objects and places of worship.

In the Southern Urals, rich in mountain ranges, ridges and hilly plains, the cult of mountains remains an important element of religious belief. It is manifested in various ways among the peoples of the region. The cult is often closely associated with the custom of burying people on hills and mountain tops, and the traces of these burials are recorded today in the form of archaeological sites, and are perceived by local residents as sacred objects.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the South Ural Old Believers worshiped the graves of holy elders on the slopes of Mount Yurma (Kusinsky District, Chelyabinsk region). The Mari people of Bashkortostan, most of whom adhere to their ethnic religion ("Mari paganism"), continue to venerate the summit of Shukyn Kuryk. According to legend, this is the burial site of Kuryk Kugyza, a celebrated defender of the Mari people (Kaltasinsky District, RB).

The Tatar and Bashkir populations of the Republic of Bashkortostan, who traditionally practice Islam, especially venerate the mountains of Aush Tau (Uchalinsky District) and Toratau (Ishimbaysky District). These peaks house the graves of saints – known as Awliya (also spelt aulia or wali, meaning "patron" or "saint" in Arabic) – who are revered by Muslims. While Tatars mostly associate the concept of Awliya with people revered as saints, in Bashkir tradition – as observed by A.K. Idiatullov – it has a broader meaning and often implies holy mountains, springs, etc. (Idiatullov, 2018: 91).

Over many years of expeditions made to different regions of the Southern Urals, the authors have studied mountains and hills where stone mounds or formations were recorded, which the local (primarily Bashkir) population refers to as Әүлиә тауы (Awliya Tau, Mountain of a Saint) and Изгеләр тауы (Izgelar Tau, Mountain of Saints). According to the residents of nearby settlements, legendary *batyrs* (folk heroes) and revered saints of Awliya are believed to be buried there. People visit the graves to honour them, request help, healing and receive blessings. Notably, in the local perception, the summit and the tombs upon it are often regarded as a single sacred space.

According to the researchers, the cult of holy mountains, Awliya Tau, was formed in the Southern Urals due to the influence of Islam on the local ancient traditions that revered mountain tops and hills as sacred sites for worshipping host spirits and the supreme deity. As a result, these sacred places were transformed and reinterpreted as Muslim shrines, with mountains housing the graves of saints (Awliya) becoming particularly revered. They are known as Awliya Tau (Suleymanova, 2005: 16–18; Absalyamova, Aminev, Mannapov, Migranova, 2019: 64; Shaikhislamova, 2014: 1483) and are found in many areas of Bashkortostan.

Nowadays, such sites have become popular destinations for religious tourism, attracting pilgrims, casual travellers and people specializing in spiritual practices, training programmes etc.

The Awliya Tau located in Kugarchinsky District, Bashkortostan, is a striking example of these processes. Its summit is home to a number of cult objects as well as elements that the authors had not encountered before – pieces of plastic bags tied to tree branches and the iron fences of graves, scraps of signal tape, children's toys left by visitors and notes with affirmations – positive statements written in the form of short phrases.

Despite its regional and wider popularity as a place of worship and pilgrimage, Awliya Tau has yet to be the subject of a dedicated study. At the same time, studies of the formation and development of sacred spaces associated with individual mountain tops allow us to identify local features of ethno-cultural traditions and also provide a retrospective analysis of their development within the socio-cultural fabric of certain regions (Dugarov, 2005; Karataev, 2021; Absalyamova, 2022).

The purpose of the work is to study the beliefs and religious practices of the South Ural population, which are associated with the cult of sacred mountains based on the materials discovered on the summit of Awliya Tau.

To achieve the study's purpose, the following objectives were formulated:
- to describe the physical condition of the sacred mountain of Awliya Tau and the places of worship located on it;
- to identify and characterize the complex of religious rituals and spiritual practices carried out on the specified mountain top;
- to conduct a retrospective study of the formation of the sacred site being studied and determine its socio-cultural significance for the local population, the district, and the region.

SOURCES. METHODS AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article is based on field materials obtained in the course of a complex archaeological and ethnographic expedition to the territory of Kugarchinsky District, Bashkortostan Republic in September 2023.

Given that modern scientific research depends on well-organised processes, interdisciplinary data analysis, cutting-edge methods and continuous theoretical and methodological advancements, a synergetic approach was adopted to address the issue.

As part of the expedition, an archaeological field study of the summit of Awliya Tau was carried out. It involved an examination of tombstone structures and stone layouts, along with video recording, photography and documentation of their current condition, with signs of sacralisation identified separately.

Additionally, ethnographic methods were employed by interviewing local residents to gather primary information. Non-ethnographic research methods were also used to analyse online photo and video resources and study posts tagged "Awliya Tau Kugarchinsky District".

It is important to note that netnography – a term combining "net" (network) and "nography" (ethnography) – is a specialised approach for studying virtual spaces through online communications, which has been introduced into academic discourse by Dr. Robert V. Kozinets relatively recently (Kozinets, 2020). Although this technique is still considered innovative in Russia, its application in the study of religious rituals, pilgrimages, places of worship and holy places allows us to obtain more comprehensive data (Yavnaya, 2023).

Systematic and historical methods were employed to study the formation and development of the sacred space of Awliya Tau. The systematic method enables us to consider the mountain and the cult objects located on it as a historical, archaeological, religious and mythological complex, to which a system of specific traditions and rituals is attached. Meanwhile, the historical method makes it possible to trace the development of the sacred space's organisational structure and its integration into the contemporary socio-cultural context of the South Ural region.

Considering that the formation of individual sacred spaces is influenced by many factors, including landscape and natural geography, we also used the method of geoinformation mapping to compare the site under study with other Muslim places of worship that share similar form and content.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE SITE

Awliya Tau is located between the Russian village of Kuzminovka and the Bashkir villages Ibragimovo and 1st Tupchanovo in Kugarchinsky District, Bashkortostan (Fig. 1). The citizens of the Bashkir villages believe this place to be sacred. At the foot of the mountain – an important feature of the local landscape – flows the Bolshoy Ik River, fed by the Malyi Ik and Karachayelga tributaries. According to local informants, during the Soviet era the mountain was called Berekme Tau ("the mountain that connects"), while its current name is relatively recent. It is also known as Topsan. Nearby, a route used by tourists from the Mrakovo settlement leads to the Muradymovsky Gorge, with Awliya Tau on the way.

The dome-shaped mountain rises 474 m above sea level with relatively gentle slopes, most of which are covered with woodland, except for the south-eastern part. Despite its isolated location, its south and south-west adjoin the spurs of the Urals. The rounded, partially wooded summit, is home to cult objects and can be reached by a path that leads up from the foot of its eastern side near the village of 1st Tupchanovo. The intensity of visitation to the site can be indirectly inferred from the depth of its surface depression, which reaches up to 12 cm below the surrounding area.

Not so long ago, the mountain had a guardian, Alimgulov Minnulla Galimyanovich, a resident of the village of 1st Tupchanovo. Before he died in December 2012, people made a short video about him (*Secrets of the mountain of Awliya Tau*). Everything he knew about the mountain he had learnt from his grandfather who used to take him there when he was a child. With time, M.G. Alimgulov climbed the mountain with people willing to see it and he told them the history of the place, taught them how to pray, etc.
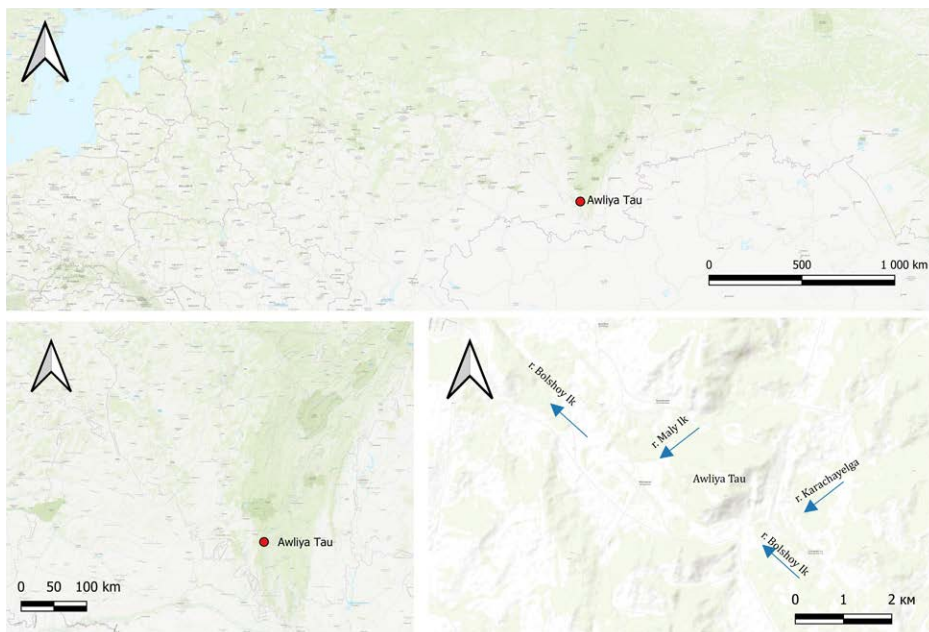
Figure 1: The location of Mt. Awliya Tau.
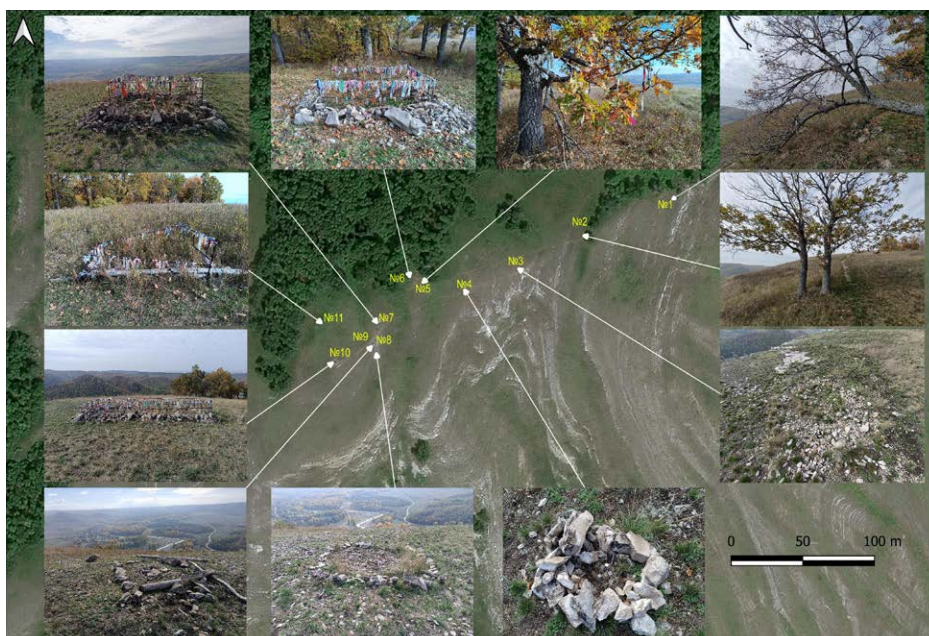
Figure 2: Plan of the location of religious objects on Mt. Awliya Tau: 1–2, 5 – trees with decorated branches; 3–4, 8–9 – stone layouts; 6–7, 10–11 – graves of Awliya.

There is a belief that his knowledge may have been passed down by the well-known religious leader and healer Shamigula Khalfa (Shamigula Badretdinovich Bikbaev, 1876–1957), a native of the village of Saitkulovo (Absalyam) in the same district, whose burial place is venerated as sacred.

CULT OBJECTS

The cult complex of Awliya Tau may be divided into two key components: the natural (landscape) element, including the mountain's summit, and the anthropogenic (man-made) element. The latter can be further subdivided into groups of individual elements: 1) trees decorated with ribbons; 2) stone layouts; 3) wooden structures; 4) graves of saints.

All these objects, located near or on the summit of the mountain, have been numbered consecutively and marked on the map (Fig. 2). Most of them are concentrated at the summit of Awliya Tau on an irregularly oval-shaped platform that is bordered by forest to the west, north-west, north and north-north-east, by relatively steep slopes to the south-east, south and south-west and by gentler slopes to the east.

Three objects from the first group are trees with decorated branches, positioned along the path that leads from the foot of the mountain to its summit.

The first tree (Fig. 2-1) is located approximately 300 m from the starting point of the ascent. The trail passes beneath a low tree trunk, whose end nearly touches the ground, forming a natural "arch". A number of ribbons, handkerchiefs and scraps of yellow-black signal tape are tied to its branches. According to informants, this unusually curved trunk is like an entrance to the sacred space of the mountain.

Ascending several dozen metres, the trail passes by two solitary trees (Fig. 2-2). It runs beneath their branches, which are adorned with ribbons, fragments of fabric and plastic bags. The trail then splits: one of the paths goes to the forest, on the edge of which there is another tree with numerous colourful ribbons (Fig. 2-5). The second path passes by four stone layouts – two in the upper part and two at the summit – and then leads to the site where the graves of the saints are located.

The study first dealt with the objects located along the trail leading to the edge of the forest. On the way to it, on the left side, there was a contour stone layout, an oval structure measuring 2.7 m by 3.2 m, composed of a single row of small and medium-sized stones with smooth, rounded edges (Fig. 2-3). Among the stones, rusty and patina-covered coins in denominations of 50 kopecks, 1 ruble and 2 rubles, dating from 1998 to 2012, were found.

Further along the path, on the right side, there was a second contour stone layout composed of medium and large stones (in two rows in some places), which was round in shape and between 0.8 m and 0.7 m in diameter (Fig. 2-4). Inside the circle, there was a pile of clean, oxide-free coins in denominations of 50 kopecks and 1, 2, 5 and 10 rubles, dating from 2005 to 2023.

The next two stone layouts, located to the left of the path, were situated near each other at the summit, closer to the south-eastern edge of the site.

The third stone layout, a square structure measuring 2 square metres, consists of large boulders and is integrated with a natural rock outcrop (Fig. 2-8). At the centre, a large stone is surrounded by small and medium-sized rock fragments. On its surface and nearby, coins were found (some covered in rust) in denominations of 50 kopecks, 1, 2, 5 and 10 rubles, dated between 1997 and 2023. Also, near the large stone, there was an open half-litre jar of honey, a log and two poles, one of which had a plastic lamp with a solar battery attached to its end.

About 2 m to the south-west of the previous site lies the fourth square stone layout (Fig. 2-9), measuring 2.2 by 2 metres and made of large stones. Within this structure, a circular stone layout was recorded. At this location, a broken metal women's hairpin and a chain with beads were found. Also, coins of various denominations – 50 kopecks, 1, 2 and 10 rubles, dated from 1997 to 2019 – were scattered around the inner perimeter, some showing deep rust while others were free of oxidation.

According to informants, these structures have been repeatedly reconstructed. For example, a few years ago, the site of the third square stone layout (Fig. 2-8) featured a layout measuring about 1.5 by 2 m, lined with stones of different sizes, with the same central boulder. Meanwhile, at the fourth layout (Fig. 2-9), a structure consisting of four poles decorated with numerous ribbons had been erected. One pole stood in the middle and was lined with numerous stones, while the other three leaned against it and were fastened together with a ribbon on top. According to some informants, there used to be a grave of a saint enclosed by a wooden fence on this site, a description of which will be given below.

A construction of logs and poles was found closer to the forest, connected to the trunks of two dead trees. One of the trees was decorated with ribbons, while the second had a log, a pole and part of an iron fence from the grave leaning against it, all adorned with ribbons. Nearby, two more poles and a triangular-shaped stone lay on the ground, with two small stones, a tasbih rosary with black round beads, several 2-ruble coins and one 10-ruble coin, dated between 2019 and 2023 placed on them.

It is worth noting that this particular construction was obviously included in the cult complex at a later stage and may have originally served as a place for storing unnecessary things. Nevertheless, the construction and the wooden pole stuck into the ground near the first grave – also adorned with ribbons and even a sock – was allocated to a separate group.

The last group of religious sites consists of the graves of saints.

The first of them (Fig. 2-6) is located on the edge of the forest near a tree with branches adorned with ribbons. The grave is lined along its perimeter with large and medium-sized stones, forming a rectangle measuring 3 by 2 metres, oriented along the north-west – south-east axis. It is enclosed on three sides by a metal fence, adorned with multi-coloured ribbons of different lengths, pieces of signal tape, handkerchiefs, etc. Some women's jewellery, a bracelet with beads, and an elastic hairband were also attached to the fence. The missing section of the fence on the northwest side was located near a construction made of logs and poles. Among the stones, two stand out: one, over a metre long, was notably large, while the other had an unusual bluish hue and was tied with a pink ribbon. Coins in denominations of 50 kopecks, 1, 2, 5 and 10 rubles, issued between 1998 and 2023, were scattered all around, most of them inside the stone layout.

The second grave, measuring 2 by 3 metres and square-shaped, stretches along the west-southwest to east-northeast axis (Fig. 2-7). It is located 40 m south-west of the first grave. It is surrounded by large and medium-sized stones and enclosed on all four sides by a metal fence. Inside, there is another oval-shaped stone layout, along the inner space of which coins were recorded, including some with traces of deep rust in denominations of 1 and 2 rubles, issued between 2006 and 2019. Like the previous grave, the fence is decorated with numerous ribbons, handkerchiefs, plastic bags, etc.

A note with affirmations was also found there. These are positive statements written in the form of short phrases, which will be discussed later.

The third grave (Fig. 2-10) is located about 40 metres south-west of the second. Similar to the previous graves, it is lined with stones around the perimeter and enclosed on four sides with a metal fence. However, it stands out due to its larger dimensions of 3 by 5 metres. Inside the stone layout, which is oriented along a long axis from the north-north-west to south-southeast, there is an oval-shaped stone layout. Coins of 50 kopecks, 1, 2 and 10 rubles, issued between 1998 and 2019 were recorded all around, with the highest concentration observed in the south-eastern half of the grave. A small black stone with a regular rounded shape was also found there.

The fence was decorated with numerous ribbons, handkerchiefs, plastic bags, etc. Among the stones, various objects were found, including candy wrappers, two toys – a money lamb and a dinosaur, a 50-ruble banknote, as well as two notes with affirmations.

The fourth grave (Fig. 2-11) is located in isolation at the edge of the forest, among dense bushes and grass, 42 m to the west of the second grave and 36 m north-northwest of the third. It is bordered on three sides by a wooden construction made of cross-laid logs and planks, the upper parts of which are adorned with faded pieces of fabric and ribbons. A metal fence is installed above the wooden construction, to which relatively few ribbons are tied, most of them sun-bleached, and only two fragments of signal tape. Unlike the others, this grave looks abandoned: the metal fence is broken and only a few coins were recorded on the planks in denominations of 2, 5 and 10 rubles, one issued in 1997 and the others between 2007 and 2022.

According to a legend passed down among the local population, a Bashkir leader and his family fiercely resisted the Tatar-Mongols trying to conquer the Bashkir lands. The family – including grandfather, grandmother, daughter-in-law and child – was buried on the mountain. To serve as both a warning and a means of intimidation, a Mongol military leader forbade burial in the ground, threatening brutal reprisals in case of violation of this order.

After the enemies had departed, the surviving Bashkirs decided that if the dead could not be buried on the plain, they could be buried on a mountain top. Years passed and over time people noticed that on the holidays of Uraza and Kurban-Bayram (Eid and Eid al-Adha), lights appeared on the mountain where the graves were located. They were associated with a blessing from Allah. Gradually, the local population came to believe that the mountain top was a holy place with miraculous powers that helped liberate people from sins and heal various diseases. People began to visit the mountain not only from the surrounding settlements and villages, but also from all over Bashkortostan and the adjacent regions of Russia and other countries including Kazakhstan and Egypt.

RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

The traditions observed at Awliya Tau and in many areas of Bashkortostan, such as tying pieces of cloth and ribbons of different shapes, colours and sizes to the fences surrounding saints' graves, the branches of nearby trees or poles, leaving coins and jewellery as sacrifices, and making piles and pyramids of stones on mountain tops, have deep roots and are the manifestation of orolatry – the veneration of mountains (Garustovich, 2011).

Many pilgrims tie ribbons and pieces of cloth as a sign of repentance and as a request for their wishes to be fulfilled. However, this is the first time the authors have observed yellow-black signal tape and plastic bags on the mountain. According to informants, this practice has appeared relatively recently and was introduced by tourists who visit Awliya Tau on the way to the Muradymovsky Gorge Nature Park.

According to the data posted in different years on the "Official Portal of the Republic of Bashkortostan", the Park was visited by 17,500 people in 2018, 20,200 in 2019, 26,500 in 2020, 32,300 in 2021, 46,800 in 2022 and about 48,000 in 2023 (*Official portal*).

It is worth mentioning that local residents react strongly against the site's growing popularity and many of them express dissatisfaction with tourists, whose number is increasing every year. In their opinion, they litter the holy mountain with rubbish. Some members of the Muslim population believe that visiting graves, even those of saints, and seeking favours from the deceased is a sin or shirk (polytheism, paganism) and should be stopped.

According to the local tradition, everyone who ascends the mountain takes a stone with them as a symbol of their sins (the heavier the sin, the bigger the stone). Pilgrims put the stones and their fragments on the indicated graves or stone embankments and pray to the saints buried there. Some of them perform a circumambulation of the graves.

During the study, new objects left by some pilgrims and tourists were recorded that had not previously been encountered at other sacred sites in Bashkortostan. They included toys and notes with affirmations – positively worded statements intended as autosuggestions to change one's usual way of thinking and shape the desired future.

The concept of affirmation appeared in Western culture in the first half of the 20th century as part of training programmes that fall under the broader category of "self-help" (self-improvement, self-guided improvement). In Russia, this concept gained popularity primarily through the works of American writer Louise Hay, one of the promoters of affirmation practices. Self-help practices are widely used in popular psychology (neuro-linguistic programming, hypnosis, associative priming, etc.), as well as in mystical philosophical movements, such as New Thought and New Age (Shelestyuk, Galuschak, 2019: 110–111).

A total of three such notes (one poorly preserved) were left by women among the stones on the second (one note) and third graves (two notes). All of them were written in Russian and as projective statements in the present tense: all the authors affirm that they are successful, healthy, have fulfilling (comfortable) jobs, their own apartments and the opportunity to travel, etc. In general, their main content shows that the authors prioritise material comforts, family well-being, etc. Obviously, their small number does not allow

for broad conclusions, but it does indicate that the cult of the sacred mountain is being integrated into the modern socio-cultural environment.

It is worth noting that similar processes – the inclusion of mountain tops with the graves of saints in ritual practices by representatives of new religious movements and trends – have been recorded by the authors in many districts of the Republic of Bashkortostan and adjacent regions.

FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SACRED SPACE

There is almost no information about when people started treating Awliya Tau as a place of religious worship. In order to avoid conflicts with the local citizens, it was decided to carry out an archaeological survey without digging test pits or cleaning up the outcrop. An inspection of the sacred site showed that there is only one grave at the summit with a faintly visible earth embankment, roughly two metres in diameter. At its peak stood a wooden fence. Such mounds on mountain or hilltops are characteristic of burials from the Late Middle Ages and the early modern period in the Southern Urals (Fig. 2-11). Considering that archaeological materials from the Early Iron Age and the Middle Ages have been identified on many mountain tops of the Southern Urals – Kurmantau (Gafuriysky District, RB), Toratau (Ishimbaisky District, RB), Aush Tau (Uchalinsky District, RB), etc., this evidence testifies to the manifestation of the cult of mountains (Ovsyannikov, Kotov, Rafikova, Savelev, Garustovich, Ruslanov, 2022: 375–380). It is most likely that the Awliya Tau has held an important place in the religious beliefs of the local population since the Middle Ages.

With Islam spreading in the Southern Urals, pagan beliefs and rituals began to change. In Bashkir tradition, orolatry, closely related to the cult of ancestors (manifested by the construction of burial complexes on mountain tops), gradually transformed into the cult of sacred mountains (Ovsyannikov, Kotov, Rafikova, Savelev, Garustovich, Ruslanov, 2022: 391–394). Apparently, these processes also had some effect on the mountain, as proven by the above-mentioned legend about the Mongols.

Given the dominant location of Awliya Tau in the area and the fact that every Bashkir clan had its own sacred mountain (Shirgazin, 2010), it is highly likely that by the early 20th century, the top of Awliya Tau played a key role in the sacred topography of the inhabitants of the villages of Ibragimovo and 1st Tupchanovo.

In the Soviet years, despite the fact that local residents climbed the mountain to celebrate the First of May (Spring and Labour Day) and the Ninth of May (Victory Day), Awliya Tau still had a cult significance in the national consciousness.

During an interview with A.G. Salikhov, a philologist and native of the Kugarchinsky District, it was found that Shamigula Khalfa, a famous religious leader who passed away in 1957, climbed to the top of Awliya Tau for prayer shortly before his death. A.G. Salikhov learnt of this from informants who noted that Shamigula Khalfa's age meant he could not climb the mountain himself, so he had been carried there on a cart by several elderly women who did not feel any burden thanks to the spiritual elder's miraculous power.

According to the researcher Z.G. Aminev who visited Awliya Tau in 1989, people from Kugarchinsky and other nearby areas came to pray at the saint's grave.

The processes of national cultural revival and re-Islamisation at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries in Russia and Bashkortostan led to a widespread increase in people's interest in traditional beliefs, sacred sites and holy places, etc.

In light of these events, interest in Awliya Tau has increased. Obviously, M.G. Alimgulov, the guardian of the mountain, also played an important role: not only did he accompany those who came to the mountain, but he also told legends associated with it, contributing to its popularisation.

According to Z.G. Aminev, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, there was only one grave on the mountain top. Pilgrims came, read prayers from the Koran, made various sacrifices in the form of pieces of cloth and coins, and left stones next to the grave, eventually forming a stone mound (Aminev, 2008: 10–11). It probably served as a basis for the second grave of Awliya, as A.G. Salikhov already recorded two graves in 2008.

After a few years, the number of graves probably increased to three. The first and the second graves were recorded in video footage dated November 2013, which was posted on the website of Kugarchinsky District's Department of Culture. Another grave with a bench next to it was located at the site where we recorded stone layouts Nos. 3 and 4. All of them were surrounded by wooden fences made of logs and poles, to which ribbons and pieces of cloth had been tied (*Secrets of the mountain of Awliya Tau*, 2024).

According to informants, by the early 2020s, the latest and largest grave appeared, confirmed by photos posted online (*The Holy Mountain Awliya*, 2024). At the same time, at the initiative of a resident of 1st Tupchanovo, iron fences were installed to replace the wooden ones.

As for the above-mentioned tombstone structure above the current third and fourth stone layouts, after the wooden fence had been removed, an iron one was put in its place. However, after some time the old dismantled fence was moved to another place, which we marked as grave No. 4.

By studying the location of the mountain and fences using satellite images and topographic maps, certain patterns were observed. For example, three fences are almost exactly aligned along the north-eastern to south-western axis. Perhaps, they were intentionally oriented in the direction of the Kaaba. The Bolshoy Ik River curves around the mountain from the south and west, while the Maly Ik River curves around it from the north and flows into the Bolshoy Ik at the north-western foot of the mountain. Meanwhile, the Karachayelga River flows along the eastern foot of the mountain, at the heart of the panoramic view of the surrounding area as seen from the fences. In this regard, geoinformation methods and the HeyWhatsThat resource were used to determine what is visible from Mount Awliya Tau. The results were compared with those obtained from other famous Muslim sacred sites, including the sacred mountains of Aush Tau and Narys Tau, as well as the mausoleums of Turakhan, Hussein-Bek and Bandebike.

To implement the above task, the HeyWhatsThat resource was used. It displays all areas visible from a particular point on a hill or summit, covering a full 360 degree radius. The system not only automatically identifies areas of visibility, but also marks them in red on the map, making it possible to determine the territory visible from the specified location.
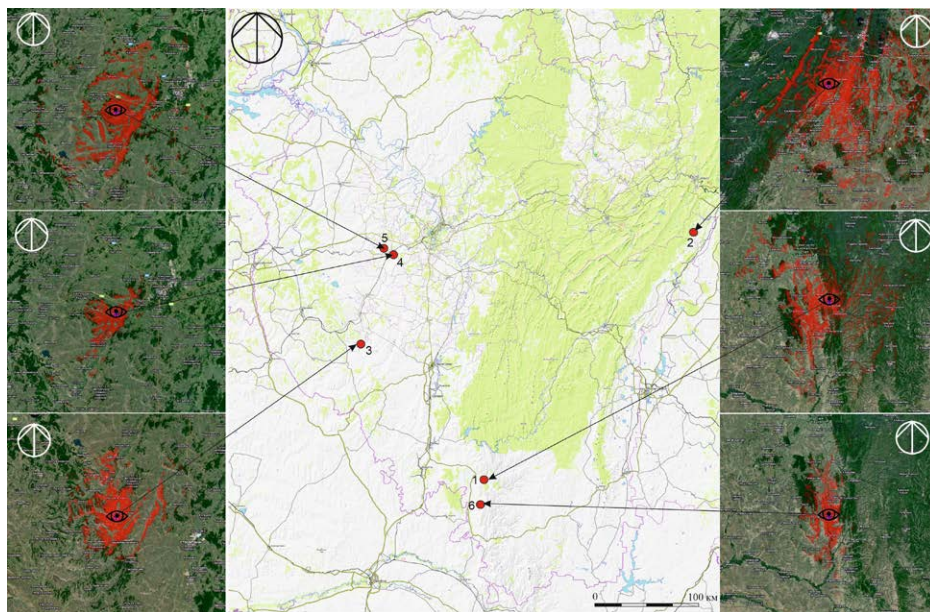
Figure 3: The main directions of visibility zones from the cult objects are: 1) Mt. Awliya Tau, 2) Mt. Aush Tau, 3) Mt. Narys Tau, 4) Khusain-Bek mausoleum, 5) Turakhan mausoleum, and 6) Bendebike mausoleum.

Mount Awliya Tau (altitude 474 m) offers spectacular panoramic views of the surrounding area, especially towards the south-east in the direction of the Muradymovsky Gorge, which is visited by large numbers of tourists. From the graves, the south-west and south are most visible (Fig. 3-1).

Mount Aush Tau is located in the Uchalinsky District of the RB (altitude 645 m). The entire surrounding area is visible from the stone layout on its summit. However, the area of greatest visibility is towards the south (Fig. 3-2).

Mount Narys Tau is located in the Miyakinsky District (altitude 200 m). As in the previous cases, the entire surrounding area is visible from the grave of the saints, and the visibility zone detected by the resource is almost evenly distributed around the mountain top (Fig. 3-3).

The mausoleum of Hussein-Bek is located in the Chishminsky District (altitude 111 m). The visibility area identified at the site is oriented along a north-east – south-west axis and has a subtriangular shape, with the outer side extending significantly to the south-west (Fig. 3-4).

The mausoleum of Turakhan is also located in the Chishminsky District (altitude 189 m). From the site of the mausoleum, the area of greatest visibility extends predominantly towards the south (Fig. 3-5).

Similarly to the mountain of Awliya Tau, the mausoleum of Bandebike is located in the Kugarchinsky District (altitude 214 m). From the mausoleum, the zone of greatest visibility stretches along the north – south axis, i.e., it extends to the north and the south (Fig. 3-6).

Thus, comparing the visibility zones from Mount Awliya Tau with other significant Muslim shrines in the region, it has been found that despite their differences and the large distances between them, they share a common feature – a panoramic view of the surrounding area and greatest visibility towards the south, possibly aligning with the direction of the Kaaba.

CONCLUSION

The conducted research has shown that Awliya Tau is a sophisticated cult complex consisting of two main components: the natural landscape, including the mountain summit, and anthropogenic (man-made) features represented by cult objects such as graves of saints, stone layouts, wooden structures and trees adorned with ribbons.

A comprehensive study of beliefs and religious practices associated with Awliya Tau reveals three main layers of religious and cultural stereotypes: pre-Islamic, associated with orolatry, Islamic, associated with the veneration of Muslim sacred places, and contemporary, represented by psychological and esoteric spiritual practices.

It should be noted that the term esotericism in this article is considered in line with E. G. Balagushkin's ideas, encompassing a wide range of spiritually oriented teachings. This includes the promotion of occult mystical knowledge, neo-pagan religions and various forms of psycho-spiritual practices, including alternative medicine (Balagushkin, 2002: 248).

The analysis of available sources and literature suggests that for the population living in the area, Awliya Tau has been a sacred site since at least the Middle Ages. The beliefs and religious practices associated with it are a mixture of two cults – the cult of the mountain and the cult of saints. These traditions, rooted in older belief systems, have evolved through mutual influence and have successfully adapted to the modern socio-cultural environment.

The data obtained in this research generally correlate with the results of archaeological, ethnographic and linguistic studies of orolatry in the Southern Urals, both in general and concerning individual mountain tops. Together, they help identify recurring patterns and tendencies in the formation and development of sacred spaces associated with the mountains. These have become integral not only to the general Muslim pilgrimage and tourist culture of the South Ural region, but have also been included into the ritual practices of new religious movements. They are even visited by people practicing esotericism, popular psychology, etc.

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МОГИЛЫ СВЯТЫХ НА ВЕРШИНАХ ГОР ЮЖНОГО УРАЛА: ТРАДИЦИОННЫЕ ВЕРОВАНИЯ И СОВРЕМЕННОЕ ВОСПРИЯТИЕ

В статье на основе полевых материалов, собранных авторами в ходе архео-олого-этнографического изучения горы Аулия тау в Кугарчинском районе Республики Башкортостан в 2023 г. и работ современных исследователей, посвященным вопросам оролатрии на Южном Урале, рассматривается ретроспективное развития культа Священной горы.

При проведении исследования использовался синергетический подход, базирующийся на сопряжении имеющихся археологических и этнографических

данных, а также материалов полученных с помощью методов нетнографии в социальной сети Интернет.

При изучении горы и расположенных на ней культовых объектов применялись археологические и этнографические методы; для анализа формирования и развития приуроченного к ней сакрального пространства использовались системный и исторический методы, а также метод геоинформационного картографирования.

На основе имеющихся источников и литературы был не только рассмотрен процесс трансформации культа гор, тесно связанного с культом предков, под влиянием ислама в культ священной горы – Аулия тау, но и представлены происходящие изменения религиозных представлений о ее сакральности и значении в современной социокультурной среде.

Полученные результаты коррелируют с уже имеющимися материалами, свидетельствуют о сходстве закономерностей и тенденций формирования и развития сакральных пространств, приуроченных к отдельным горным вершинам. Выявленные на горе разновременные культовые проявления говорят о том, что Аулия тау является частью общемусульманской, паломнической и туристической культуры Южноуральского региона. В тоже время они указывают на ее включение в ритуальную практику новых религиозных движений, психологических практик и т.д.

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Gender Metamorphosis of Dives in the Qajar Era Illustrations: A Mythological and Sociological Analysis

———— Nahid Jafari Dehkordi and Elaheh Panjehbashi* ————

There have been extensive studies on the gender metamorphosis of divs, monstrous creatures of widespread presence in Persian lore. An interpretation of the evolution of nature, supernatural beings (including div), and the feminine presence within a historical backdrop indicate that humanity once perceived these as mysterious and menacing entities, believing their lives to be influenced by the will and intervention of sinister divs. However, over time, these entities have been emancipated from their ethereal, inscrutable realms and become subjected, instead, to the faculties of contemplation and judicious reasoning. Iranian society, as a longstanding part of the human tapestry, has also experienced this reassessment. The present study is an attempt to scrutinise the causality behind the manifestation of gender shifts in depictions of divs during the Qajar era. The Qajar era is widely regarded as the historical turning point in which the last remnants of Iran's traditional societal structure began to fade, marking the dawn of a new world. Artworks from this key period attest to a profound transformation of the view toward nature, supernatural beings, and women. Div, as an epitome of the horrors of nature – and woman, as a symbol of the beauty and tenderness of nature, underwent a fusion. Divs, once petrifying entities, assumed more benign and distinctly feminine forms. We argue that this metamorphosis signifies a tendency to demythologise nature and the secularisation of feminine social life.

KEYWORDS: Qajar, gender, metamorphosis, mythological, div, illustration

O spolni metamorfozi divov, pošastnih bitij, ki so v perzijskem izročilu zelo razširjena, so bile opravljene obsežne študije. Razlaga razvoja narave, nadnaravnih bitij (vključno z divi) in ženske prisotnosti v zgodovinskem ozadju kaže, da jih je človeštvo nekoč dojemalo kot skrivnostne in grozeče entitete ter verjelo, da na njihova življenja vplivata volja in posredovanje zloveščih divov. Vendar so se te entitete sčasoma osvobodile iz eteričnih, nedoumljivih področij in postale podvržene sposobnostim kontemplacije in razsodnega razmišljanja. Tudi iranska družba je kot dolgoletni del človeške tapiserije doživela to ponovno vrednotenje. Pričujoča študija poskuša raziskati vzroke za pojavne spremembe med spoloma v upodobitvah bogov v obdobju Kadžarja. Kadžarsko obdobje na splošno velja za zgodovinsko prelomnico, v kateri so začeli izginjati zadnji ostanki tradicionalne družbene strukture v Iranu, kar je pomenilo začetek novega sveta. Umetniška dela iz tega ključnega obdobja pričajo o globoki preobrazbi pogleda na naravo, nadnaravna bitja in ženske. Div kot utelešenje grozot narave in ženska kot simbol lepote in nežnosti narave sta se združila. Divi, nekoč okamenela bitja, so prevzeli blagodejne in izrazito ženske oblike. Trdimo, da ta metamorfoza pomeni težnjo po demitologizaciji narave in sekularizaciji ženskega družbenega življenja.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Kadžar, spol, metamorfoza, mitološki, div, ilustracija

INTRODUCTION

The term "Metamorphosis" and its practical application in mythology originate from Ovid's seminal work titled *Metamorphoses*, which delves into the transmutation and transfiguration of one entity into another. In Eastern cultures, this term encompasses broader and somewhat different notions and is expressed by terms such as *Maskh* (human transformation into animals), *Faskh* (human transformation into plants), and *Raskh* (human transformation into inanimate objects) among others (Ovidius Naso, 2010).

   Traditionally, human societies formed their opinion regarding all entities – be they living beings, objects, or phenomena – in terms of their potential utility or detriment. Nature, perceived as the backdrop and stage for all entities known to humans, has always been teeming with creatures and concepts to which humans would assign evaluative labels. Each entity possessed mysterious aspects, which humans tended to simplify according to more straightforward criteria. All entities deemed as harmful and perilous were considered to represent unknown forces that were ostensibly insidious, menacing, and cunning – in brief, forces capable of negatively impacting human life. Our ancestors associated these entities with and felt their presence in such phenomena as darkness, pain, death, natural disasters, predatory animals, and even human "enemies". This invisible realm was thought to house mythical evil creatures such as divs, aals, bakhtaks, and jinns.

   On the opposite side were concepts, entities, and phenomena that were viewed as virtuous, fruitful, beneficial, and reassuring. Beauty, shelter, fruit trees, flowers, herbs, livestock, and hunting animals contributed to human survival and enhanced the pleasures of life. Maternal and feminine qualities, inherent within constrained human communities of ancient times, were synonymous with the above-mentioned positive aspects. This world-view and understanding of life and nature, although continuously evolving and becoming more sophisticated, were largely shared across all cultures. Although numerous religions and ideologies have emerged and faded away through millennia, the original perceptions of our ancestors remained remarkably stable and are distinctly present in contemporary cultures. This research focuses on Iranian society during a specific historical period and the way it experienced a gradual metamorphosis and transition, without delving into a meticulous investigation of the subject from a broad perspective.

   The Qajar era was a period of significant social transformations within Iranian society, one of which involved people's belief in the supernatural. Divs were once considered as supreme omnipresent beings capable of influencing all aspects of daily life; entities that could not be explained in terms of human logic nor governed by human laws and mores. However, in this particular era, even the imperious div underwent a substantial shift in identity. No longer considered invincible, divs began to be reimagined either as abject beings or ones whose monstrous qualities were largely tamed. Numerous artworks attest to the profound mythological metamorphosis in the nature of supernatural beings, especially divs, during the Qajar era. This research will explore this very metamorphosis and its broader implications.

   Throughout history, the cultural spectrum of Iran has not only witnessed conflicts between significant social forces and ethnicities but also served as the stage for the dawn, decline,

and transformation of supernatural forces. Political unrest and the lack of security often accompanied intellectual upheavals, further aggravating clashes of ideas. Although Iranians, for large parts of their history, have believed in the existence of an omnipotent deity as the creator of all and the one sovereign of all, the parallel belief that supernatural forces such as divs, jinns, aals, and bakhtaks exert an influence on their lives has never ceased to exist. These oft ominous forces, however, have undergone various transformations in form, nature, and function themselves, closely mirroring the social transformations of the time. Supernatural forces, then, have served as reflections of social forces and events. Documenting artworks as reliable records for historical examinations, especially in cases with limited written resources and historical reports, was therefore a necessity in this research.

This research is not concerned with any specific form, background, or manner of presentation; rather, it is focused on a particular notion of artworks and the term used in this paper for this purpose will henceforth be *illustrative arts*. To these authors, illustration encompasses all arts that involve visualisation, painting, engraving, and embodiment, which share the common goal of representing, imitating, or freely inter-preting the forms existing in nature. In brief, the objective of this study is to discover why the divs portrayed in The Qajar era paintings underwent a gender metamorphosis. The authors seek to answer the question of whether these changes reflect intellectual and ideological transformations within society or merely signify transition toward a novel artistic experience. Evidently, addressing this question necessitates an in-depth study of the social and historical background of this transformation, as well as an artistic investigation to understand the context within which the works in question were produced.

The lack of independent and comprehensive studies in this field, the continued rele-vance of the Qajar era today, and transference of the legacy and tribulations of Iranian society of the Qajar era to modern-day Iran, underscore the importance of such research projects. Establishing a meaningful connection between contemporary society and its final phase of traditionality during the Qajar era may assist us in developing a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of ourselves.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Evaluating an artwork from historical and cultural perspectives also requires a full ex-amination of its sociological and mythological aspects, and this research is grounded in these considerations. By delving into the mythological and sociological background of the subject matter, the authors present their evaluation of the artistic and aesthetic aspects of the works and present their conclusions.

Within theoretical focus of this study, the Qajar era may be viewed as the stage for profound transformation in three aspects that mutually influenced one another: *nature* came under the unprecedented dominance of humankind, *women* were prepared to come out of the confinement of domestic spaces where they had been virtually imprisoned

for centuries, and the belief in the absolute power of mysterious supernatural beings was fading away under the influence of the age of enlightenment and the advent of modernity.

This period marked the final stage of Iranians' struggles with nature. With the exception of indomitable major events such as earthquakes and droughts, nature was all but conquered by humans. The transition toward the use of sophisticated methods, tools, and firearms in place of their increasingly obsolete counterparts rendered humanity more adept at dealing with predatory creatures in nature, leading to the unfortunate extinction of important indigenous species in Iran, such as lions and tigers. Prior to the Qajar era, hunting was almost exclusively considered as a skill and art belonging to the wealthy nobility, and the upbringing of future kings involved training in hunting and athleticism (Adinehvand, 2016). Whereas aristocrats, princes, and even kings showcased their prowess and resourcefulness by participating in royal hunting parties, the increasing ease with which animals could now be trapped and killed almost stripped hunting of its epic glory and heroic elements, turning it into an easily accessible and widespread pastime for the masses.

Visual arts like painting, illustration, and engraving served as advertising tools during the Qajar era, depicting heroic scenes of royal hunts. Sculpture, relief, and tilework would also frequently portray these scenes (Heidari Babakamal et al., 2016). Artists of the era found portrayals of hunting grounds to be a suitable platform for their artistic expression (Adinehvand et al., 2016). No significant artwork remains of the hunting exploits of the lower classes who were of no interest to the artists of the time; however, hunting was undertaken with increased interest among the people. Certain sections of society saw hunting as a means of sustenance, providing for their families and, at times, relatives and neighbors. The triumph over nature eradicated any mythical elements associated with hunting. Nature, once considered a sacred realm in the rituals of Mehr, Zoroastrianism, and Islam, was quick to lose its mystery, with modern science creating increasingly accurate maps and accounts of all its components and characteristics, while facilitating the utilisation of its resources. Therefore, sites of formerly mythical repute, such as valleys, caves, and wells, which were once regarded as the dwelling places of mythical creatures like divs and jinns lost much of their aura, no longer able to capture anyone's imagination.

The Qajar era society was intensely religious. The leading figures of the time were not scholars or even religious intellectuals, but the superficial clergy who insisted on the ritualistic aspects of religion. The incessant impasses and failures, in addition to confrontations with the incomparably advanced foreign world over a prolonged period had instilled in the people the belief that many aspects of life were beyond human reach, that supernatural forces and metaphysical beings held the reins of world affairs. While the Qajar era left us with more reliable historical accounts for use as study resources compared to previous eras, it was nonetheless characterised by overwhelming belief in the occult, superstition, pseudoscience, and supernatural beings (Hatami, 2019). Notably, this backward attitude did not only plague ordinary people. Political figures and decision-makers shared such beliefs and practiced the same rituals. For instance, Zahir-al-Dawlah (1983) a prominent military leader and the governor of Kerman under Fatḥ Ali Shah, reported the use of talismans by Nāyeb-al-Saltana, Mohammad Ali Shah's father-in-law.

A conflicting trend, however, was also instigated during the Qajar era, where intellectuals began to desacralise and demystify supernatural beings. This widespread belief contributed to the ultimate defiance and revolt against imaginary supernatural beings. In an era where invisible forces were widely thought to play a significant role in determining individuals' actions and fates, artworks were being created that criticised these prevailing beliefs. Artists now depicted demonic entities as stripped of their powers and sinister attributes, giving them dejected, ineffectual, and passive appearances. Continued victories of humanity against nature, therefore, led to the demystification and demythologisation of nature itself. Once considered sacred, all-powerful, and frightening, nature now could no longer be represented by the harsh symbols of the past.

In the Qajar era, women were condemned to confined spaces. These constraints arose, primarily, from religious beliefs, and also the strong influence of centuries-old misconceptions, fantasies, customs, and rituals. It must be noted, however, that women were neither alien to these concepts nor their sole victims; rather, in most cases, women were willing agents and executors of these internalised norms. In addition to the spiritual constraints imposed by the prevailing culture and religion, the Qajar woman also had to endure frequent physical punishment – a common, widely accepted practice at the time (Zarrinsky, 1992). Any doubts regarding the miserable conditions under which lower-class women lived would be quashed if one also considered the unimaginable duress and humiliation that they suffered as maids in aristocratic households. Guidelines crafted by a prominent landowner to govern the conduct of his servants depicts a clear picture of the prevailing circumstances of women:

> The maid shall not speak with [male] servants. She shall not raise her voice or cause disputes. She shall not climb to the roof or go outside the yard to have a break, eat fruits, and so forth. If she fails to follow the rules and does anything other than her duty, a valet is authorised to strike her with a wooden bat. If the valet fails in this, my honourable brother, Mirza Ali Khan, will scalp him to establish the strict order I intend to have in my house. When maids set out to visit the holy shrine or visit the bathhouse, they must always be accompanied by several servants. They should never, under any circumstances, be left on their own. Even when maids have gone for pilgrimage or bathing, the house should never be left untended or unguarded, be it day or night. At night, two babas [elderly servants] shall sleep under the same roof [lest the maids leave the premises]. A valet and a gardener, by turn, shall sleep outside behind the door until the morning prayer, at which time they are allowed to return to their chambers (Naqdi, 1979).

The narrow enclosure around the female human, which originated in primitive rituals, had become established as cultural norms. The threads that bound her to the supernatural world were still very much in place. Even Naser al-Din Shah, the one Qajar king who claimed to be an advocate for modernisation and sought to emulate the Western way

of life, remained a proponent of these norms and quite superstitious. According to some accounts, a number of women were expelled from his harem as "inauspicious", having been blamed for some unfortunate incidents (Polak, 1989). It was this type of environment where The Qajar era women were molded.

In the unending list of supernatural entities in which Iranians (like other Eastern cultures) believed, there was another fearsome entity known as *aal*, whose sole function was to torment and harm women and their offspring (Rice, 2004; Churchill, 1891). Apparently, women managed to reach a sort of understanding and compromise with these imaginary beings, either driving them away by force or getting them to fulfill their wishes. For instance, some women would plead to Satan through aal to resolve their infertility (Knanishu, 1899) or, alternately, sought help from the Queen of Fairies (Sykes, 1910).

Women's emotional and sexual relationships, fertility, and reproductive prowess during this period significantly relied on bizarre beliefs deposited from prehistoric times. A piece of monkey liver or the vulva of hyenas and rabbits were used in specific ways as to create or enhance love. Alternately, oil extracted from the skin of wolves or wild hogs was applied to the garments of a husband and wife with the intent to diminish their sexual attraction to one another, ultimately leading to discord and the deterioration of their marriage (Amanat, 2004; Afzal al-Mulk, 1982). In traditional societies, fertility and reproduction are essential feminine traits and decisive in a woman's fortunes. If a women exhibited any shortcoming in this regard, she risked losing her social or familial status. Therefore, adhering to the role ostensibly dictated by nature, which required her, to reproduce as all females should, was an archetypal and obligatory duty. According to various accounts, in the quest to become fertile, women would pass under an elephant's belly (Morier, 1999), gathered under the statue of a tiger or slept beneath it (Yate, 1900), and used the gallbladder of wolves (Amanat, 2004; Morier, 1999). Additionally, in instances where a woman endured intense childbirth pain and had difficulty delivering the baby, her husband resorted to placing feed on her bare breasts and having a horse eat from it (Dieulafoy, 1976).

In contrast, certain methods were also popular as contraceptive solutions. For instance, women who wished to avoid pregnancy, placed a piece of a wolf's body in their clothes prior to intercourse (Serena, 1983). This method was even practiced in royal circles. In one notorious case, the court jester of Naser al-Din Shah exposed a conspiracy involving some of the King's wives who sought to render him sterile by slipping in some bear liver into his food (Etemad al-Saltaneh, 1966).

In all, historical data indicate that Qajar women's upbringing, personality patterns, and code of social behavior practically directed them toward superstition and the occult. Not only were the majority of common women preoccupied with such beliefs and so-called methods, but society at large, even at its highest level, namely the royal court, caused them to resort to supernatural solutions. On this basis, artists' inclination to portray supernatural beings in the form of female humans could not be considered offensive or a violation of norms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a theoretical exploration based on documentary studies whose statistical population consists of Iranian artworks featuring depictions of divs. By selecting 16 Qajar era artworks, the authors draw the readers' attention to certain details in the artworks of that period. These details point to a significant change in the form, style, and function of the motifs of divs compared to past works. Through the course of this research, the data extracted from credible sources were ultimately developed into documented information by means of a qualitative method based on descriptive-historical analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bibliographic analyses indicate that no research has thus far been conducted on this particular subject matter. However, sources can be found that have addressed certain aspects of it, with some focusing on depictions of divs and others exploring the role and social status of women during the Qajar era.

According to Rice (2004), Iranian women during the Qajar era profoundly believed in supernatural forces, viewing them as active participants in their daily lives.

With a particularly keen eye for nuances of everyday life, D'Allemagne (1956) provided a detailed account of the social life of Iranians during the Qajar era. Primarily focused on Iranian women, this source has been particularly useful in shaping the current understanding of the social situation of women in the Qajar era.

Elm and Dinari (2019) worked on providing a clearer picture of the clothing of Qajar women by going through the field works of Western explorers. A valuable study based on eye observations and critical views from non-Iranian individuals looking in from the outside, this report sheds light on the social fabric of the era.

Mehrpooya et al. (2017) delved into the evolution of the div motif during the Qajar era. Aside from having a half-human half-animal body, the being was, for the first time in Qajar paintings, depicted as having four eyes.

Nategh (1979) referred to a code of conduct devised by the head of an aristocratic family. The document makes frequent use of imperative verbs to determine the behavioural boundaries of a family, thereby providing an accurate reflection of the institutionalised moral values of its era.

Hosseini-Nia (2021) posited that the composite beings illustrated in the Qajar era, although shaped in the imagination of the artists, were heavily inspired by the beliefs prevalent in pre-Zoroastrian Persia. This interpretation speaks of two groups of supernatural forces descending on earth from another world: malevolent entities that engage in battles with humans and forces of good; and benevolent entities that support humans and other creatures on earth.

Mohammadi-Pour (2020) analysed div motifs in terms of form, structure, perspective, elements breaking out of the frame, proportional changes, circumvention, and composition with other elements in five prints of *Chapsangi Shahnameh*.

Rashidi (2012) examined the mythical beings depicted in illustrations as surrounding the figure of Imam Ali, the first Imam of Shia Muslims, in terms of form and composition.

Radmehr (2011) investigated the perception of jinn in the collective consciousness of the people, as well as the role of these beings in the Quran and Islamic narratives. The author cites Islamic narratives and pop culture as the primary sources of this study.

Zakariayi (2006) argued that in addition to the mythical quality and inherent duality of nature in terms of good and evil, benevolent and malevolent forces, by extension, originate in human nature. According to the author, this duality has been manifested in diverse forms during different historical periods, including the Qajar era.

What distinguishes the present research from the studies reviewed in this section is its reliance on scientific studies within the framework of socio-cultural and mythological perspectives regarding the value of Qajar era artworks. Moreover, this investigation places the emphasis on the historical background of three key components: nature, supernatural beings, and women.

THE CONCEPT OF DIV IN SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

The cosmos and what human beings comprehend through their five senses have undergone continuous transformation, diversification, and reinterpretations throughout history. Although characterised by obscurity, secrecy, and complexity, unpleasant concepts have not been exceptions to this rule. Divs, as a highly diverse group of malevolent beings, have symbolised unpleasant forces of nature. This section investigates how natural forces are manifest in divs as symbolic entities and the transformation divs have undergone throughout history. In this context, particularly in ancient times, the term *Div* generally refers to imaginary supernatural entities, often portrayed as anthropomorphic beings that function as deities, that are responsible for overseeing various aspects of life, able to determine or alter the destinies of individuals, and create or affect natural phenomena. However, it is important to acknowledge that the contemporary perception of divs has evolved over the centuries and differs from the ancient understanding of these beings.

A) Belief in Divs in Prehistoric Times
The history of religion is one of the most complex aspects of human life. It is very difficult to find something that the humankind has not worshipped in one way or another at some point in its history (Hume, 1969). Harder still is to find a facet of human knowledge and understanding that has not been entangled with religious beliefs. At least up to this point in history, humanities as academic disciplines have been influenced by religious thought, although to various degrees. This is particularly true for ambiguous, non-empirical fields such as the occult (Eliade, 1997). Nature, as the setting and framework for the formation of human existence, has been an open ground for all sorts of analyses and explanations, including religious interpretations. When nature was to be feared, it was perceived as a roaring beast; and when the time was right to cherish nature, it was regarded as a charming lady who could alternately take on a motherly role or be a lover. Seeking to demystify

sacred texts, Spinoza stated that since the masses were unaware of the inner workings of nature, they were open to farfetched supernatural interpretations and, therefore, would readily accept any natural occurrence as a miracle (Spinoza, 1862).

Divs were among the first entities to be sanctified and worshipped by Aryans. The synonymity of the terms used to refer to divs and concepts like *God*, *day*, and *light* indicates that Aryans lived with this religious belief before their ultimate dispersion and the great diaspora. According to linguistic studies on Indo-European languages, *Dyēus pheter* is the original term denoting the concept of deity. This deity was still recognisable for ancient peoples even after undergoing inevitable transformations in other lands. It became *Dyáuṣ Pitā* in Sanskrit, *Zeùs Patḗr* in Greek, and Jupiter in Latin. Evidently, these terms are derived from the word *Div* whose original meaning in Indo-European languages was *day*. It later transformed to *Díva* in Sanskrit, *Tiv* in Armenian, *Diēs* in Latin, and *Die* in Old Irish. It would gradually come to be used as the most common word for *God*: *Dīvus* or *Deiuos* in Old Latin, *Deus* in Latin, *Deva* in Sanskrit, *Dievas* in Lithuanian, *Dia* in Old Irish, *Tvar* (plural name) in Old Icelandic, and *Dava* in Avestan (Beekes, 2010: 78). The close proximity of the words *div* and *day* signifies the prehistoric inclination toward naturalism in primitive religions.

In those historical periods, nature, with all its obscure elements, was the chief source and stimulus of human thought. Nearly all other concepts and phenomena were either constructed in its image or understood in reference to it. Supernatural beings, including divs, embodied the frightening and mysterious side of nature, while women and feminine characteristics symbolised its gentle, beneficial, fertile, and motherly aspects.

B) Belief in Divs at the Dawn of Global Religions
During the formative periods of global religions, the concept of divs and the worship of divs as primitive deities had significantly different connotations compared to the organised religions that emerged later. Among primitive peoples, "sacred" beings were generally seen as frightening and furious entities capable of causing harm. In order to protect oneself from their malevolent intentions, it was necessary to seek their favor and mercy. This separation of negative aspects from the supreme divine power eventually led to the development of demonology and the belief in the existence of devils. This pivotal development likely took place during the Paleolithic period (Brandon, 1970).

In ancient Near-Eastern religions, particularly early Judaism (Angelini, 2021), as well as in Christian demonology during the Middle Ages, Satan was perceived as a malevolent supernatural being who could possess individuals and required exorcism. Much of Jewish demonology, which greatly influenced Christianity and Islam, was influenced by ancient Persian teachings, particularly those of later Zoroastrianism (Boyce, 1987).

The abstraction of negative traits from primitive deities was not absolute, and some of these traits were preserved and even celebrated in certain religions. In the case of Iranian culture, these deities were originally divs who underwent a transformation in their conceptual function over time. Initially appearing as gods, these entities were later dethroned and replaced by Ahura (or Asuras). They then became ostensibly powerful malevolent beings whose might was matched by heroes but ultimately faced defeat against

forces of good. In the final stage of the transformation of divs, they became peripheral and powerless entities in feminine forms, who were defeated not by mighty warriors but by pampered kings and love-struck courtiers.

The concept of "femininity" and the role of women have also undergone various transformations throughout history. From the early matriarchal era, where goddesses held supreme authority and enjoyed widespread popularity, to centuries of progressively patriarchal societies where male gods dominated, the history of femininity has been marked by constant changes. However, during the period spanning from the formation of early civilisations to the Age of Enlightenment, men assumed the position of the "primary" sex, relegating women to the unenviable role of the "second" sex.

For centuries, many civilisations have personified the earth as a goddess. In Greek mythology, the goddess Gaia, colloquially referred to as *mother earth*, is synonymous with the earth and nature (De-Gaia, 2018: 43). To those who hold this belief, interactions with the environment and caring for the earth represent devotion or prayer to this goddess. Furthermore, the earth and all the beings it supports are seen as a network of life embodying Gaia (Parsons, 2002).

The decline of the golden age of goddesses and the dominance of specialised deities led to the decline of women's overall status. The matriarchal era had also come to an end. In this period, women often appeared in the role of a beloved, mothers, or at best, queens. However, with the emergence of major global religions, including Abrahamic religions, respect for women and their vital role in family life was restored. However, this was far from implying complete equality with men (Klingorová, Havlíček, 2015; Inglehart, Norris, 2005). Notable progress was also made in the position of women in Islamic thought. While virtually no women, perhaps except for Hagar, were addressed by divine revelation or supernatural forces in the teachings of religions, by some Islamic accounts, it was Khadijah who first conveyed the message of revelation to the Prophet of Islam.

The social system of the period maintained its longstanding foundation based on patriarchy and religion. Indeed, religion and patriarchy are fundamental social structures that largely operate based on social organisation (Attoh, 2017). The patriarchal system, which targets the position of women, persisted in most religions. Religions rooted in patriarchy served to solidify the hegemony of male humans. The relationship between an ostensibly male God and humanity, as established within the internal system of these religions, would naturally extend into families in terms of the man-woman relationship dynamics (Slusser, 2009). This is exemplified in Christianity, wherein the male authority in the household and the church is founded upon and informed by the system of creation, and salvation is only attainable to those who remain faithful to this hierarchy. From this perspective, God has endorsed – an continues to consider – patriarchy as the optimal structure for human societies (Waltke, 1995).

In tandem with the transformations in the concept of femininity, humanity's perceptions, assumptions, and fantasies regarding themselves and the universe have also undergone significant changes. Two particular concepts, which are closely linked to the notion of "woman" and have continuously evolved with it, are *nature* and *div*s. In the past, these three were intertwined with each other. That is, nature was conceived as both

a woman and a div; woman symbolised both nature and embodied elements associated with divs; and divs symbolised nature and were portrayed as women-like creatures. With the intellectual and physical development of humanity, these concepts, along with other human thoughts and perceptions, have arguably undergone five stages of evolution and metamorphosis: 1. Worship, 2. Compromise, 3. Challenge, 4. Subjugation, and 5. Realism. From this perspective, the present research examines the concept of Div in its fourth stage of metamorphosis in Iranian culture and art.

The process of associating women with demonic qualities was, on the surface, only a pretext for applying sexual violence. However, the psychological rationale behind this association was more rooted in the mysterious nature of women and divs. Within a somewhat bizarre syllogistic line of reasoning, just as humanity turned to the occult to comprehend and explain the enigmatic wonders of nature, women's resemblance to nature in terms of fertility led to their association with supernatural beings. Therefore, the conceptual position of woman underwent transformations that paralleled these associated qualities. As a result, the fourth stage of the conceptual metamorphosis of women, characterised by subjugation, ultimately worked to their disadvantage. Women came to be viewed in a negative light and were subjected to submission and obedience. Alongside the constant threat of sexual violence that many of them faced, women were now antagonised for their presumed supernatural qualities, which were now viewed as sinister and menacing, rather than fascinating.

The prevailing belief among patriarchs was that women, as a result of their perceived emotional nature, were more prone to arousal and seduction than men, and were less hesitant to indulge in sinful conduct to gratify their fleshly desires. This belief was often cited as the reason behind women being more susceptible to the temptations of devils and their predisposition to engage in sorcery. The notion that the majority of sorcerers were women, and that they were typically picked from among disobedient and rebellious women, further reinforced the association of femininity with sinister supernatural qualities (Dunn, 2017). In medieval Europe, a connection was even established between sexual crimes and female demonology, leading many to believe that the relations between witches (female) and demons (male) were of a sexual nature, as well (Broedel, 2013). As a result of being labeled with this characterisation, some women felt compelled to double down on this misconception by emphasising their "ugly" and socially deviant behaviors in order to showcase their supreme metaphysical and magical powers. This, in turn, contributed to a heightened sense of betrayal associated with these women (Bardsley, 2007).

C) Belief in Divs in the Qajar Era

Qajar art, with its unique characteristics distinguishing it from earlier periods, is recognised to have originated around the reign of Naser al-Din Shah in 1848 AD. Prior to that time, during the rule of Agha Mohammad Khan, Fath Ali Shah, and the brief rule of Mohammad Shah, the Qajar dynasty had not achieved the level of stability in its borders and society necessary to shape the prevailing social discourse encompassing religious, political, literary, and artistic aspects. It was during this period that the Qajar kings defined their ideals and established their desired state, which soon became prevalent in society through endorsement or synthesis. It is crucial to also recognise that the Iranian society

of The Qajar era, was strongly influenced by the tumultuous periods of the Safavid, Afsharid, and Zand dynasties; it thus had the propensity for – and had displayed symptoms of – impending cultural shifts. Therefore, the examples selected and examined in this study of Qajar art are not limited to any specific period within the rule of this dynasty.

The Qajar era marked the beginning of a fateful historical phase for Iranian society. It navigated cultural influences from other regions, acknowledged its scientific and technological backwardness, as well as outdated lifestyle, in comparison to the rapidly advancing outside world, and grappled with its intellectual and managerial inefficiencies. Ultimately, these circumstances led to the recognition that immediate reform was necessary, culminating in the Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911). Beneath these changes were motives accumulated over several thousand years of Iranian culture, resulting in the emergence of a modern "equivalent": the ancient nature, once teeming with predatory animals such as lions, tigers (formerly known to Persians as "red lions"), leopards, and eagles, was now subdued and dominated by Iranians through the introduction of firearms. The institution of monarchy and the longstanding structures attached to it, which for millennia had claimed to be the masters of Iranians' fate, were gradually stripped of their dignity and splendor. Kings and their entourage were now not only subject to incessant criticism, but also seen as completely deserving to perish at the hands of armed insurgents like Mirza Reza Kermani.

METAMORPHOSIS OF PRE-QAJAR ARTISTIC MOTIFS

The depiction of encounters between humans and demonic entities, even prior to the emergence of Qajar dynasty, was a consistent theme in Iranian art. In pre-Qajar art, divs were depicted as powerful beings whose most notable characteristic was their humanoid forms. The beings would often be illustrated with terrifying faces, heads like carnivorous animals, horns and tails resembling those of herbivores, and adorned with armbands, leg bindings, saddles, and other accessories (see Figs. 1–10). The most popular demonic creatures for pictorial representations among artist were divs and dragons. However, in the pre-Islamic era, sphinx-like motifs, often depicted as a combination of carnivores, herbivores, and birds, had the strongest presence. This trend to illustrate metamorphosed beings continued after the advent of Islam, as well, with artworks often featuring composite creatures. Figure 1 depicts a div with a repugnant face and talons like gigantic birds.

Divs were sometimes illustrated in painting as wielding a mace, a detail especially prominent in depictions of battle scenes (see Figs. 2, 3, and 4).

The physical anatomy of divs mirrored that of heroes; however, divs were made to look more robust and formidable, emphasising the hero's inner struggle against their own negative and animalistic qualities (Figs. 5–7).

Divs in pre-Qajar illustrations were often depicted as unmistakably male, a detail that was underlined in many instances by artists through an explicit depiction of the male genitalia (Figs. 8–10). The popular derogatory term *narreh-ghoul*, literally "male ghoul", which is used in Persian in reference to heavyset young men, is thought to have been inspired by such illustrations.

Figure 1: A div carries the Queen of Sheba's throne, from *Ajayeb al-Makhluqat*, watercolor, 16th century, Shiraz or Qazvin, Iran. (Bibliothèque nationale de France)

Figure 2: Battle of Imam Ali with subterranean divs, from *Ahsan al-Kibar*, watercolor, 1580 AD. (Golestan Palace Museum)

Figure 3: Battle of Rostam with a div, from *Shahnameh Tahmasbi*, watercolor, 1600 AD. (Aga Khan Museum)

Figure 4: Sultan Muhammad, Battle of Tahmuras with divs, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1525 AD, Tabriz, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Figure 5: Battle of Rostam with a div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1300–1330 AD, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Figure 6: Battle of Rostam with a div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1330–1340 AD, Isfahan, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Figure 7: A div tossing Rostam into the sea, watercolor, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, 1330–1340 AD, Isfahan, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Figure 8: A div tossing Rostam into the sea, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1500 AD, Iran. (Library of Congress)

Figure 9: Moein Mosavar, A div tossing Rostam into the sea, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1660 AD, Isfahan, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Figure 10: Battle of Rostam with a div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1560–1580 AD, Iran. (Metropolitan Museum)

METAMORPHOSIS OF ARTISTIC MOTIFS IN THE QAJAR ERA

Before exploring instances of metamorphosis, it should be reminded that in pre-Qajar art demonology, male divs, or other malevolent beings with masculine traits, were prevalent. While this type of divs was depicted comparatively less often, when ordinary people discussed murderous or destructive divs, they were in fact referring to male divs who were ostensibly devoid of feminine tenderness and maternal instincts. Masculinity, having traditionally been associated with warfare, competitiveness, and sexual dominance since ancient times, was evidently more aligned with the depiction of invisible vicious creatures. At any rate, the same divs whose masculinity had traditionally been emphasised, began to be depicted by Qajar era artists as having feminine shapes and attitudes.

During The Qajar era, women, in particular, experienced a significant phase in the evolution of their nation's spirit. On one hand, they witnessed the persistence of radical religious beliefs and the survival of customs that had lasted for millennia. On the other hand, the totemic psychological aspects associated with women's gender were being discarded. Whereas the increasing weight of societal, economic, and political constraints forced women to maintain their quiet existence within the walls of their house, geographical and cultural doors were being opened to foreigners, who had transformed from infidel enemies to affluent trail-blazers of the civilisation, compelling women to reconsider their perception of femininity. One of the outcomes of this duality was the trend to portray malevolent beings in feminine shapes in artworks of the period.

The formerly ferocious-looking divs, who were described as twisting and turning and levitating in disturbing allegories and folk tragedies, were now being portrayed in a quasi-comedic light. Consequently, the female form became a more suitable vessel for these beings in artworks. Qajar artists dispensed with conventional demonological forms and began to present divs in distinctly feminine shapes. The new divs possessed prominent breasts, feminine thighs and buttocks, and wore short skirts that accentuated their curves. The faces and features of divs now looked gentler. Once portrayed as imperious warriors, divs now merely went through the motions in their confrontations with those looking to claim their lives, looking quite beatable against the adversary (Figs. 11–25).

Male heroes known for their demon-slaying skills also underwent a transformation. Characters like Rostam, who had often looked exceedingly masculine and muscular, were now being portrayed as the ideal Qajar youth: dressed in light-color clothing, with slender waists and kind faces. This transformation can be observed in lithographic prints (Figs. 11 and 12), ceramic work on public buildings (Figs. 13 and 14), and epic illustrations (Figs. 14 and 15).

In pulp illustrations of this era (figures 17 and 18), we see a young man with a glowing face and lithe physique engaged in a solemn and worthy ritualistic task.

Qajar era artists also depicted Fath Ali Shah in the same idealised fashion, with a lean figure, delicate hands, and royal attire, solemnly bringing divs to their demise (see Figs. 19 and 20). Were the div motifs eliminated from these illustrations, it is highly likely that an unsuspecting Iranian from the Qajar era would have had difficulty differentiating a valiant hero grappling with divs from a young man portrayed as heading to his new bride's chambers to consummate their marriage.

Figure 11: Battle of Rostam and the Div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, lithograph, late 19th century, Iran. (Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Asian Art)

Figure 12: Slaying of a div by a folk hero, lithograph, Qajar era. (Zolfaghari, Heidari, 2012: 1981)

Figure 13: Battle of Rostam and the White Div, underglaze tile, Nasser al-Din Shah era, Sa'adabad Palace, Iran. (Archives of the authors)

Figure 14: Mousazadeh, Battle of Rostam and the White Div, seven-color tile, mid-14th century, bathhouse in Afifabad Garden, Shiraz, Iran. (Seif, 1997: 163)

Figure 15: Battle of Rostam and Akvan Div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, 1800–1850 AD, Iran. (Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Asian Art)

Figure 16: Battle of Rostam and the White Div, from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*, watercolor, c. 1900 AD, Qajar Persia. (Bonhams Auction House)

Figure 17: A young Qajar hero punishing a div, gouache on paper, 1750 AD. (Wellcome Collection)

Figure 18: A young Qajar man confronting a div, gouache on paper, 1750 AD. (Wellcome Collection)

Figure 19: Battle of Fath Ali Shah and the Div, gouache on board, Qajar era. (Wellcome Collection)

Figure 20: Battle of Fath Ali Shah and the Div, gouache on board, Qajar era, (Wellcome Collection)

During the Qajar era, the attire of divs, typically reduced to a short skirt, did not undergo significant changes. However, it did align with the clothing worn by lower social classes. According to some accounts, women's clothing gradually became shorter during this period, with skirts reaching just above the knees, which was in line with the artistic trends of the time.

There were instances, however, where divs were depicted wearing women's trousers and dresses. For instance, in Figure 21, an angel is illustrated wearing traditional clothing associated with affluent women, while the two divs in the scene are depicted wearing tight trousers, with the lines of their trousers discernible on their calves. Women during that era would reportedly wear a tight and delicate red garment called *Arkhalig*, whose distinguishing feature was its corset-like waist panel (Soltikoff, 2002). Similar to the figures in the image, women were often seen wearing tight trousers with short skirts known as Shaliteh (D'Allemagne, 1956).

It is highly likely that these tight trousers were influenced by Western cultures, as Naser al-Din Shah, in particular, ordered such trousers and short jackets to imitate the fashion trends he had observed during his travels to Europe (Alam, Dinary, 2019). However, there are other accounts whose description of traditional Iranian trousers are consistent with what the angel in the image is wearing. D'Allemagne mentions that Iranian women, when venturing outside their homes and into public places, would wear *Chaqchour*, which were peculiar trousers wide in the thigh area and narrow in the calves (D'Allemagne, 1956).

In Qajar era art, divs were generally depicted in a passive state. However, when it came to depictions of the court of Prophet Solomon (Figs. 22–25), which was a popular subject among artists of that time, there was a coinciding period of renewed public interest in the narrative of Imam Hussein's uprising against the oppressive Umayyad caliph, Yazid I (Najmi, 1977). According to certain religious historical accounts, Imam Hussein not only called on all people to join him in his fight against oppression, he also sought supernatural assistance to aid him and his family in the *Battle of Karbala* (Majlisi, 1983). Consequently, in all of these images, divs are not portrayed as submissive or obedient beings. Instead, the artists gave them imposing physiques, as if suggesting their capability to undertake arduous, decisive tasks on behalf of a king.

The reaction of divs towards heroes (Imam Ali: Fig. 2; Rostam: Figs. 11, 13, 14, 15, 16; Qajar young princes: Figs. 17 and 18; Fath Ali Shah: Figs. 19, 20; a folk hero: Fig. 12) seems to follow the same sensibility. They had all become passive, powerless, manipulable beings, mirroring the depiction of Qajar women against "men privileged with institutionalised behavioral patterns". In Qajar illustrations, the divs were often depicted without typical masculine characteristics like fierceness and brutality. They showed no resistance when confronted by the heroes alongside whom they were portrayed. This characterisation style was widely accepted by the Qajar audience to the extent that, in some instances, artists would go so far as depicting a Qajar teenager without a heroic physique or armor effortlessly slaying a div (Figs. 17 and 18). Fath Ali Shah himself was not an exception to this rule: with a mustache flowing like a maiden's tresses, a stretched physique resembling the Persian Leopard, and a graceful face like a bridegroom, he charges forward and triumphantly overpowers any divs on sight (Figs. 19 and 20).
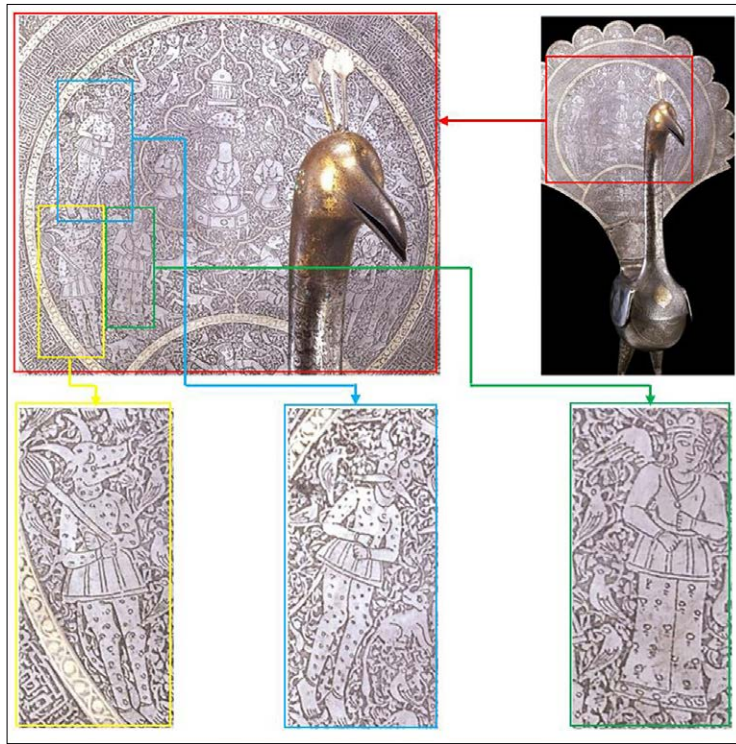
Figure 21: A div and an angel in the court of Prophet Solomon, steel engraving, 19th century, Iran.
(The British Museum)

Figure 22: Divs at the of Prophet Solomon,
lithograph, Qajar era. (Farhang Razi, 1949: 559)

Figure 23: Divs carrying the throne of Prophet
Solomon, lithograph, Qajar era (Meem Gallery)

Figure 24: Divs in the court of Prophet Solomon, mirror frame, lacquer, Qajar era. (The Michael Collection)
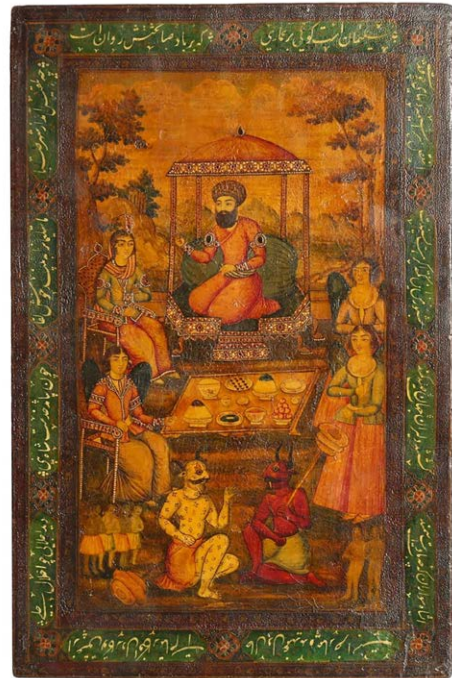
Figure 25: Divs in the court of Prophet Solomon, mirror frame, lacquer, Qajar era. (The Michael Collection).

In this particular instance, it would be inaccurate to state that the artist depicting the Qajar king had not been influenced by illustrations of ancient Iranian demons. There are frank imitations of Shahnameh illustrations like *Rostam and the White Div of Mazandaran* where, instead of half-human and half-div offspring, two bound divs are placed lifelessly within the frame.

Figures 2 to 10 can serve as cases that exemplify the above-mentioned imagery. In all these examples, which date back to pre-Qajar periods but follow the prevailing Qajar sensibility, the hero's triumph and the div's downfall are inevitable. However, pre-Qajar divs had a distinctively aggressive body language, with terrifying facial features and bodies like carnivorous animals. Another point is that, unlike the classic "captive in the king's court" motif (Figs. 21 to 25), in the pre-Qajar illustration (Fig. 4), the div appears to be a fearsome and irrepressible creature that has not yet been reduced to servitude by the all-conquering king.

If we consider passivity and subjugation as the predominant female characteristics in the Qajar era society of Iran, there are other indicators that can be examined to understand the significant gender metamorphosis of divs in the artworks of that time. The gender metamorphosis of divs in the Qajar era may be identified through the following three components.

A) Morphology and appearance

In artworks, divs were often depicted with feminine breasts (see Figs. 13 and 15), which easily differentiated them from male warriors who were depicted with robust muscular chests. Divs' figures exhibit graceful feminine curves, particularly with full thighs and broad hips (see Fig. 19), which were commonly depicted characteristics during this era. These creatures were never portrayed as agile, dynamic, or proactive. In some instances (Figs. 14 and 21), even the div's face is adorned with the erotic makeup style associated with the era. However, it is important to note that the artist did not mean to imply that the human hero was confronting a "female" div; ironically, the hero's face appears more heavily made up than the div's (as shown in Fig. 17). Among epic illustrations, Figure 15 takes a step further in this regard. The div's feminine physique and clothing in this image are complemented by seductive tints, lending the artwork a distinct color spectrum. Notably, the triumphant hero neither has the same skin tone as the div, nor does it possess the same full limbs. What gives the creatures a non-human appearance are their semi-animal faces and long tails.

B) Attitude and actions

The depiction of divs' reactions and behavior toward the hero in Qajar era paintings presents a notable departure from earlier portrayals. Unlike pre-Qajar paintings where defeated and subjugated divs were often shown submerged in blood, trapped in mud, or in chains, the divs of this period exhibit distinct and meaningful reactions. In contrast to past depictions where heroes sought to brutalise and tear apart the limbs of the divs, the heroes in Qajar era artworks appear on the verge of kissing the subdued divs. Remarkably, the divs do not display any inclination to fight off the hero's advances, let alone retaliate aggressively. It is important to note that the passive, welcoming body language of the divs also existed in visual artworks and epic literary works of preceding eras (see Fig. 6).

The epic hero's final triumph has long been considered an essential and inevitable element of the narrative. In illustrative arts, divs were often portrayed as proactive and ready for battle, emphasizing the gravity of the precarious situation in which the hero found himself. However, Qajar era artists clearly, and consciously, deviated from these conventions, choosing instead to depict the hero as poised to hurl the div to the ground and stand triumphantly over it.

C) Clothing and equipment

Another significant feature in div paintings during the Qajar era is the clothing, weapons, accessories, and ornaments that accompany the divs. Similar to the Qajar era women, divs are depicted wearing a short skirt known as *tonban* or *shalteh* which only covers their genitals. In some cases, divs are also depicted as wearing skin-colour trousers traditionally worn by Qajar era women (Fig. 17). In contrast, in pre-Qajar periods, divs were often portrayed with exposed torsos and protruding stomachs. Some artists even placed the divs' uncovered genitalia in full display to accentuate their shameless and dishonourable nature, considering that being fully covered was a traditional hallmark of feminine purity

and self-restraint in Qajar culture (and most other Eastern cultures) (Figs. 1–10). In Qajar artworks, divs were not equipped with deadly weapons or other terrifying tools; and if they did, the artists often gave the accessories a deliberately comic appearance (Figs. 19 and 20). In contrast, in pre-Qajar periods, divs were usually illustrated holding large weapons (Fig. 3) or possessing physical characteristics reminiscent of predatory animals, symbolising their proclivity for violence.

Figure 22, a lithographic work from the Qajar era, showcases a scene where a group of divs stands on the right side, while a group of naked women stands on the left, all prepared to serve the royal court in an unidentified land. The depiction of both the divs and women wearing identical short skirts conveys a hidden message. Firstly, it evokes the imagery of Prophet Solomon's court for Muslim Iranians, where the array of servants extended beyond humans to include animals and supernatural beings. Secondly, it alludes to the notoriously hedonistic lifestyle of the Qajar kings. Lastly, it signifies the command of humanity over nature, depicting divs and other supernatural entities humbly under the legal authority of a human being.

Women are portrayed as street girls resembling European dolls. More importantly, divs appear as both terrifying symbols of nature and as sex slaves catering to the desires of lustful men. The same divs, it should be noted, that Prophet Solomon had employed for labor and entrusted with challenging tasks. The portrayal of divs in this context showed them as unarmed beings with gentle faces, small non-threatening jaws, short feminine skirts, and seductive smiles, suggesting a shift in belief whereby divs were no longer suitable representations of the violent and frightening aspects of nature, as they had been in the past.

In Figure 26, we encounter what could be considered the quintessential piece in this collection, which contains all the aspects of the metamorphosis in question. The artwork features a group of divs, each holding a mace, which resemble a chorus. Their relaxed and seductive postures do not evoke the image of battle-hardened warriors. The maces, perfunctorily given to them by the artist, resemble honey spoons, bearing no resemblance to heroes' lethal weapons. Ironically, their pseudo-weapons further diminish their perceived grandeur. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that they inhabit an Iranian artwork, as they are even depicted wearing *tonban*, trousers adorned with intricate patterns typically worn by Qajar women.

To better evaluate gender metamorphosis in this example, let us consider Figure 27, a complementary artwork displayed in the same museum aisle. This piece portrays a group of female divs. Interestingly, the divs in this artwork bear a striking resemblance to their male counterparts from the previous image, characterised by distinctively unusual eyes and animal paws instead of human feet. A comparative analysis of the two images reveals a significant blurring of gender distinctions among the divs, as all of them have acquired distinctly feminine human forms. Both male and female divs are depicted wearing similar attire, and their physical appearances and postures are nearly indistinguishable. The only discernible gender marker is the presence of a male tail, which, in the absence of additional evidence, serves as the sole indicator to determine the gender of these creatures.

Figure 26: Divs with pitchforks, tilework. (Musée du Louvre)

Figure 27: Feminine div, tilework. (Musée du Louvre)

From a broad perspective, the components and instances of the gender metamorphosis of divs in the Qajar era can be shown in Table 1.

Component	Example	Figure number
Appearance	Feminine breasts	13, 15, 19, 26, 27
	Soft and curved lines instead of broken lines and sharp angles	15, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26
	Inverted lower body volume with upper body	19, 20, 22, 25, 26
	Feminine makeup	14, 17
	Human-like skin colour	11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25
	No frightening or ferocious features	11, 13,14,15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25
	No emphasis on masculine features	11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26
Attitude	Non-aggressive posture	21, 22, 23, 24,25 26
	Propensity for subjugation	11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20
	Emphasis on usefulness and ability to do manual labor instead of harmful intentions	18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26
Clothing and equipment	Short skirts in alignment with contemporary fashion	18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 26
	Being unarmed or possessing ineffective weapons	11, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27

Table 1: Components and examples of gender transformation of demons in the Qajar era.

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, humans have valued, conceptualised, and replicated natural phenomena, objects, and living beings to facilitate their understanding of nature. Our ancestors attributed mystical aspects to all harmful, incomprehensible, or frightening entities, considering them capable of exerting dominance over human life. In this way, mysterious and ominous beings emerged in the human mind that were associated with natural phenomena and the universe. The virtuous, helpful, beneficent, and comforting aspects of these beings were identified and symbolised, with the distinction that they were tangible and could be observed in the external world.

The female human, endowed with the gift of fertility, encompassed and embodied all of these positive aspects due to her nurturing, supportive, and beautiful nature. Nature and the female human, despite their continuous evolution and changes, have maintained their fundamental meaning and significance in the collective consciousness of humanity. One significant phase of transformation regarding these concepts occurred during the Qajar

era in Iran, where they were demystified. Scientific progress and humanity's triumph over nature led to the diminishing of the divine and celestial aspects associated with nature, supernatural beings, and women, relegating them to a secular and earthly realm.

Examining this topic through written records, oral literature, and scant historical material sources may present notable limitations. However, we have chosen visual artworks from this period as our primary sources, as they provide well-documented and revealing insights into the subject.

The demystification and desacralisation of nature also had an impact on the mythological and supernatural aspects associated with femininity. Toward the end of the Qajar era, nature had ceased to be seen as sacred or possessing mythic feminine qualities. Through a gradual shift, the earth lost its feminine aura and, paradoxically, women became more grounded in earthly realms. The encounter of Iranian society with modernity sparked a revolution in the nation's worldview. As the reverence and enigma surrounding nature diminished, supernatural beings that were once believed to have dominion over the natural world and posed threats to humanity were no longer perceived in the same light.

Ultimately, Iranian women, in the face of societal constraints in a patriarchal society on one hand, and the global wave of women's liberation on the other, gradually lost their traditional and mythic gender roles as "goddess", "mother", "beloved", and "queen", and began to assume more conventional and worldly roles. The consequences of these changes are evident in the oral and material culture of that period.

The depiction of divs during the Qajar era exemplifies how artists of the period, perhaps unconsciously, incorporated all three levels of social transformation into their works. The feminisation of divs in the Qajar era art was a reflection of the shifting perception of nature, supernatural beings, and the female gender. The appearance, clothing, equipment, and physical attributes of divs all resembled the feminine form. These mythical beings, once symbols of the supernatural forces or dark aspects of nature, now appeared in – and were regarded as – feminine beings. Both within the confined households of the Qajar era and in the modern, Western-influenced tendencies of the day, women no longer resembled their perennial "nature" and were undergoing a deep-rooted transformation. Nature, divs, and the female gender, were all made earthly to proclaim the existence of terrestrial femininity.

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ПОЛОВАЯ МЕТАМОРФОЗА ДИВОВ В ИЛЛЮСТРАЦИЯХ КАДЖАРСКОГО ПЕРИОДА: МИФОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ И СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ

В персидской традиции дивы – это устрашающие сверхъестественные существа, которые часто становятся предметом обсуждения, а их половая метаморфоза была темой многих исследований. Анализ развития природы, сверхъестественных сил (включая дивов) и женского начала в историческом контексте показывает, что в прошлом их воспринимали как таинственные и пугающие силы, способные воздействовать на человеческую жизнь посредством злонамеренных вмешательств. Со временем эти существа утратили свою непостижимую, эфирную природу и стали объектом разума, наблюдения и размышления. Иранское общество, как древняя часть мировой цивилизации, также пережило эту трансформацию восприятия.

В настоящем исследовании мы рассматриваем причины появления половых преобразований в образах дивов в искусстве каджарской эпохи. Период Каджаров считается важным поворотным моментом, когда начали исчезать последние остатки традиционной иранской социальной структуры, что открыло путь новому взгляду на мир. Произведения искусства того времени отражают глубокое изменение отношения к природе, сверхъестественным существам и женщинам. Дивы, как воплощение ужаса природы, и женщины, как символ красоты и нежности, постепенно сливаются в этих образах. Некогда устрашающие дивы приобретают более мягкие и отчетливо женственные формы. Эта метаморфоза отражает тенденцию к демифологизации природы и секуляризации положения женщин в обществе.

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Balkan Wolf/Dog in Folklore Interpretations in the Mythology of Nature by N. Nodilo through T. R. Đorđević to Lj. Radenković and P. Plas

Suzana Marjanić

This interpretive timeline presents (not necessarily in chronological order) the imaginary of the "Balkan" wolf/dog in South Slavic customs and beliefs from Natko Nodilo, through T. R. Đorđević and Lj. Radenković, all the way to contemporary cultural animal studies research by P. Plas (the author employs a methodology that integrates ethnolinguistic/semiotic and linguistic-anthropological and ethnopoetic approaches), contextually related to other Slavs and Indo-European comparative mythology in the framework of archetypal wolf/dog phobias (*lupophobia, kinophobia*). While Nodilo relies on A. de Gubernatis' interpretation of nature mythology, T. R. Đorđević follows the ethnographic material of the South Slavs (as for Croatia, he carefully researched, among other things, the wolf/dog entries in the *Collection of Folk Life and Customs of the South Slavs*), and Lj. Radenković semiotically observes the wolf/dog in the symbolism of the world of the South Slavs, where he notes that the closest domestic animals to man are the horse, sheep, cow and ox, followed by the bull, goat, donkey, hen, pig, dog and cat. So-called wild animals are arranged in relation to the *god-shepherd* (*God's shepherd*) – the bear is closest to him, and the wolf is the farthest.

KEYWORDS: wolf, dog, fear, folklore interpretation, South Slavic customs and beliefs

Interpretativni časovni pregled predstavlja (ne nujno v kronološkem zaporedju) domišljijski lik »balkanskega« volka/psa v južnoslovanskih običajih in verovanjih, od Natka Nodila, prek T. R. Đorđevića in Lj. Radenkovića vse do sodobnih kulturnih raziskav živali P. Plasa (avtor uporablja metodologijo, ki združuje etnolingvistični/semiotični in jezikoslovno-antropološki ter etnopoetični pristop), kontekstualno povezano z drugimi Slovani in indoevropsko primerjalno mitologijo v okviru arhetipskih fobij volkov/psov (*lupofobija*, *kinofobija*). Medtem ko se Nodilo opira na A. de Gubernatisovo interpretacijo mitologije narave, T. R. Đorđević sledi etnografskemu gradivu južnih Slovanov (kar zadeva Hrvaško, je med drugim skrbno raziskal vpise o volku/psu v *Zbirki ljudskega življenja in običajev južnih Slovanov*), Lj. Radenković pa semiotsko opazuje volka/psa v simboliki sveta južnih Slovanov, kjer ugotavlja, da so človeku najbližje domače živali konj, ovca, krava in vol, sledijo pa jim bik, koza, osel, kokoš, prašič, pes in mačka. Tako imenovane divje živali so razvrščene v odnosu do *boga-pastirja* (*Božjega pastirja*) – medved mu je najbližji, volk pa najbolj oddaljen.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: volk, pes, strah, folklorna interpretacija, južnoslovanski običaji in verovanja

Once upon a time, there were a lot of wolves in Europe.
Tihomir R. Đorđević (1958: 205)

Following the lexical entry on the W/wolf (*Canis lupus*), we start with the zoological fact that the wolf belongs to the dog family (lat. *Canidae*), and following the conceptions of religion that recognize the beginnings of religious phenomena in the fear of nature, as did the nature mythology by Friedrich Max Müller, I start with the question of where the historical, historically conditioned, certified fear of wolves comes from.[1]

In addition to the archetypal phobia, there is a deeply rooted notion of the wolf as man's enemy. Wolves were the first animals with which humans established a mutual relationship, which eventually led to domesticated dogs (*Canis familiaris*). As highlighted by the exhibition *Of Animals and Humans* ("O životinjama i ljudima", Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb, 2017), modern science supports the theory of unintentional domestication, meaning that wolves initiated contact with humans by following them to feed on human food scraps. Over time, both species lost their initial fear, fulfilling the first condition for a mutually beneficial relationship. In sedentary cultures, the wolf was considered an enemy that killed domestic (useful) animals. The food competition between man and wolf (cf. Visković, 1996: 310) was soon accompanied by hunting competition. Phobia and the demonization of wolves,[2] along with competitive hunting, led to frequent wolf persecutions in Western and Central Europe, aiming for their complete eradication. Thus, wolves were exterminated in Great Britain (where the last wolf was killed in 1743), Denmark (1772), and Germany (1904).[3] In Southern and Eastern Europe, greater tolerance toward wolves (and other large *beasts* – I am using this common linguistic speciesism) was documented.[4] Even here, after significant damages, wolf hunts were organized, but the goal was never to exterminate their entire population.[5] Milan Lang notes that in Samobor, people "exterminated" wolves around the mid-19th century:

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[1] The article was originally published in Croatian in the journal *Folkloristika: časopis udruženja folklorista Srbije* (Belgrade), No. 1, 2025.

[2] In the context of anthropological structures of the imaginary, Gilbert Durand states that for Western imagination, the wolf is the savage animal *par excellence* (Durand, 1991: 77), demonstrating how the animal's snout concentrates all the terrifying fantasies of animality: "agitation, aggressive mastication, sinister grunting and roaring" (ibid.: 76).

[3] Tihomir R. Đorđević (1958: 205) refers to the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 9 (Berlin/Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1938–1941), which documents the disappearance of wolves in various European countries.

[4] Today, the largest wolves live in the cold regions of Latvia, Belarus, Alaska, and Canada, and can reach a weight of up to 60 kg (cf. "Gray Wolf", "Sivi vuk", 2023).

[5] On the other side of demonization, regarding the phobia of the "Balkan wolf", we find the apotropaic charm of the wolf's yawn (the skin cut around the wolf's jaw) in this symbolic whirlwind. During epidemics, children were passed through the wolf's yawn, as a sort of magical circle, because of the belief that they would be protected under the wolf's patronage (Bandić, 1991: 26; cf. Plas, 2021: 35–38). "In folk magic, the act of passing through something is considered one way to eliminate the *man–demon* opposition, whereby the person, to free themselves from evil influences, enters the demonic world by crossing a boundary perceived as a symbolic line between the human and non-human world. Considering the 'liminal' characteristic of the wolf, the 'wolf's yawn' often forms a 'boundary' during ritual passage" (Radenković, 1996: 78–79, 81).

There are no wolves in the Samobor area. In the past, when there was more brush and thickets around, one might wander here in the winter. The late Samobor teacher Josip Herović noted in his writings that he was once chased by two wolves while driving at night from Mokrica to Samobor. – Fifty years ago, landowner Farkaš killed a wolf near his estate (Kalinovica). No one recalls hearing or seeing a wolf near Samobor after that (Lang, 1911: 207).[6]

Tihomir R. Đorđević, according to Friedrich Wilhelm von Taube's account, in the section "Extermination of Wolves" documents how, in the second half of the 18th century, there was a significant trade in wolf and fox skins in Slavonia, where the wolf was considered a pest and bloodthirsty predator, leading to "relentless extermination" by the people (Đorđević, 1958: 220).[7]

Canids (lat. *Canidae*) include both dogs and wolves. In the context of the archety-pology of archetypal demonization, dogs are included in folklore beliefs of foretelling death and misfortune, and I cite some from the *Collection of Folk Life and Customs of the South Slavs* related to beliefs about dogs as "domesticated wolves". Rudolf Horvat notes the following belief from Koprivnica: "When a dog howls with its snout pointed downward, someone will die, but if it looks up, there will be a fire" (Horvat, 1896: 254). Milan Lang writes the following for Samobor: "If a house dog howls terribly at night, it signifies the death of a distant relative or acquaintance. Otherwise, the general belief is: If the dog lowers its snout to the ground while howling, it means death; if it holds its snout upward, it means fire." In a footnote, Lang adds: "Our people say that when a puppy is born, it sees nothing in its first year; only after a year does it start to see" (Lang, 1914: 195). Frano Ivanišević, writing about Poljice (in a section on reading omens related to natural phenomena), notes: "Similarly, if a dog howls around the house, it calls for death" (this comes after text related to the croaking of ravens); "No evil spirit approaches a black dog" (Ivanišević, 1905: 283). Tomislav Macan records a variation of the belief from Blato on the island of Mljet: "If a dog licks a roof, someone will become a reaper. (i.e., a werewolf) (Blood can come from the nose or a wound)," and "When a dog howls in the village, something bad will happen (i.e., war)" (Macan, 1932: 236).[8]

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[6] Lang also mentions rat hunting with dogs: "Rat terriers are very skilled rat hunters. A man named Jozef has two such dogs. He has trained them very well, and wherever he goes with them, it's a delight to watch how deftly and passionately these small dogs catch rats. Like lightning, they leap here then there, grabbing a rat by the neck, shaking it, and laying it dead at their master's feet" (Lang, 2011: 209).

[7] In 2019, the first study on the socioeconomic and cultural impact of wolves in Croatia was conducted. Despite the saying (Plautus – Hobbes) "Man to man is wolf", the residents of Lika, Gorski Kotar, Dalmatia, and Kordun, regions where wolves reside, believe that wolves have the same rights as humans and should continue living in their ancient, natural habitats within Croatia. The vast majority of people living in areas inhabited by wolves are not afraid of them, and despite the damage wolves cause to their livestock, most believe that life without wolves would worsen because the ecological balance would be disrupted (according to Tišma et al., 2019).

[8] Tihomir R. Đorđević (1958: 239) refers to the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 4 (Berlin/Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1931/1932) as a source for the dog acting as an omen of death. Similar beliefs involving omens are recorded about the wolf as well, for instance Škarić for Lipovo Polje in Lika writes "When the wolf howls, it is an omen for bad weather or military conflict" (Škarić, 1911: 153).

Dušan Bandić, in the context of the mentioned phobia, emphasizes that even the name of the wolf was not to be spoken, and various taboo-nicknames were used instead, such as *napomenik*, *kamenik*,[9] *pogan*,[10] or *the one from the hills* (according to Bandić, 1991: 25). Slavist Pieter Plas has written extensively about the motif of petrification in formulas recited when breaking the verbal taboo, as well as other attributes as motifs of neutralization (2021: 196, 243).

Perhaps the symbolic, archetypal nature in Durand's definition – the anthropological structure of the imaginary, the combining of the dog and the wolf – can be illustrated through the systematic research of Ülo Valk on zoomorphic manifestations of the devil in Estonian folklore records. Ülo Valk differentiates four categories of zoo-visualizations: domestic animals (with the dog coming first, followed by the cat, goat, horse, pig, foal, ox/bull, cow, ram, calf, sheep, lamb). In the category of *wild* animals, the hare dominates (followed by the bear, wolf, squirrel, fox, frog/toad, snake, mouse, hedgehog, European moose, lynx, lion, tiger, rat, marten, unspecified animal). Among ornithomorphic visualizations – the rooster (followed by the crow, capercaillie, black grouse, hawk, raven, magpie, unspecified bird, eagle, sparrow, cuckoo, hen, stork, goose), and among fish and insects – northern burbot, northern pike, picus, horsefly. He points out that there is a significant difference in the zoomorphic manifestation of the devil between Estonian folklore records and Christian demonography. Compared to Christian literature, where so-called *predatory beasts* hold the top place in animal demonization, in Estonian folklore, domestic animals dominate (242 visualizations of the devil in isomorphisms of domestic animals out of a total of 390 zoomorphic manifestations), while among wild animals, the harmless vegetarian hare stands out. Given that the boundary between demonology and zoology was indeed not clear in the Middle Ages, some bestiaries introduced the devil into the classification of animals, and Ülo Valk refers to the animal euphemism for the devil – the *(old) snail – (vana)tigu* in Estonian folk tradition. It is interesting to note that the devil less frequently manifests zoomorphically in Estonian folklore than in German folklore; one typical zoomorphic manifestation of the devil in Estonian folklore is the dog, which appears in 72 out of a total of 390 zoomorphic manifestations, and is generally black in color, although the *demonic* and *demonized* dog is not necessarily portrayed as *large* or *threatening*. It usually appears as a small lively dog, a small dog/dachshund, and as a white dog. The author also reveals that the connotations of the dog in the Estonian cultural sphere are not easily defined because, as A. A. Amfiteatrov states, the devil[11] in the form of a dog is a feature of Western European tradition (Valk, of course, refers to Mephistopheles' appearance as a black poodle during the first encounter with Faust in the worlds of Goethe's *Faust*, to which I add Sloterdijk's *cynical* interpretation that the *devil* chose the symbol of a cynical sect of philosophers for his first appearance). In the Orthodox East, the dog symbolically figures as a friend of humans, who is in conflict with

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[9] Cf. Karadžić, the lexeme *kamenjak* in *Rječnik*.

[10] Mijat Stojanović noted the lexeme *pogan* (1866: 17).

[11] Gura points out that in the Polish ritual of inducting a young man into the circle of adult reapers, the newcomer is referred to as "wolf", to which in some local variations corresponds the name "bear": "such a young man was adorned with bean stalks and given a tail made of ears of grain" (Gura, 2005: 130).

evil spirits. Ülo Valk's interpretation of the *demonized dog* is based on the monograph *The Devil in Dog Form: A Partial Type-Index of Devil Legends* (1956) by folklorist Barbara Allen Woods, which contains – as the title phrase suggests – a (partial) index of types and a bibliography of legends about the devil in the form of a dog.

Thus, while the wolf represented a visual symbol of fear in hunter-gatherer societies, this symbolism was taken over by the dog with the Indo-European peoples. Ljubinko Radenković, in his exceptional study on dogs, shows that dogs resemble their ancestors (wolves and jackals), eat carrion, human feces, reproduce in groups, can transmit certain diseases to humans, are active at night, are *bribable*, and traditional culture generally considers them unclean animals, attributing them with demonic qualities. Radenković also notes that such perceptions were further influenced by two major religions – Christianity and Islam – which negatively structured the image of the dog into the segment of the unclean animal (Radenković, 2023: 489).[12]

WOLF/DOG IN THE NATURE MYTHOLOGY: NODILO'S READING OF DE GUBERNATIS ON THE EXAMPLE OF A NYCTOMORPHIC WOLF

One of the earliest scholars to write about the folkloric conceptualization of the dog in the context of South Slavic studies was Natko Nodilo, working within the framework of Müller's nature mythology (Müller, 1997 [1898]; Marjanić, 2022). Nodilo detected that the Vedic worlds deal only with the Sun, Sky, Day, Dawn, Morning, Spring, to which the appellation *deva* belongs, and oppose dark forces, whereby the sunrise and sunset, the alternation of day and night, the struggle between light and darkness, becomes the main narrative of mythology.

In addition to the mentioned anthropocentric phobia, which arose from the sedentary agricultural paradigm, narratives of fear of the wolf can also be illustrated within the context of Angelo de Gubernatis' mythology of nature, specifically his zoo-mythology, which draws from Friedrich Max Müller.[13] Nodilo uses their interpretations (now debunked) to

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[12] Authors of the exhibition *The Dog in Croatian Fine Art from the 19th Century to the Present Day* (Galerija Prica, Samobor, 2013) Snježana Pavičić and Dajana Vlaisavljević state that "art generally offers evidence of the positive relationship between humans and dogs. The darker side of the dog is rarely depicted, though it was most present during the early Middle Ages, when the dog was considered an unclean animal, a trait that took on symbolic connotations. The dog is also considered an unclean animal by Jews and Muslims, which explains their negative view of this animal. The Bible, too, alludes to the greed and gluttony of dogs, but later, at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, for example, one of the more popular Christian saints, Saint Roch, became the patron saint of dogs. Similarly, Saint Bernard, from whom the popular breed of dogs, the St. Bernards, got their name, and Saint Dominic, founder of the Dominican Order (or God's dogs, according to the Latin name *domini canes*), are examples of a positive relationship towards dogs in Christianity" (Pavičić, Vlaisavljević, 2013).

[13] The importance of de Gubernatis' interpretations of zoomythology and cultural botany (*La mythologie des plantes, ou les legendes du règne vegetal* [Mythology of Plants, and Legends from the Plant Kingdom], 1878) in the region at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century is also evidenced by Pavle Sofrić's (from Niševljan) monograph *Glavnije bilje u narodnom verovanju i pevanju kod nas Srba po Angelu de Gubernatisu* [Main Herbs in Folk Belief and Singing Among Us Serbs According to Angelo de Gubernatis] (Belgrade, 1912), which comes from the mentioned cultural botanical book by de Gubernatis.

explain the nyctomorphic wolves in the worlds of the *Ṛgveda* and the *Edda:* the so-called Night Wolves, the zoomorphic form of the Wolf as a nyctomorphic demon – Vṛka from the ṛgvedic concept and the symbolic wolves – Sköll, Mánagarm, Fenrir/Fenrisúlfr – from the worlds of the *Edda.* In the context of nature mythology, de Gubernatis notes that we already have several intriguing mythical accounts of the wolf in the *Ṛgveda*; in these worlds, the wolf is demonized, represented as the exhausted Vṛka (de Gubernatis, 1872: 142), and following this, the wolf in the *Edda* is depicted as a grim and devilish monster.

> The night and the winter is the time of the wolf spoken of in the Voluspa; the gods who enter, according to the German tradition, into wolves' skins, represent the sun as hiding himself in the night, or the snowy season of winter (…). Inasmuch as the solar hero becomes a wolf, he has a divine nature; inasmuch, on the contrary, as the wolf is the proper form of the devil, his nature is entirely malignant. The condemned man, the proscribed criminal, the bandit, the *utlagatus* or outlaw, were said in the Middle Ages to wear a *caput lupinum* (in England, *wulfesheofod*; in France, *teste lœue*) (de Gubernatis, 1872: 149).

Unlike Müller's mythology of nature, Nodilo assumes dualism (religion of *two principles*) for *bright/Uranian gods* who can also be transformed into ethically "inappropriate" deities. Considering the annual, cosmic period of activity of the supreme Slavic deity who acts as Vid during the summer/day and as an *aged* Veles during the winter/night (a *weakened* aspect of Svantevid), he initiates the binomial supreme deity of Serbs and Croats (Vid – Veles) (cf. Marjanić, 2022). According to Nodilo's interpretation, the bright gods can be teriomorphized into wolves, bears, and foxes, but during the hardships of winter, they are mostly wolves, in line with the dominant Wolf figure.

> That this is not merely a metaphor, but that winter was once associated with the Wolf, is evident from the proverb: 'The wolf hasn't yet eaten the winter', or 'The wolf hasn't yet swallowed the winter' (Nodilo, 1981: 254).[14]

In the winter darkness, even the light faces of the divine become akin to the *terrifying* Wolf or fall under his dominion, as portrayed in the *Edda*, where the nyctomorphic Wolf devours Odin himself. Nodilo emphasizes that in more *ancient* times (than witches), people were frightened by the voracious Wolf, a three-headed monster (Nodilo, 1981: 98), which figures as the zoomorphic embodiment of the night, a *predator in the imaginations* of the early Indo-European peoples (ibid.: 108).

In short, Nodilo references the Scandinavian symbolism of the Wolf and the Vedic image of the Wolf (Vṛka) devouring a quail (Dawn), whom/which the Aśvins save from the nyctomorphic Wolf (RV I, 117, 16; I, 118, 8; X, 39, 13) from the wolf's lair (cave of night)

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[14] For the general connection between wolves and winter documented in proverbs, see Plas, 2021: 158 (section "Vučje vrijeme" – Time of the Wolf).

(Nodilo, 1981: 90, 446) (Nodilo, 1981: 446). In the Edda, wolves symbolize the end of the world and chaos – "the wolves will soon devour the Sun. Three long winters without summer will cover the Earth with snow and ice" (Sturluson, 1997). In the context of Nodilo's nature mythology, the zoo-symbol of the nyctomorphic Wolf becomes a marker of the dark zoomorphoses of night and the cold part of the year.

Likewise, Nodilo draws a parallel between Zora and the *half-white, half-black* goddess Hel, sister of the wolf Fenrir/Fenrisúlfr, whom Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta Danorum*, book/chapter 39) interpreted as Proserpina, and whom the *Edda* places in the *underworld* of Niflheim. In Niflheim, the northern land of eternal ice and fog, there is a *court and courtyard* called Niflhel, ruled by the goddess Hel (Nodilo, 1981: 121). Loki, who has three *demonic* children (the wolf Fenrir, the *serpent* Jörmungandr [Jörmungand – another name for the Midgard Serpent; cf. Orchard, 2002: 223], which *encircles the cosmos*, and the daughter Hel, who receives the dead who do not go to Valhalla), is one of the twelve Aesir/Asâ/Ansâ, sons of Odin, known by the Saxons – who equated him with Saturn – under the name Krodo/Hruodo (Nodilo, 1981: 371–372).

In the context of this interpretation of the wolf, Nodilo refers to the religion of two principles, where the nyctomorphic wolf appears as the zoosymbol of Črnobog (Black God). He adds an interpretation to Helmold's record of Zcerneboch: "(…) and the black god of the Baltic Slavs was possibly also called Vrag [the Devil]" (Nodilo, 1981: 107).[15]

In the context of nature mythology, Nodilo follows de Gubernatis' interpretation of the wolf, specifically as the Vedic Vṛka, and in the context of the Scandinavian Fenrir who devours the Moon, symbolizing a cosmic disruption. As Angelo de Gubernatis states:

> In the *Edda*, the two wolves Sköll and Hati wish to take, one the sun and the other the moon; the wolf devours the sun, father of the world, and gives birth to a daughter. He is then killed by Vidarr. Hati precedes the luminous betrothed of the sky; the wolf Fenris, son of the demoniacal Lokis, chained by the Ases, bites off the hand that the hero Tyr, as an earnest of the good faith of the Ases, had put into his mouth (cf. de Gubernatis, 1872: 147).[16]

Let us focus further on Fenrir from the *Edda* within the context of Nodilo's description of Hel's realm. Beneath the third root, which is located above the land of ice, the hell of Niflheim (Hel's realm) where the wolf Fenrir dwells (Nodilo, 1981: 134), who seeks to reach the well of Hvergelmir (*the boiling cauldron*) that is the source of all the rivers in the world; the dragon Nidhogg (*he who strikes with hatred*) resides, who gnaws at the roots at the bottom. "In Hvergelmer with Nidhug are more serpents than tongue can tell" (Sturluson, 1997: 59). In Niflheim, the northern land of eternal ice and fog, there is a *court and courtyard* called Niflhel (Orchard, 2002: 264), ruled by the goddess Hel. As a

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[15] The compensation or penalty paid for murder in the *Law code of Vinodol* (Articles 29 and 31) is referred to as *vražba* (Katičić, 1989–1990: 79). Compare this to Nodilo's parallels regarding *Vrag* and the deities of the underworld within the framework of Indo-European comparative mythology, as shown in a table in Marjanić, 2022: 155.

[16] Cf. "Hati Hróðvitnisson", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hati_Hr%C3%B3%C3%B0vitnisson.

shorter mythological reference, with all the main actors involved, Fenrir (or Fenrisulfr, Fenris Wolf, Fenris) is a mythical creature in Norse mythology – a wolf, the son of Loki and the giantess Angrbođa. Fenrir is chained by the gods, but he will grow too large for his bonds and eventually kill Odin during Ragnarök. When Fenrir reaches his full size, his upper jaw will touch the sky while his lower jaw touches the Earth. After killing Odin, Odin's son, Víðarr, will slay Fenrir, either by stabbing him in the heart or tearing apart his jaws.[17] In short, at the end of the world, Fenrir will devour the Sun, while another wolf, Mánagarmr, will do the same to the Moon.[18]

In his ethno-astrological research, Janković notes the archaic belief that during solar and lunar eclipses, certain *monsters* are eaten; he also references Nodilo's observation that the explanation for the cause of solar and lunar eclipses through werewolves is a Slavic belief; in this context, Janković mentions that the Romanian word *verkolači* refers to the *lunar eclipse* (Janković, 1951: 110; Nodilo, 1981: 258).

The wolf as a nyctomorphic devourer of light can be linked to the concept of "Pasunce" (Sun Dog), a myth about the three Suns; the suncovuk (Sunwolf); blind Sun (in Montenegro), Sun dogs. A false Sun, parhelion, or Sun dog is an optical phenomenon in Earth's atmosphere, appearing as two bright spots at 22° on both sides of the Sun at the same height above the horizon (Janković, 1951: 40).[19] In Norse mythology, Sköll (Old Norse
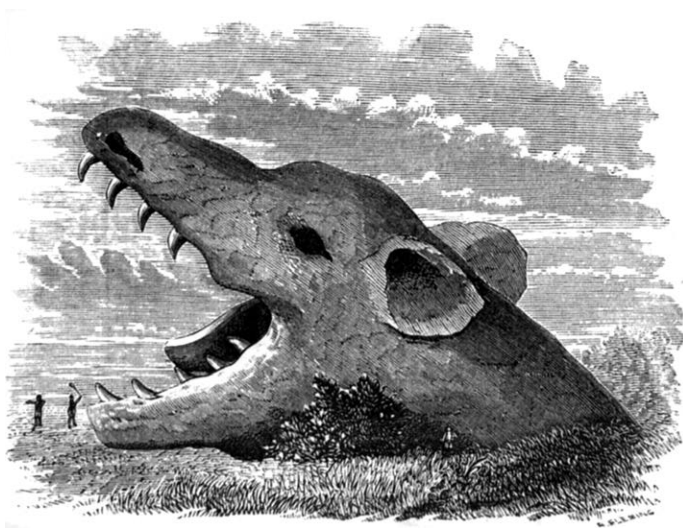
Figure 1: A. Fleming, The Wolf Fenrir (Alexander Murray, *Manual of Mythology: Greek and Roman, Norse, and Old German, Hindoo and Egyptian Mythology*, London, Asher and Co., 1874. (Taken from: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Fenrir_(Manual_of_Mythology).jpg)

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[17] "Fenrir", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fenrir.

[18] Durand noes that these beliefs also appear in northern Asia, where the Yakuts explain the phases of the Moon through the insatiability of a bear or a ravenous wolf; similarly, they use the expression that a dog howls at the Moon or howls at death (Durand, 1991: 77).

[19] In northern Montenegro, this phenomenon is known as "blind Suns". See also "Sun dog". Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_dog. "In the case of parhelia, one or two bright circles can be seen to the left and right of the Sun, similar in size to the Sun, but much dimmer in brightness" (Janković, 1951: 40).

"Treachery" or "Mockery") is a wolf chasing the Sun (personified as the goddess Sól). Hati Hróðvitnisson pursues the Moon (the Moon personified as Máni). According to Rudolf Simek, it is possible that Sköll is another name for Fenrir, and if so,

> There could be an interpretation within nature mythology in the case of Sköll, who chases the Sun, and Hati, who chases the Moon. Such an interpretation suggests that wolves were meant to describe the phenomenon of parhelion or sun dogs, as they are called 'sun wolves' in Scandinavian languages (Norwegian 'solvarg,' Swedish 'solulv'), 'wolf of the Sun' (Simek, 1998: 375).

WOLF FOLKLORE

Ljubinko Radenković offers a remarkable conceptualization of animals, including the dog/wolf, in his book *Simbolika sveta u narodnoj magiji Južnih Slovena* (1996). From a semiotic and ethnolinguistic perspective, he demonstrates how humankind constructed its worldview from the familiar to the unknown, from itself to the distant and unconquered spaces believed to be inhabited by the souls of the dead and mythological beings (Radenković, 1996: 7). Radenković applies two criteria to determine the symbolic status of animals: the vertical arrangement relative to the world tree (*arbor mundi*) and the horizontal arrangement based on the distance from humans. According to the first criterion, grounded in oppositions such as up–down, above–below, dry–wet, animals are arranged as follows: at the top of the world tree are birds (with eagle or falcon figuring as zoometonymies); in the middle, at the level of the tree, are hoofed animals, dogs, cats, chickens, and sometimes bees; on the same level, but opposite these animals, are wild animals like wolves, foxes, deer, and bears. In the lower part of the world tree, at the final, third level (roots), reside snakes, frogs, fish, moles, mice, insects, etc. Using this arrangement, which focuses on proximity to humans, Radenković notes that animals closest to humans include horses, sheep, cows, and oxen, followed by bulls, goats, donkeys, chickens, pigs, dogs, and cats. So-called wild animals are positioned relative to the *god shepherd* (*božji pastir*),[20] with the bear being closest and the wolf the furthest (ibid.: 356–357).[21] Thus, the dog is seen as a guardian of the boundary between social and wild spaces, while the wolf is the guardian of the opposite boundary, from the wild to the social (Radenković, 1996: 99).

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[20] According to the folklore of Serbs and some other nations (Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Romanians, Lithuanians, Finns, French, etc.), the wolf shepherd is the master of wolves, who gathers them once a year and determines their prey. There is a widely known legend about a man (most often a shepherd) who, hidden in a tree, observes how a wolf shepherd distributes the prey (as a rule, livestock) to the gathered wolves (Mencej, 2001; Radenković, 1996: 356–357).

[21] Aleksandar Gura highlights the parallelism between the wolf and the bear, which can be observed in their symbolic and metaphorical equivalence with the pair of domestic animals – dog and cat: "if the wolf in folk representations corresponds to the dog, then the symbolic analogy for the bear is often represented by the cat" (Gura, 2005: 130).

In summary, Ljubinko Radenković systematically presents a zoomorphic code, schematically mapping animals based on proximity/distance and high/low, with binary oppositions clean/unclean, wild/domesticated. In this system, the wolf is positioned at the level of semantic or semiotic opposites – *distant*, *wild*, *low*, and *unclean* – while the dog is associated with the *near*, *domesticated*, *low*, and *unclean*, and is placed next to the cat (cf. Radenković, 1996: 187). While the domestication of dogs is linked to hunter-gatherer societies, the domestication of cats occurred with the advent of early agricultural societies, as they protected grain from rodents and snakes.

"Wolf folklore" – the ritual genres and the ethnopoetics of "wolf texts" – are most comprehensively documented in Plas' book *Mi o vuku* (2021). This is the first local study that provides a systematic analysis and interpretation of the symbolism of the wolf – understood as a "text" – in traditional folk culture of the Western South Slavic, particularly Shtokavian, region, based on ethnographic, folkloric, and linguistic sources, mostly from the period 1880–1970 (the research corpus includes 1134 bibliographic entries). This study is also the first local work to merge the interpretive niche of ethnopoetic interpretation with modes of symbolic, interpretive anthropology in the context of ethnozoological readings of the "wolf text." Through a contextual and structural-linguistic analysis of oral literary texts and a simultaneous observation of form (stylistic and structural features), content (semantic-referential), and function (pragmatic meanings), Pieter Plas employs a methodology that integrates ethnolinguistic (semiotic and linguistic-anthropological) and ethnopoetic (oral literary, poetic, and pragmatic-performative) approaches, achieving a comprehensive approach to the studied phenomenon (cf. Pandurević, 2016: 22–23).

Pieter Plas naturally used Nodilo's interpretation of "wolf folklore" in his research. As this text focuses on Nodilo's interpretation of the source of the fear of "wolf's mouth", who was the first to write about this phenomenon in the context of mythology of nature/mythological research as far as the South Slavic corpus is concerned, we should fragmentarily mention some dimensions of "wolf folklore" from Nodilo's study *Stara vjera Srba i Hrvata* [Old Faith of Serbs and Croats] (1885–1890). This is Nodilo's interpretation of the lycanthropic name, which becomes an apotropaic name, used to ward off "invisible misfortune", as Nodilo interprets the German name Wolfgang. Furthermore, these are "dog days" as well as the custom of *vučari* (wolf hunters).

There are a number of "wolf folklore elements" in Nodilo's nature mythology, such as a lycanthropic remedy called *izmeče* (a lamb in the stomach of a sheep slaughtered by a wolf), which is left to dry and then used as incense to treat a condition called *vukojedina* (a kind of wound on a child), "when the child's mother, while pregnant, accidentally eats sheep or goat meat from an animal devoured by a wolf" (Karadžić: Rječnik – *Vukojedina, Izmeče* [Nodilo 1981: 254]),[22] but on this occasion I'm only focusing on the previously mentioned wolf phenomena.

Nodilo records that the apotropaic practice of giving lycanthropic names is known in Montenegro, Boka Kotorska, and Herzegovina. A person would climb onto a wall

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[22] *Izmeče* – an unborn lamb from the womb of a sheep slaughtered by a wolf, cf. Plas, 2021: 365. For *vukojedina* cf. Plas, 2021: 401.

around the house during the birth of the child and recite a ceremonial-poetic formula for apotropaic naming (from Vrčević's writing) to protect the child from *witches*: "Hear, people and folk! A she-wolf has given birth to a wolf, for all the world to know, and for the wolf cub's health!" (Nodilo, 1981: 98; cf. Vrčević, 1881: 73).[23]

In the context of the symbolic reading of the dog, Nodilo dwells on *Dog Days*. During this period, the Romans practiced the ritual of *caniculi* (July 24 – August 23), *augurium canarium*, where they sacrificed dogs near the city gates (*porta catulana*) to invoke an abundant harvest (Nodilo, 1981: 377). They also celebrated *Vulcanalia* in honor of the fiery god Vulcan. Nodilo interprets the *caniculi* ritual as representing the Indo-European concept of two dogs serving as guardians at the entrance to winter and night, symbolizing the underworld (*mundus subterraneus*).

Sima Trojanović records that this time, when water would become contaminated, was called the Dog Days (*Dies caniculares*), lasting from July 23 to August 23. The greatest heat also occurred during this period, and the Saxons were forbidden from bathing or drinking from open sources, as all water was believed to be poisoned by "dog drops" (particles) that had fallen from the sky (Trojanović, 1911: 163–164).[24]

Sirius, once known as the "burning" star, was also called the Dog Star (*Stella canicola*),[25] and it was believed to bring misfortune, such as droughts, crop destruction, and the spread of rabies. Thus, sacrifices were offered to the star, including dogs, sheep, and wine. The period of these ritual festivities was called the *Dog Days*, as noted by Barbara Kovačević (cf. Gelenčir, 2017).

> From this, the term 'pasji dani' (*dies caniculares*) originated, which exists today in other European languages as well, for example, English *Dog Days*, German *die Hundstage*, Italian *canicola*, and in the Croatian language, the term 'pasje vrućine' (dog heat) emerged, referring to the intense heat characteristic of the period from the end of July to mid-August. (Cf. Gelenčir, 2017; cf. Vidović Bolt et al., 2017.)[26]

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[23] Cf. the interpretation of the mentioned ritual text and the wolf metaphor in the meaning *wolf = health* (Plas, 2021).

[24] Same as Nodilo (cf. Marjanić, 2022: 383), Sima Trojanović also references *The Saxons in England* by John Mitchell Kemble.

[25] Sirius, the brightest star in the constellation *Canis Major* (Latin for "Great Dog"), was referred to as the Dog Star by the ancient Romans, a name they adopted from the Greeks. They also borrowed the concept of the *Dog Days* (*dies caniculares*), which spanned from roughly late July to mid-August, when Sirius rose together with the Sun. "The Dog Days represent a period of hibernation, days when nothing happens, with the main activity being the struggle against the humid heat" (Tomić, 2020).

[26] For example, Milan Lang records two different dates for the *Dog Days* (Pasje dane). First, he mentions that the *Dog Days* (from July 27 to August 22) are blamed for bad milk (Lang, 1914: 197). Furthermore, Lang (now with different date markings) notes that the hottest days of the summer, from July 20 to August 20, are called the *Dog Days* and provides an etiological explanation: "When the dog was shivering from the cold in the winter, he said he would build a house in the summer; but when summer came and the heat arrived, he lay on his back in the hemp field, lifted his legs high, and said: 'Who on earth would bother with such work? These are the true Dog Days'" (Lang, 1911: 28).

According to Mannhardt's research,[27] Frazer examines the dog and the wolf as embodiments of the corn-spirit in harvest customs. He highlights that this understanding is widespread in France (most prominently in northeastern France), Germany, and Slavic countries. "Here the wolf is the corn-spirit whose fertilising power is in his tail." (Frazer, 2002: 316). The wolf caught in the last sheaf lives during the winter in the farmhouse, ready to act as the corn-spirit in the spring. During the winter solstice, when the lengthening days begin to herald the arrival of spring, the Wolf appears once again, notes Frazer. This can be contextualized with the custom of *vučari* (or vukari – wolfmen), a ritual performance (cf. Đurić, 2023: 552), which, in Croatia, was observed in Lika and the Dalmatian hinterland during the winter, most often between Epiphany (Three Kings, January 6) and Candlemas (February 2), when the threat of wolves was greatest (cf. Belaj, 1983).

> In Poland a man, with a wolf's skin thrown over his head, is led about at Christmas; or a stuffed wolf is carried about by persons who collect money. There are facts which point to an old custom of leading about a man enveloped in leaves and called the Wolf, while his conductors collected money (Frazer, 2002: 318).

The custom of *vučari* is interpreted by Nodilo in the context of the Roman Lupercalia, the mythic site of the Lupercal cave and the *she-wolf* goddess who nursed the twins Romulus and Remus, which he further interprets as the *January* and *February* Sun. Nodilo establishes a parallel between the *she-wolf* goddess and Acca Larentia (Nodilo, 1981: 255–256, 295). Radmila Kajmaković argues that in this description of the custom, as noted by Nodilo, "it is clearly referring to vučari", rather than čarojice (witch-like figures), since čarojice never wear a *vučina* (wolf's pelt), although one participant is masked in the skin of an animal, "a goat" (Kajmaković, 1974: 633). Vitomir Belaj, however, rejects the interpretation of vučari as a survival or continuation of the Roman *discursus lupercorum* or *Lupercalia*, which took place in mid-February (Belaj, 1983: 86; cf. Plas, 2021: 276).

IN CONCLUSION, OR HOW THE WOLF *BECAME* A DOG: THE DOUBLET OF THE WOLF IS THE DOG (DURAND, 1991: 77) OR "SPEAK OF THE WOLF…"

This interpretive timeline (not necessarily in chronological order) of this review article presents the imaginary of the "Balkan" wolf/dog in South Slavic customs and beliefs from Natko Nodilo, through Tihomir R. Đorđević and Ljubinko Radenković, all the way to contemporary cultural animal studies and ethnopoetic research by Pieter Plas, contextually related to other Slavs and Indo-European comparative mythology in the framework of archetypal wolf/dog phobias (*lupophobia*, *kinophobia*). While Nodilo

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[27] Wilhelm Mannhardt in his works *Roggenwolf und Roggenhund. Beitrag zur germanischen Sittenkunde* (1865) and *Die Korndämonen. Beitrag zur germanischen Sittenkunde* (1868) focused on vegetation spirits from an evolutionary standpoint, more precisely the archaic cult of trees and its later development.

relies on Angelo de Gubernatis' interpretation of nature mythology, and remains in pure mythology (allegorism) in the vein of Max Müller's mythology of nature (1997), Tihomir R. Đorđević follows the ethnographic material of the South Slavs (as for Croatia, he carefully researched, among other things, the wolf/dog entries in the *Collection of Folk Life and Customs of the South Slavs*), and Ljubinko Radenković semiotically observes the wolf/dog in the symbolism of the world of the South Slavs, where he notes that the closest domestic animals to man are the horse, sheep, cow and ox, followed by the bull, goat, donkey, hen, pig, dog and cat. So-called wild animals are arranged in relation to the *god-shepherd* (*God's shepherd*) – the bear is closest to him, and the wolf is the farthest. Nodilo's "demonization" of the wolf (more precisely, his interpretation of the wolf's zoo-symbolization within the framework of nature mythology) contrasts with Čajkanović's totemistic interpretation, which suggests that the great Slavic god of the dead was envisioned in the form of a wolf (the divine *lame wolf*) (Čajkanović, 1941: 147; Bandić, 1991: 30). Pieter Plas points out that the complex of thanatological representations associated with this animal is generally approached with a critical stance toward existing interpretations, particularly in relation to Čajkanović's reading of the wolf as a totem and its role in the cult of the dead. Plas emphasizes that there are "very few indications of a direct connection between wolves and thanatological representations". In contrast, Dušan Bandić argues that Čajkanović's thesis about the wolf as an incarnation of the deceased and ancestral spirits is the most well-argued (Bandić, 1991: 30).

Unlike ethnozoology, zoo-ethics corresponds to different settings. Zooethicist Nikola Visković adds that the wolf, usually seen as a model of bestiality, is not what we imagine: it is social, loyal to the pack and its mate, a caring parent, respects the territorial boundaries of wolf groups, and in mutual conflicts does not mutilate nor kill its opponent if the latter retreats or surrenders (Visković, 1996: 348). Referring to Boris A. Uspenskij's writings on the connection between cursing and the cult of the earth and the cult of the dog, Josip Užarević, in his exploration of the phenomenology of swearing, or the theory of swearing, adds that it is not entirely clear whether swearing means "calling someone a dog" (since "psovka" in Croatian – meaning curse word/phrase – shares the same root as "pas" – dog), as suggested by Ignacije Gavran, or perhaps "behaving like a dog, in a dog's manner" (by the *kynical* strategy of freedom in relation to the cynicism of the heteronomy of life), and concludes that both perspectives are likely intertwined.[28] Unfortunately, as an illustration of the use of animals in propaganda and the language of hate, it is usually denoted by Plaut's (Hobbes') apophthegm "Man to man wolf" (cf. Sax, 2001), as well as, e.g., Kafka's Jozef K., who, at the end of the *Process*, remarks upon his own death by saying "Like a dog".

<div align="right">Translated by Juraj Šutej</div>

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[28] Ignacije Gavran points out that in the context of obscene curses, speciesist animal names often appear, most commonly bitch, dog, and, for example, goat, stallion, mare, donkey.

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BALKANSKI VUK/PAS U FOLKLORISTIČKIM INTERPRETACIJAMA U MITOLOGIJI PRIRODE N. NODILA PREKO T. R. ĐORĐEVIĆA DO LJ. RADENKOVIĆA I P. PLASA

Interpretativna vremenska lenta (ne nužno kronološkoga slijeda) izlaže imaginarij o „balkanskom" vuku/psu u južnoslavenskim običajima i vjerovanjima od Natka Nodila preko Tihomira R. Đorđevića i Ljubinka Radenkovića sve do suvremenih kulturnoanimalističkih istraživanja Pietera Plasa (koji koristi metodologiju koja integrira etnolingvistički/semiotički i lingvističko-antropološki i etnopoetički pristup), i to kontekstualno vezano uz ostale Slavene i indoeuropsku komparativnu mitologiju u okviru arhetipske fobije od vuka/psa (lupofobija, kinofobija). I dok se Nodilo oslanja na interpretaciju mitologije prirode Angela de Gubernatisa, Tihomir R. Đorđević prati etnografski materijal Južnih Slavena (što se tiče Hrvatske pomno je, među ostalim, istražio zapise o vuku/psu u *Zborniku za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena*), a Ljubinko Radenković semiotički promatra vuka/psa u simbolici svijeta Južnih Slavena, gdje zamjećuje da su *čovjeku* od domaćih životinja najbliži konj, ovca, krava i vol, a zatim slijede bik, koza, magarac, kokoš, svinja, pas i mačka. Tzv. divlje životinje raspoređene su u odnosu na *boga-pastira* (*božji pastir*) – njemu je najbliži medvjed, a najdalji vuk. Dakle, pas je čuvar granice socijalnog i divljeg prostora, kao što je vuk čuvar granica, ali suprotno usmjerenoga od psa, od divljeg prema socijalnom.

Autor je primijenio dva mjerila za određivanje simboličkoga statusa životinja: vertikalni raspored u odnosu na stablo svijeta (*arbor mundi*) i horizontalni raspored temeljen na udaljenosti prema čovjeku. Tako su po prvom mjerilu, u čijoj se osnovi nalaze opozicije gore – dolje, iznad – ispod, suho – mokro, životinje raspoređene na sljedeći način: na vrhu Stabla svijeta nalaze se ptice (kao zoometonimije figuriraju orao ili sokol); u sredini, na nivou Stabla svijeta raspoređeni su kopitari, pas, mačka, kokoš i ponekad pčele; na istom nivou, ali suprotno od njih nalaze se divlje životinje – vuk, lisica, jelen, medvjed. U donjem dijelu Stabla svijeta, na zadnjem, trećem nivou (korijenje) borave zmija, žaba, riba, krtica, miš, kukci itd. Po sljedećem mjerilu, ponovimo, čovjeku su najbliže životinje, ističe Ljubinko Radenković, konj, ovca, krava i vol, a slijede bik, koza, magarac, kokoš, svinja, pas i mačka. Ukratko, Ljubinko Radenković sustavno prezentira zoomorfni kôd, shematski prikaz rasporeda životinja po obilježjima blisko/daleko i visoko/nisko, s binarnom opozicijom čisto/nečisto, divlje/pitomo, gdje se Vuk nalazi na razini semantičkih ili semiotičkih suprotnosti *dalekoga, divljega, niskoga i nečistoga*, a pas – *bliskoga, pitomoga, niskoga i nečistoga*, i pritom je pozicioniran odmah do mačke (usp. Radenković, 1996: 187).

Nodilovo iščitavanje „demonizacije" vuka (točnije, iščitavanje zoosimbolizacije vuka u kontekstu mitologije prirode) nalazi se u opreci s Čajkanovićevom totemističkom interpretacijom koja navodi da je veliki slavenski bog mrtvih zamišljen u obličju vuka (božanski *hromi vuk*) (Čajkanović, 1941: 147; Bandić, 1991: 30).

Pieter Plas navodi da kompleks tanatoloških predodžbi vezanih za ovu životinju uglavnom sagledava s kritičkim otklonom prema postojećim tumačenjima, prije svega u odnosu na Čajkanovićevo čitanje vuka kao totema i njegove uloge u kultu mrtvih, ističući da je „iznimno malo indicija o izravnoj vezi vukova s tanatološkim predodžbama". Za razliku od Pietera Plasa, Dušan Bandić navodi da je Čajkanovićeva teza o vuku kao inkarnaciji pokojnika i predačkih duhova najbolje argumentirana (Bandić, 1991: 30).

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Afterlife Beliefs and Dream Encounters with the Dead among Adherents of Alternative Spiritualities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Tina Ivnik

This article examines the connection between the ideas adherents of alternative spiritualities in Bosnia and Herzegovina have about the afterlife and their understanding of dreams involving the dead. It explores how these ideas and interpretations are connected to the perceived agency of the dead, as experienced by my interlocutors in their dreams. Focusing on ideas about the afterlife within alternative spirituality, the article discusses why these beliefs have regained significance and how they have been reinterpreted in relation to modern/secular and religious explanations. By analysing the beliefs of individuals engaged in alternative spiritualities regarding the afterlife, it explores how these ideas shape their understanding of dreams featuring personally known deceased individuals. As beliefs about the afterlife influence how individuals perceive the state of the dead, it examines how these beliefs enable the dead to have agency upon the interlocutors in their dreams. The findings are based on ethnographic research conducted with spiritual individuals in Sarajevo and Banja Luka in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

KEYWORDS: alternative spirituality, dreams, dead, afterlife, near-death experience, Bosnia and Herzegovina, agency

Članek preučuje povezavo med predstavami o posmrtnem življenju in razumevanjem sanj o bližnjih mrtvih med pripadniki alternativnih duhovnosti v Bosni in Hercegovini. Raziskuje, kako so te predstave in interpretacije povezane z vplivom, ki ga imajo nanje mrtvi. S poudarkom na predstavah o posmrtnem življenju v alternativni duhovnosti članek obravnava, zakaj so ta verovanja znova pridobila na pomenu in kako so bila reinterpretirana v razmerju do modernih/sekularnih ter religioznih razlag. Z analizo predstav o posmrtnem življenju pokaže, kako ta prepričanja oblikujejo njihovo razumevanje sanj, v katerih se pojavljajo mrtvi. Ker prepričanja o posmrtnem življenju vplivajo na to, kako posamezniki dojemajo stanje mrtvih v onstranstvu, članek preučuje, kako ta verovanja omogočajo, da imajo mrtvi v sanjah določen vpliv na sogovornike. Ugotovitve temeljijo na etnografski raziskavi, opravljeni med pripadniki alternativnih duhovnosti v Sarajevu in Banjaluki v Bosni in Hercegovini.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: alternativna duhovnost, sanje, mrtvi, posmrtno življenje, izkušnja bližine smrti, Bosna in Hercegovina

INTRODUCTION

Dreams are cross-culturally understood as enabling communication between the divine and human worlds (Järvinen, 1998; Bourguignon, 2003: 136; Mageo, 2003: 16; Đorđević Belić, 2024). The anthropologist Raymond L. M. Lee notes that the remains of dream chambers found at archaeological sites in many parts of the world reveal the notion that dreams connect the worldly and otherworldly realms (Lee, 2013: 117). As such, dreams can also be understood as a medium for contact between the living and the dead. This is how dreams of the dead are perceived in many different cultural contexts and they are believed to enable the living to obtain information about the needs of their deceased, their condition in the afterlife, and general information about the afterlife (see Stark et al., 1996; Järvinen, 1998; Kiliánová, 2010; Hesz, 2012). How these dreams are narrated, understood and interpreted is significantly influenced by people's ideas and notions about the afterlife. Furthermore, people's ideas of the afterlife, together with their understanding of dreams, influence how they perceive the agency of the dead in dreams and what impact they may have on the living.

Concepts of the afterlife vary across societies, religious groups, as well as among individuals. Lee (2013: 110–111) notes that in modern, post-Christian, Western societies, religious teachings on the afterlife have become marginal and beliefs in the afterlife have fragmented. Similarly, sociologist Tony Walter (1993: 129) observes that in postmodern Western societies, believers often come up with their own answers to metaphysical questions, including what happens after death. The Church is no longer the primary source of information for these sorts of questions.

However fragmented afterlife beliefs have become in postmodernity, Lee (2015: 84) writes that this period has brought renewed interest in the possibility of post-physical existence. He sees the growing amount of literature related to death and dying in recent years as a sign that our relationship towards death has changed (Lee, 2003: 134; see Moody, 1984; Newton, 2003; Newton, 2005; Schwartz, 2016). Among the new answers emerging on this topic, alternative spirituality is especially influential as it has reconfigured ideas about death.

This article will discuss how ideas about the afterlife have been reinterpreted within alternative spirituality, contrasting them with previous modern/secular and religious explanations, and examining why these ideas have re-emerged as a significant topic among spiritual communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It will analyse people's ideas about the afterlife and how these ideas influence, connect to, and intertwine with their interpretations of dreams involving personally known deceased – primarily significant others. As beliefs about the afterlife influence how individuals perceive the dead, I will examine how these beliefs enable the dead to exert agency over my interlocutors in dreams.

In this article I demonstrate that questions about the afterlife are important to my interlocutors, many of whom have quite elaborate ideas on the subject. The interlocutors I write about in this article, as well as most of the individuals involved in alternative spirituality I interviewed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, believe in reincarnation. Their views of the afterlife have mainly been shaped by books and workshops on the topic. Many of them

mentioned accounts of near-death experiences and literature that is globally influential in alternative spiritual circles. Alternative spirituality has been considerably more important than the religion of their upbringing in shaping their views of the afterlife. I noticed that ideas about the afterlife influenced how my interlocutors understood the dreams of the deceased – they mainly interpreted them as real encounters with the souls of the deceased. The experiences of the agency of the dead in dreams were described as having a positive effect on them. I interpret this as resulting from their positive view of the afterlife.

In describing the influence exerted by the dead on the living, I use the concept of agency. Alfred Gell famously defines an agent as one who "causes events to happen in their vicinity" (Gell, 1998: 16). He theorized that things can possess agency – what he calls secondary agency – as human agency is exercised through them (Gell, 1998: 19–21). Bruno Latour expands this definition, viewing agency as "the capacity to have effect and/or to influence the actions and interactions of individuals and events" (Latour, 1993 in Heng, 2022: 402), thereby eliminating the distinction between primary and secondary agency.

Many authors have argued that the dead possess agency (Maddrell, 2013; Heng, 2020; Heng, 2022; for research in Bosnia and Herzegovina see Henig, 2017; Mencej, 2021; Mencej, 2024). Some scholars understand the agency of the dead as residual agency, meaning that it is ascribed to them by the living (see Hockey et al., 2010; Maddrell, 2013). I understand agency in a similar way to Terence Heng, who describes the dead as "agentic and capable of influencing the actions of others" (Heng, 2020: 39; see also Heng, 2022: 402). He focuses on materiality and objects – material proxies of consociation – through which the dead exercise agency over the living (Heng, 2020: 39). However, in my research the dead exercise agency over the living in dreams, so no objects are used as proxies. Moreover, my findings suggest that the agency of the dead in dreams is primarily manifested in the emotional responses of the living rather than in their concrete actions. The responses include feelings of closeness to the deceased, a sense that the relationship is continuing or relief that the dead continue to exist in the afterlife. My understanding of agency is somewhat broader than that of the scholars mentioned above. It is in line with how my interlocutors described it – not necessarily as leading to an individual's action, but as an emotional transformation or impact resulting from contact with the dead in dreams.

Dreams have long been a subject of research in anthropology and folkloristics (see Lincoln, 1935; Eggan, 1949; Kaivola-Bregenhøj, 1993; Stark et al., 1996; Stewart, 1997; Hollan, 2004; Kracke, 2006; Kirtsoglou, 2010; Laughlin, Rock, 2014; Mittermaier, 2015). However, there has been limited research on dreams involving the deceased. This issue has mostly been dealt with from the point of view of bereavement in psychology (Barrett, 1992; Garfield, 1996; Hinton et al., 2013; Black et al., 2016), and anthropological analyses have been conducted in various cultural settings (for Karelians in Russia see Stark et al., 1996; Järvinen, 1998; for a village in Slovakia see Kiliánová, 2010; for Hungarians in Romania see Hesz, 2012; for Serbians see Đorđević Belić, 2024). However, little is known about how dreams involving the dead are understood in relation to spiritual individuals' views of the afterlife (cf. Lee, 2003), despite the increasing influence of such views, especially in the West.

I will analyse the ideas and experiences of three individuals I interviewed during my fieldwork in two cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Sarajevo and Banja Luka. In the following chapter, I briefly describe the phenomenon of alternative spirituality and its importance in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, followed by a presentation of my interlocutors.

ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITY AND MY INTERLOCUTORS

In describing the spiritual movement of my interlocutors, I use the term "alternative spirituality" and refer to its adherents as "spiritual people". I differentiate "spirituality" from "religion" by understanding spirituality as emphasizing subjective, personal experiences and the search for one's authentic self, while religion is more focused on institutions and organized systems of belief[1] (see Heelas, 1996: 18–22; Sutcliffe, Bowman, 2000: 8; Fuller, 2001: 4; Houtman, Aupers, 2010: 6; Wixwat, Saucier, 2021: 122; Bužeková, 2024: 1–3). Spirituality can therefore be antagonistic to religion, but not necessarily. An example from Bosnia and Herzegovina is the Sufi tradition (see Kostadinova, 2023), which, while being a spiritual tradition, is also part of the Islamic religion. Although these concepts may be blurred in the field, this article does not include individuals who identify solely with traditional religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (such as Muslim or Christian spirituality).

Thus, my research focuses on alternative spirituality, where "alternative" denotes a distinction from established religions. Many of my interlocutors identified as "spiritual but not religious", rejecting the established religious institutions (for a discussion of the term "spiritual but not religious", see Fuller, 2001; Wixwat, Saucier, 2021). However, I recognise the problematic nature of this term, as it is broad and encompasses diverse, heterogeneous alternative spirituality groups and movements, including a wide range of worldviews and ideas (Sutcliffe, Bowman, 2000: 10–11). To address this issue, I provide a detailed explanation of each interlocutor's ideas. Another issue with the term "alternative" lies in its discursive assumptions, as it implies viewing these groups from the perspective of official religions. Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman criticize this perspective, arguing that various forms of spirituality should be regarded as equal parts of the contemporary religious landscape.

I acknowledge that spirituality and the individual's search for meaning are not new phenomena but have existed throughout history in various forms, shaped by different socio-historical contexts (see Sutcliffe, Bowman, 2000: 4–8; Houtman, Aupers, 2010: 8).[2] However, as stated by Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman, the relative power of spiritualities in contemporary times lies in their ability to be repackaged to suit industrial

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[1] I am also aware that the distinction between spirituality and religion is characteristic of modern Western societies and may not be applicable to all societies (see Wixwat, Saucier, 2021: 122).

[2] This is why I consider alternative spirituality to be a more appropriate term than synonymic terms such as "new spirituality", "contemporary spirituality", "new religious movements" and "new religiosity". However, I use the term New Age when citing other authors who employ it. I regard it as a narrower term, more closely associated with the post-World War II context.

and post-industrial societies, which are seeing the decline of official forms of religions (Sutcliffe, Bowman, 2000: 8). Alternative spirituality, though not new, transitioned from niche practices to a mass movement during the 1960s, particularly in the West, before expanding globally (Heelas, Woodhead, 2005: 48; Heelas, 2008: 40). Folklorist Kaarina Koski (2016: 18) describes the period after the 1970s as marked by a growing interest in the paranormal and the occult, alongside the decline of traditional religions and an increasing fascination with alternative spiritual beliefs.

The growing popularity of alternative spirituality, its increasing number of adherents and its rapid spread around the world have led some scholars to characterize it as a "spiritual revolution" (see e.g. Tacey, 2003). While Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005: 2; 149) have questioned the term and speak instead of "mini revolutions", it is evident that alternative spirituality is gaining global influence, especially in the West. Less is known about the influence of alternative spiritualities elsewhere. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, traditional religions became more publicly visible as the importance of ethno-religious identities increased after the war (1992–1995) (see Kolind, 2007: 124; Maček, 2009: 162). Alternative spiritualities remain of limited importance, and reliable statistics on the people involved are difficult to obtain.

However, in my field research I came across many spiritual groups that had been founded in the last few years and encountered many people who had recently become involved in alternative spiritualities. Based on my fieldwork experience, we could speculate that in urban contexts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, their relevance is slowly growing, gaining more public visibility and attracting new adherents (for the rise of alternative spiritualities in other post-socialist countries see Črnič, 2001; Potrata, 2004; Radulović, 2014; Kis-Halas, 2019; Panchenko, 2021; Bužeková, 2023: 13; Bužeková, 2024). Furthermore, alternative spiritualities played a significant role in interpreting extraordinary and metaphysical experiences among my interlocutors (cf. Koski, 2016), as well as addressing abstract questions about life after death. They significantly influenced how interlocutors imagined the state of the dead in the afterlife and the possibility of encountering them.

During my six-month fieldwork in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, I conducted 105 semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in alternative spiritualities, employing qualitative content analysis. My criteria for choosing interlocutors were broad; I mainly interviewed people who defined themselves as "spiritual but not religious", with some exceptions. These included interlocutors who participated in alternative spiritual activities or groups but were also practicing Orthodox Christians or Muslims (cf. Bužeková, 2023). In the interviews, I asked them general questions about their spiritual paths, attitudes towards the afterlife and their experience with the agency of the dead. My interlocutors were often happy to share their experiences of encounters with the dead and commented that this was an important and overlooked question. As noted by Kaarina Koski (2016: 16), such experiences are appreciated in New Age circles. Among the instances where people had experienced the agency of the dead, dreams were the most common medium.

The three interlocutors I focus on in this article are all involved in alternative spiritualities, which have significantly shaped their ideas of the afterlife, their understanding of contact with the dead in dreams, and the effect these experiences have had on them.

I will first provide a brief description of each interlocutor and their spiritual path, followed by an analysis of their understanding of the afterlife. Then I will present their dreams of the dead, their interpretations of these dreams, and how they perceive the agency of the dead in relation to their beliefs about the afterlife.

My interlocutors, whom I will call Mirza, Ajša and Lejla,[3] are all spiritual people, practicing different types of spirituality. All three of them are highly educated, holding university degrees. They all told me that religion did not play an important part in their upbringing, instead describing their families as being socialist/communist. They were all born in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was a secular state. Although it was more liberal towards religious communities than the Warsaw Pact countries (Buchenau, 2005), religion was discouraged and removed from public life, schools and institutions.

Mirza, a 43-year-old from Sarajevo, did not have a religious upbringing, as his parents were not religious, though they both grew up in Muslim families. As a child, he was curious about the meaning of life and started reading texts from different religions, but they did not provide the answers he was looking for. When the internet became widely available, a new world opened up for him, allowing access to spiritual literature and videos on life, psychology, well-being and spirituality. Nowadays, he mainly engages in spiritual practices alone, while also attending various workshops and lectures on the topic.

Lejla is 41 years old and was brought up in a non-religious family. She states that death was a taboo topic in her family, despite growing up during the war. In her twenties and thirties, she was an atheist, but later turned to yoga, which improved her physical and psychological well-being. This sparked her interest in the spiritual aspects of yoga. She now actively practices yoga, attends spiritual workshops and maintains her own personal spiritual practice.

Ajša is a 38-year-old spiritual individual from Sarajevo. She comes from a religiously mixed family, like many of my interlocutors in Sarajevo. Her father was a communist, while her mother was more interested in spiritual questions. She grew up during the war and was never interested in traditional religions, which she describes as too dogmatic. She started exploring spiritual questions independently and was especially interested in books about soul travel and reincarnation. Later, she began attending yoga classes and various workshops, a practice she continues to this day.

I chose to analyse the cases of these three individuals because they all experienced the agency of the dead in dreams and possessed well-developed ideas about the afterlife. While I do not believe their experiences and ideas are representative of all my interlocutors, I found some similarities in both their afterlife concepts and their experiences of the agency of the dead in dreams among people involved in alternative spirituality. As I will show, my interlocutors' ideas about the afterlife are significantly influenced by literature on alternative spirituality and are similar to the ideas held by individuals involved in alternative spiritualities worldwide. In the next chapter, I will explore how alternative spirituality has shaped its adherents' views on the afterlife, both on a wider scale and among my interlocutors.

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[3] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of my interlocutors. For the same reason, some of their personal information has also been changed.

SHIFTING VIEWS OF THE AFTERLIFE

Psychologist Jesse Michael Bering and cognitive scientist Mitch K. Hodge write that belief in an afterlife is predisposed by human cognitive abilities and is not culturally acquired (Bering, 2002: 269–271; Hodge, 2011). Hodge states that anthropological and psychological evidence suggests that while people understand that the body of the deceased will not function any longer, they do not fully comprehend this as the annihilation of every aspect of that person. This is why we often perceive death as an absence rather than an obliteration, reflected in the language we use – we say the dead have gone to another place and refer to them as "departed" or "gone" (Hodge, 2011).

However, people's ideas about the afterlife are strongly influenced by their cultural and religious settings and the messages they receive in them. Tony Walter (1993: 127–141) sees the New Age movement as a response to the secularization and medicalization of death, which portrays death as an abnormal event and a failure. In contrast, the New Age rehabilitates death as a natural event.[4] More importantly for my argument, the afterlife regained importance in alternative spirituality movements, where the widespread belief in reincarnation placed the future of the soul at the centre of attention (Walter, 1993: 141). Although my interlocutors were born into more or less religious Muslim, mixed or atheist families, they all expressed a belief in reincarnation. They frequently described these explanations as logical and intuitively true. Ajša shared her views on the matter:

> *To me personally you know, it [reincarnation] made sense from the beginning. /.../ Of course, I didn't fully understand it when I was young, but the idea always made sense to me. Because in a universe where everything changes, it didn't make sense to me how something could just stop. /.../ And so for me, reincarnation was perfectly logical.* (Ajša, 1986)

Tony Walter (1993: 132–141; see also Lee, 2015: 86) notes that belief in reincarnation is one of the unifying aspects of the otherwise heterogeneous New Age groups and movements. Another common feature of reincarnation beliefs is the notion of an inner essence – a soul – which is eternal and continues to exist after the death of the body.[5] A new factor identified by different authors in reincarnation beliefs is the idea that an individual's soul continues to grow not only in the afterlife but also throughout future lives (Walter, 1993: 131; Lee, 2013: 114–121; Kinsella, 2017: 187). This is characteristic of alternative spiritualities, which promote the quest for personal growth and the search for

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[4] However, Tony Walter (2020: 26) later writes that in the West, death was not considered to be natural until the scientific revolution. Instead, it was attributed to God, witchcraft, or supernatural powers, much like in many traditional societies. Walter (2020: 256) thus points out that the idea of death being natural is not traditional, but rather one that emerged in modern Western societies.

[5] The idea of the soul separating from the body contrasts with later Hebrew beliefs and the New Testament view, where a person is seen as a unified being of body and soul, resurrected as a whole. It is closer to the neo-Platonic version of Christian theology, in which the soul is immortal and continues to exist after death, though it differs in its understanding of the connection between the soul and body during life (Walter, 1993: 135).

authenticity and well-being (Heelas, 1996). In alternative spiritualities, death is not viewed as something frightening but as a spiritual transition – a gateway to knowing ourselves, as a person is freed from the material plane, i.e. the body (Lee, 2013: 114–121). Lejla told me about the explanation of death and dying she received at a spiritual workshop she attended:

> *That was the first time we dealt with the question of death, concluding that death is a transition from one state to another /…/. In fact, dying offers the greatest spiritual potential. /…/ If we are properly aware while dying, we can make great spiritual progress. And then we learned how it is possible to achieve this. Actually, the most important thing is awareness, to be conscious as we die. And not to feel fear! /…/ Then the whole story about what awaits us afterwards unfolds.* (Lejla, 1983)

Tony Walter (1993: 141) observes that in New Age spirituality, the afterlife is not a source of anxiety but rather the opposite – it is viewed with naive optimism. Many of my interlocutors echoed this sentiment, frequently repeating the phrase, "I am not afraid of dying," and expressing hopeful views about the soul's journey after death. Mirza, for example, told me he envisions the afterlife as a place full of love:

> *When we die, I believe there is only pure love, and that we return – I mean, we lean more towards these vibrations I would say, where everything is love, all is one.* (Mirza, 1981)

Love, light and unity were recurring topics in the afterlife descriptions shared by my interlocutors. The "pure love" that Mirza mentions in his understanding of the afterlife is similar to the accounts of people who have had near-death experiences and describe the universal love and understanding they felt in the process (see Moody, 1984; cf. Lee, 2003: 137). Tony Walter argues that New Age beliefs about the soul and its continuing existence after death are drawn from various religious traditions, as well as from descriptions of near-death experiences. He says the latter are particularly important, as they present proof that the soul lives on after death (Walter, 1993: 135; see also Lee, 2013: 110; Kinsella, 2017: 171). Indeed, Mirza told me his view of the afterlife was formed by these accounts:

> *Ultimately, I figured out that, essentially, everything is just love when we die. And I was watching just recently, there are loads of near-death experiences on YouTube – and look, I mean, people from all over the world, from different religions – atheists too, everyone who's had one says the same thing, it's unbelievable, really. /…/ And I think that's what's fascinating, you know.* (Mirza, 1981)

Like Mirza, many of my interlocutors stated that literature and videos about near-death experiences had a significant impact on their understanding of the afterlife. Ajša explained

the effect that accounts of near-death experiences had on her belief in the afterlife and also highlighted their credibility due to the similarities between these narratives:

> *And then there were also a lot of people who had /.../ near-death experiences. And all those experiences are really interesting to me – now you can even find a lot of them online – but all of them, in their own way, say very similar things, essentially similar.* (Ajša, 1986)

Near-death experiences were popularized by Raymond Moody (1984) in his bestseller *Life After Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon – Survival of Bodily Death*. The book contains fifty accounts of near-death experiences and identifies common themes. Michael Shannon Kinsella (2017: 173) notes that his writings on the matter were very influential not only for the definition of near-death experiences, but also for their impact on mainstream ideas about what happens after death. Even though Moody conducted his research in the USA, I found that his book and ideas also exerted a powerful influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[6]

While Moody is certainly influential, other authors also shaped my interlocutors' ideas about the afterlife.[7] Lejla told me she found her answers in a book by Robert Schwartz (2016) entitled *Your Soul's Plan*. She discovered the book after the death of a friend, while searching for answers about the location of his soul. The central idea of the book is that the soul, guided by its spiritual guides and other souls, chooses the experiences (and challenges) it will face during its lifetime. These are selected before incarnation to provide the lessons necessary for the soul's spiritual growth (Schwartz, 2016: 26). Lejla told me about her perspective on the matter:

> *And then I read that book [Your Soul's Plan] and /.../ I realized how each of us – it was, you know, an epiphany moment because I realized how often we judge other people and the ways they live. And how all these people, no matter what their circumstances – whether they are serious alcoholics, gay, people who have become paralyzed, or lost their sight, or lost their whole family in the most brutal way – how all of us come here with some kind of lesson. /.../ A lesson that we need to learn, and that the circumstances we find ourselves in are the best for us to learn the lesson we came for. Along the way – I know a lot of people, and then you start meeting a lot of people who think similarly to you and you come to the conclusion that our whole life is all about remembering. That when we were born we actually forgot everything and now we're trying to remember. Thanks to this realisation I actually have no fear of death.* (Lejla, 1983)

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[6]   His book has also been translated into Croatian and Serbian – languages my interlocutors can read.

[7]   My interlocutors also mentioned that their views of the afterlife had been shaped by movies such as *Astral City: A Spiritual Journey* (directed by Wagner de Assis, 2010), *After Life* (directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda, 1998), *Enter the Void* (directed by Gaspar Noé, 2009) and the Netflix series *Surviving Death* (directed by Ricki Stern, 2021).

Another book that was frequently mentioned by my interlocutors was Michael Newton's (2005) *Journey of Souls: Case Studies of Life Between Lives*. This book explores themes and ideas similar to those found in the works of Schwartz and Moody. Central to all these texts is the portrayal of the afterlife as a spiritual place and true home of the soul, characterized by optimism and described as a place full of empathy, morality, kindness, tolerance, patience and unconditional love (Moody, 1984; Newton, 2001: 26; Schwartz, 2016). Both Newton and Schwartz describe a pre-incarnation agreement concerning the experiences that the soul will undergo in life that is supposedly made in collaboration with the soul. Its goal is the soul's spiritual advancement. They also both claim individuals undergo amnesia before birth, forgetting all about these agreements and the spiritual afterlife (Newton, 2001: 27–29; Schwartz, 2016: 20–26). These ideas are also described by Lejla in the quotation above.

While all the previously mentioned books were written in the last half-century, another significant book frequently mentioned by my interlocutors is the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* [*Bardo Thödol*].[8] It is part of the *bardo*[9] teachings that have their source in Tibetan Buddhism, and which have had a profound influence in the West and elsewhere.[10] The book provides the reader with teachings about the soul's journeys and continued existence after death, the process of dying and the possibilities for achieving liberation – freeing the soul from the cycle of reincarnation (Lee, 2003: 141–142).

While my interlocutors rarely mentioned the book as a direct influence due to its complexity, two of them attended a workshop or lecture in which the book and the ideas behind it were explained. Ajša's understanding of the afterlife was shaped by one such lecture:

> *And there was this man, it was a few years ago, not that long ago – he gave a wonderful lecture, a weekend seminar on the Bardo Thödol [Tibetan Book of the Dead], maybe you've heard of it. /…/ And he somehow explained the Bardo Thödol. There were also meditations, and he gave, in my opinion, one of the most complete explanations of life after death.* (Ajša, 1986)

The lecturer helped them interpret the book and explained what happens after death while also telling them about meditation and other techniques that can help guide the soul at the time of death. He also taught them various methods to help them reach the soul while in *bardo* (an intermediate phase) and explained the structure of this realm. One of the methods described is lucid dreaming, which I will address in the next chapter, along with other experiences of encountering the dead in dreams and their agency as described by my interlocutors.

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[8] Raymond Moody interestingly cites this book, noting that it contains accounts of the soul leaving the body similar to those he found among his 20th century American interviewees (Moody, 1984: 89–90).

[9] *Bardos* are intermediate/transitional states between birth, death and rebirth in Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism. The period between death and rebirth consists of three *bardos* (Stefon, 2015; see Lee, 2003: 141–142).

[10] This book has also been translated into many languages, including Croatian and Serbian, both of which my interlocutors can read.

THE AFTERLIFE AND DREAMS OF THE DEAD

Anthropologist Amira Mittermaier (2011: 10) points out that in the West, the states of dreaming and wakefulness have long been ontologically, epistemologically and ethically separated. However, there are many cultures in which dreams are not seen merely as internal psychological processes but as gateways to other realities that are distinct from the reality of our everyday existence. Charles D. Laughlin and Adam J. Rock note that in most cultures dreams are taken seriously as they serve various purposes: confirming an individual's role in society, facilitating spiritual journeys, enabling contact with spirits, providing information and helping solve problems (Laughlin, Rock, 2014: 233–241; see also Kempf, Elfriede, 2003; Mittermaier, 2011: 6; Mittermaier, 2012: 248; Green, 2015: 153; Mittermaier, 2015). Dreams are often regarded as a means of accessing the realm of the dead, as in many cultures, sleep and death are seen as ontologically connected (Mabrouk, 1987: 11; Astuti, 2007: 321; Rivière, 2009: 109). Authors who investigated dreams of the dead found that the appearance of the deceased in dreams can have different meanings across cultures and historical periods (see Bitel, 1991: 39–42; Stark et al., 1996; Hollan, 2004: 174; Astuti, 2007; Rivière, 2009: 109; Kiliánová, 2010: 7; Arukask, Raudalainen, 2012: 124; Green, 2015: 160; Mittermaier, 2015: 134). Many of them discovered that dreams of the dead are culturally important and taken seriously.

When discussing dreams of the dead, my interlocutors often distinguished between "spiritual dreams", which meant actual contact with the souls of the deceased in another realm, and dreams perceived as products of their subconscious mind (cf. Kaivola-Bregenhøj, 1993: 223–224). They mostly described relying on intuition to discern whether something was just a dream or genuine contact with the soul of the deceased, often mentioning a sense of the presence and closeness of the departed. In the following section, I will examine dreams my interlocutors perceived as genuine encounters with the dead. Each subchapter will present and analyse the dreams of one interlocutor. I will also discuss how their beliefs about the afterlife influenced the possibility of such encounters and the perceived agency of the dead within these dreams.

MIRZA'S ASTRAL TRAVEL IN DREAMS AND
POSITIVE PERCEPTION OF THE AFTERLIFE

Like most of my interlocutors, Mirza dreamt of his loved ones shortly after they passed away. This always happened to him two days after they died, and he perceived the dreams as real contact with the deceased, describing the dreams as vivid and beautiful:

> *They came and you know, gave me a big, big hug. You know, they were laughing and it was just so, so nice, you know.* (Mirza, 1981)

The encounter in his dreams was initiated by the dead, in this case by his uncle and aunt who came to say goodbye. His experience of the dead as happy, fulfilled and full of

love for him is consistent with his view of the afterlife. He said that in his imagination the afterlife is *pure love*, he imagines it is *full of light* and that *all is one*. Mirza's description of his encounter with the dead assumes the soul's existence after the death of the body, a belief that Tony Walter and Raymond L. M. Lee identify as characteristic of New Age spirituality (Walter, 1993: 132–141; Lee, 2015: 86). Furthermore, he described the dead as always being connected with the living, although he emphasized that we should *let them go*:

> *Well, my perspective was /…/ that we should let them go, that they're in a good place and moving on, and that we need to continue with our lives – like, that's what comes to me /…/ you know, like, intuitively, as some kind of answer. And that we're always connected, that we love each other, you know, like that.* (Mirza, 1981)

Mirza's view was influenced by spiritual literature, particularly the works of Raymond Moody and Michael Newton, who describe the afterlife in similarly positive terms. Moody's accounts of near-death experiences emphasize the universal love and understanding felt by people who have this experience (Moody, 1984), while Newton describes the afterlife as characterized by optimism, empathy, morality, kindness, tolerance, patience and unconditional love (Newton, 2001: 26). As Tony Walter (1993: 141) observes, in New Age spirituality the afterlife is not a source of anxiety but rather the opposite – a concept viewed with naive optimism. This is also the sentiment that resonates in Mirza's account.

According to Mirza, the dead came to him specifically because they felt he had superior perception due to the work he had done on his spiritual abilities. However, he also said he travelled into the realm of the dead, providing more detailed explanations of dreams he called astral journeys.[11] During these experiences, he felt he had left his body and travelled to another dimension, where he could connect with the dead. He described a particular astral journey in which he met his ancestors who sat in a circle and prayed for him:

> *I had one particular experience when I was leaving my body, like my astral body was coming out of the physical one – I was spinning in circles and ascending.[12] It felt amazing you know, it was beautiful for me, you know. And then I saw quite a few, quite a few people sitting and just praying for me. /…/ I couldn't see their faces but I could feel they were there and they were just praying – repeating some… prayers, mantras, I don't even know what they were. And then somehow I felt like they were my ancestors.* (Mirza, 1981)

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[11] In occultism the astral plane is defined as "the realm of concrete consciousness, the level of reality that corresponds to the human experiences of dream, vision, out-of-the-body experience, and ordinary consciousness" (Greer, 2003). Astral projection, which is supposedly achieved through various techniques (lucid dreaming among others), is the process of separating the astral from the physical and etheric body (Greer, 2003; see Leadbitter, 1895). Crow writes that during astral travel "the individual imaginatively leaves her or his physical body and travels to places in this world or another dimension" (Crow, 2012: 159).

[12] For a similarly description by people recounting the experience of being carried away by witches, and its comparison with altered states of consciousness, see Mencej, 2018.

Astral travel in dreams was also described by my interlocutor Ajša who referred to her lucid dreams[13] as astral journeys – an experience I will describe below. In Mirza's account, another aspect of contact with the dead emerges, connected to his idea of the afterlife – the belief that the deceased take care of the living – praying, supporting and being there for them. I asked him if these experiences had any effect on him and he replied:

> *Yes, yes they did, like really – I was just like, overjoyed somehow.* (Mirza, 1981)

I perceive the change in Mirza's emotional state after encountering the deceased in dreams as agency of the dead. Especially in his first account, where the deceased came to him, he perceived the encounter as initiated by them. The positive effect of those dreams aligns with his view – shared by many in alternative spirituality – that the afterlife is a *good place*, and that souls move on and continue to grow spiritually in the afterlife. When I asked him how he made sense of such encounters, he said:

> *By then, I had read a lot of books about life after death and studied spirituality, spiritual science, and metaphysics and all sorts of things, so it all felt completely normal to me.* (Mirza, 1981)

Another effect of Mirza's view of the afterlife was that it helped him normalize his experiences. The encounters were all positive for him, as was his view of the afterlife. While he perceived the realms of the living and the dead as separate, he believed they could be bridged in dreams – either by the dead, who came to say goodbye, or by himself, through astral travel to their realm.

LEJLA'S DREAMS: INSIGHTS INTO THE AFTERLIFE
AND THE STATE OF THE DEAD

Lejla told me about a couple of dreams in which the dead revealed their state in the afterlife. Both dreams left a positive impact on her, as the dead consistently conveyed that they were doing well in the afterlife. In the first instance, the soul of a friend who had died by suicide appeared in order to share his state. Although Lejla perceived her friend's condition in the afterlife as unpleasant, she interpreted the overall message of these dreams as reassurance that she could be optimistic about the future of his soul. She describes her dreams and the agency of the dead in them:

> *And I dreamt of him in a dark space in Belgrade, some horribly gloomy park, dark, the three of us [including her boyfriend] – the weight is enormous,*

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[13] The American Psychological Association defines lucid dreaming as "a dream in which the sleeper is aware that they are dreaming and may be able to influence the progress of the dream narrative" (American Psychological Association, 2023).

the humidity, the darkness. There's a sense of loneliness. But I woke up
from the dream and even said it out loud to remind myself, you know, to tell
myself that he's okay now, that he's helping other souls. /…/ I was glad that
he came to me in the dream. I was happy when I realized /…/ that he would
be okay and that he would help other souls [in the afterlife]. (Lejla, 1983)

Many authors researching dreams of the dead have noted that one reason the deceased appear in dreams is to reveal aspects of the afterlife (see Järvinen, 1998; Kiliánová, 2010: 15; Đorđević Belić, 2024: 9–17). Folklorist Smiljana Đorđević Belić (2024: 17) argues that such dreams not only reflect a community's perceptions of the afterlife but also reinforce and shape its image. Interpretations of dreams about the dead are therefore connected to pre-existing beliefs about the afterlife, yet these dreams can also shape and influence those very beliefs[14] (see also Barrett, 1992: 104; Stark et al., 1996: 260; Jung, 2011: 301–311; Black et al., 2016: 111). Although Lejla was worried about her friend's well-being in the afterlife, he *came to her* in dreams and showed her his state, which she interpreted as a sign that *he will be okay*. I see his coming into her dreams and the way it changed her emotional state as agency of the dead, which is also how she saw it.

Similarly, Lejla had a dream about her brother-in-law's father, who also conveyed to her how he was doing in the afterlife.

There was another death – my brother-in-law's father passed away. /…/ On
the day of his funeral. And he had cancer, a severe case. I dreamt of him
in some endless, beautiful natural space with mountains and a river. And
incredibly clean air, even though he used to smoke, you know. It [the cancer]
even spread to his lungs, and I dreamt of him in such purity. And how he
just looked at me and waved, as if to say: "I'm okay! I'm fine." (Lejla, 1983)

Lejla explained that this experience reassured her, helping her understand that the dead are in a good place and that everything will be fine, both for them and for the living:

I don't really know – all these dreams I've had, I dreamt as if afterwards I
see that they're okay and that they will be okay. (Lejla, 1983)

Like Mirza, Lejla saw the afterlife and the state of the souls within it in an optimistic light – a perspective reinforced by her dreams of the dead. Notably, her accounts emphasise her concern for the state of the dead in the afterlife, focusing on them rather than on the bereaved. Tony Walter describes how New Age followers have shifted their focus when it comes to death. In the modern secular view, the emphasis is mainly on the bereaved rather than on the deceased. However, New Age beliefs have reversed this, placing more attention on the experiences and journey of the dead. He attributes this shift

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[14] Interlocutors' beliefs about the afterlife were sometimes influenced by their dreams of the dead. However, a discussion of this topic falls beyond the scope of this article.

to the influence of reincarnation beliefs and the idea that an individual's soul continues to evolve in the afterlife (Walter, 1993: 131–142; cf. Kwilecki, 2009: 124). For Lejla, the reassurance she received in her dreams about the fate of the souls not only eased her concerns for them but also brought her comfort regarding her own afterlife.

THE TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD AND AJŠA'S LUCID DREAMING

My third interlocutor, Ajša, explained how she envisions communication with the dead in dreams, linking it to her understanding of the afterlife as influenced by the Tibetan Book of the Dead. She explained that such contact is possible before the soul of the deceased is reincarnated:

> *And then there's this space where the soul resides before it is reborn /.../. And while they're in that space you can contact them. That's /.../ the space where the soul processes the experiences of this life, and then after working through them in its own way, it decides on a new life and is reborn.* (Ajša, 1986)

She explained that she frequently connected with her grandfather while he was in that space. Initially, he reached out to her in dreams but after attending a workshop on interpreting the Tibetan Book of the Dead, she learnt various techniques that enabled her to initiate contact herself – including lucid dreaming.

Raymond L. M. Lee (2013: 111–120) writes that lucid dreaming and near-death experiences are thought to enable access to postmortem experiences. The idea is that through lucid dreaming we can both explore our inner self while also travelling to the afterlife and gaining information about it. In *bardo* teachings, sleep is viewed as a gateway to understanding the process of death, which is seen as a transformation from embodied to disembodied consciousness, with consciousness itself continuing. He explains that as *bardo* teachings and Tibetan meditation practices have spread, this understanding has become more widely accessible and popularised (Lee, 2003: 142–144).

In a similar manner, Ajša explains how the places of dreams and the afterlife are connected:

> *And then – and then she also explained that these souls often appear in dreams because that's a space where you can communicate. It could be the influence of the subconscious, but it could also be an entry into that space, as they call it. Are you familiar with the term Akashic field?*[15] */.../*

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[15] The Akashic field (*Âkâsha*) is a concept first defined by theosophists. According to Charles Webster Leadbitter (Leadbitter, 1895: 19), it is a higher medium located on the astral plane, which contains permanently impressed records of all past, present and future events. The Akashic records are defined as "in occultism, a compendium of pictorial records, or 'memories', of all events, actions, thoughts, and feelings that have occurred since the beginning of time" (*Britannica*, 1998).

> *It's a field where you can connect beyond time and space with all the information that exists from the past and even the future. /.../ Now, I'm not sure exactly – the field where souls reside, I don't know – but they are connected.* (Ajša, 1986)

Ajša explained that she had learned that the *bardo* consists of different spheres, to which the dead are assigned based on how they lived their lives. She noted that some of the spheres are more accessible to the living than others. Ajša was able to reach her grandfather's soul because he had lived a good life, placing him in a space that was easier to access.

> *First, when you understand that space, then the soul's journey – you can see where the person is. Because they have, like – there's this… it's like a circle /.../ and I think there are six realms where the soul goes depending on the life it lived. /.../. And then, if they are – now, it's not literal like the hellish worlds from religions, but there are these so-called hellish worlds. /.../ But, for example, my grandfather – as I told you – he was so refined, and then it was easier to get in touch with him – at least that's how I understand it.* (Ajša, 1986)

Ajša experienced contact with her grandfather in dreams for several years, but this eventually stopped, as he was reincarnated. She described the impact that her grandfather had on her through these encounters:

> *You know, it's not something – my experiences aren't literal, like you receive some advice – not in that sense. But… the change it brings you, how to say, that beautiful moment with the person – with the soul of someone you love – surely has an impact on your life. Just like when you meet a friend who's still alive, you know. And let's say you have a beautiful encounter and that day is changed. I think it changes in that way. And especially, I think those beautiful experiences are significant in life, no matter on which level they happen.* (Ajša, 1986)

She described the subjective experience of contact with the dead in dreams, which was shaped by the belief she had in the afterlife, as influenced by the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Ajša viewed the interactions with her deceased grandfather as meaningful and transformative because she experienced them as real while his soul lingered in the intermediate space of the *bardo*, where contact is possible. For her, the impact of contact and spending time with a dear person is significant *no matter on what level they happen*.

Ajša's understanding was shaped by different factors, including a workshop on the Tibetan Book of the Dead. In this context, the realms of the living and the dead are less distinct, and dreaming and death are seen as interconnected. As a result, she experienced contact with the dead through lucid dreaming. Her beliefs about the afterlife also enabled her grandfather's agency, as she regarded her dreams as genuine moments spent with him.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have explored how my interlocutors' ideas of the afterlife shape their interpretation and understanding of dreams of the dead and the agency of the deceased in dreams. I focused on three interlocutors who experienced such agency. They all regarded these dreams as ontologically real contact with the souls of the deceased. This perspective was rooted in the belief that the soul continues to exist and journey after the death of the body. According to them, contact with the soul is possible in certain instances, such as in dreams.

I demonstrate that questions about the afterlife are important to my interlocutors, many of whom had well-developed ideas on the subject. In line with the idea of the afterlife in alternative spiritualities, my interlocutors believed in reincarnation (cf. Walter, 1993: 132–141; Lee, 2015: 86). Alternative spirituality generally played a much more significant role in shaping their views than the secular ideas or religious traditions of their upbringing and surroundings. Initially, some of my interlocutors sought answers within these religions but were unable to find what they were looking for. This led them to explore alternative spirituality, where they were able to find more convincing explanations.

Their view of the afterlife was, therefore, rather optimistic. This positive view of the afterlife is generally promoted by influential alternative spiritual literature, accounts of near-death experiences and teachings from the spiritual workshops my interlocutors attended. Their understanding was shaped by both contemporary writings and translations or adaptations of ancient Buddhist texts, particularly the Tibetan Book of the Dead. As Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers (2010: 7) observe, in alternative spiritualities the process of personal growth does not end with death but continues into the afterlife. In this way, my interlocutors did not see death as the end, but rather as a new level of self-exploration.

Raymond L. M. Lee (2015: 92) describes a shift in New Age spirituality where the afterlife is seen as a continuous journey rather than a final placement in a specific realm such as heaven or hell. In this view, death is not an endpoint but a transitional stage in an ongoing process of spiritual development. Similarly, religious scholar Susan Kwilecki (2009: 124) analyses after-death experiences in the United States and concludes that for those who have such experiences, death does not signify the end of spiritual growth but rather a new opportunity for it. She notes that this perception reflects contemporary American culture, similarly to how ghost encounters in medieval times reflected Roman Catholic beliefs (see Finucane, 1996).

Ideas about the afterlife shaped how my interlocutors understood dreams of the dead, which they primarily perceived as ontologically real encounters with the souls of the deceased. These souls were generally thought to exist elsewhere but remained accessible to the living provided one possessed the appropriate methods and knowledge to make contact with them. Alternatively, they experienced the dead reaching out to the living, though they emphasized that such encounters required a certain level of spiritual development, attentiveness or openness. All three of my interlocutors experienced contact with the souls of loved ones or individuals who were at least known to them.

Since these dream encounters were perceived as genuine interactions with the souls of the dead, my interlocutors experienced the agency of the deceased. This agency was described as having a positive influence, which was consistent with their optimistic view of the afterlife. Rather than prompting specific actions, the agency of the dead primarily manifested as emotional transformation. My interlocutors described their encounters as pleasant, reinforcing their belief that the souls of the deceased continue to exist elsewhere, do well in the afterlife, and maintain a supportive relationship with the living. This perspective aligns with their understanding of the afterlife as a positive place, full of meaning and love.

In the experiences of my interlocutors, who were either visited by the dead or travelled to meet them in dreams, the dissolution of boundaries between life and death is striking. Raymond L. M. Lee (2015: 92) attributes this shift to postmodernism, where previously defined distinctions are increasingly questioned and redefined. In this context, death – largely neglected in modernity[16] – is attracting renewed interest and becoming a subject of exploration (Lee, 2003: 144). The ongoing processes of reenchantment (Lee, 2003: 144) and the relocation of the sacred into the subjective world of the individual (Houtman, Aupers, 2010: 25) raise questions about the changing ideas of the afterlife, the possibilities of contacting the deceased, and the practices used for connecting with the dead. How these developments will shape broader perspectives on the afterlife, death and dying will remain an interesting question for future research worldwide.

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[16] Tony Walter opposes the idea of "death denial" in modernity, arguing instead that the growing division of labour across all aspects of our lives has led to reduced contact with dying. He thus sees the institutionalisation of dying as a consequence of modernity, rather than "death denial" (Walter, 2020: 30–31).

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PREDSTAVE O POSMRTNEM ŽIVLJENJU IN STIKI Z MRTVIMI V SANJAH MED PRIPADNIKI ALTERNATIVNIH DUHOVNOSTI V BOSNI IN HERCEGOVINI

Članek obravnava ideje o posmrtnem življenju in interpretacije sanj o mrtvih med duhovnimi posamezniki v Bosni in Hercegovini. Temelji na šestmesečnem terenskem delu v Sarajevu in Banjaluki. Ugotavlja, da alternativna duhovnost nudi razlagalne okvirje za različna metafizična vprašanja, med njimi tudi za vprašanje življenja po smrti. Ker je ideja o reinkarnaciji in duhovni rasti po smrti vse bolj razširjena, zlasti na Zahodu zanimanje za življenje po smrti že dlje časa narašča. Alternativna duhovnost postaja vse bolj prisotna tudi v Bosni in Hercegovini, kjer je po vojni sicer prevladoval vpliv tradicionalnih religij. Članek se osredinja na tri duhovne posameznike iz Bosne in Hercegovine, predstavi njihovo duhovno pot in podrobneje analizira njihove predstave o posmrtnem življenju ter literaturo in druge vplive, ki so te predstave sooblikovali. Ugotavlja, da sogovorniki verjamejo v reinkarnacijo, si posmrtno življenje predstavljajo optimistično, prav tako pa menijo, da je stik z dušami, ki obstajajo tudi po telesni smrti, mogoč. Nadalje članek obravnava takšne stike, ki so jih sogovorniki izkusili prek sanj. Sanj si torej ne razlagajo kot odraz podzavesti, temveč kot ontološko resnične izkušnje stika z mrtvimi. Članek podrobneje analizira sogovorničino izkušnjo astralnega potovanja v sanjah, sanje, v katerih mrtvi prenašajo informacije o svojem stanju v posmrtnem življenju, in lucidno sanjanje, ki sogovornici omogoča stik s preminulim bližnjim. Ugotavlja, da predstave o posmrtnem življenju ustvarjajo možnost, da mrtvi na različne načine vplivajo na žive, kar so izkusili obravnavani sogovorniki. Članek potrjuje tezo o sicer širše prisotni tendenci brisanja meja, ki je značilna za postmoderno družbo. Pokaže namreč, da so v alternativni duhovnosti svetovi mrtvih in živih vse manj dojemani kot ločeni, zaradi česar so mrtvi in posmrtno vedno pogosteje predmet zanimanja in raziskovanja.

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Forest Spirits and Their Functions in the Traditions of Estonians, Estonian Russians and Belarusians

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This article gives a comparative analysis of data on forest spirits, including their names (terminology), functions, interactions with humans and how they protect people and animals. It examines the similarities and differences in the mythological narratives and practices of Finno-Ugric peoples (Estonians) and Slavic groups (the Russian minority in Estonia and Belarusians in Belarus). The available data reveals a wide variety of terminology and appearances: anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, phytomorphic and fantastical beings. One of the main functions of forest spirits was to lead people astray. The explanations given by narrators remain cognitively interesting to this day: while the causes are attributed to mythical beings, they are mostly related to general oral norms and values.

KEYWORDS: forest spirit, guardian spirit, leading astray, path of the spirits, mythology

Članek primerjalno analizira podatke o gozdnih duhovih, njihovih imenih (terminologiji), funkcijah in delovanju v odnosu do ljudi ter o tem, kako ščitijo ljudi in živali, ter preučuje, kako podobne ali različne so mitske pripovedi in prakse ugrofinskega ljudstva (Estoncev) in Slovanov (ruske manjšine v Estoniji in Belorusov v Belorusiji). Razpoložljivi podatki kažejo na veliko raznolikost terminologije in pojavnosti: antropomorfna, zoomorfna, fito-morfna ali fantastična bitja. Ena glavnih funkcij gozdnih duhov je bila, da človeka speljejo s poti, argumenti pripovedovalcev so spoznavno zanimivi še danes: vzroki so povezani z mitskimi bitji, večinoma pa so povezani s splošnimi ustnopravnimi normami in vrednotami.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: gozdni duh, duh varuh, zapeljevanje s poti, pot duhov, mitologija

INTRODUCTION

This article analyses and summarises the beliefs related to forest spirits among the Baltic Finnic and Slavic populations in Estonia and Belarus. It describes the common structures associated with terminology, functions and interactions with humans, as well as protective ritual practices. Comparisons are also made with the Finno-Ugric and Slavic traditions, primarily those of the eastern and northern Slavic regions.

The *longue durée* approach offers the possibility to make hypotheses on the historical origins of mythical characters and enables an investigation into how they have evolved over extended periods of time. It is common knowledge that language and belief systems

change over time (Blommaert, 2015; Pomeranceva, 1975), and interactions between cultures concern all levels, including mythology – changing names, character traits, characteristics, associated motifs and practices. As Descola (2014: 272) notes, such transformations are "important to explain the diversity of humans' perceptions of their environment". Many earlier studies have demonstrated that seemingly fantastical and arbitrary tales often exhibit striking similarities across cultures. In our research, the physical landscape also plays an important role, as both Estonia and Belarus are forest-rich European countries. Over half of Estonia's territory is covered by forests, while in Belarus the figure stands at 40 %, which means that forests also play an important role as subsistence areas.

Although folklore texts are mental constructions of reality – and only some are characterized by a realistic narrative style – changing social and economic circumstances cannot be overlooked when interpreting these phenomena, as they affect belief systems, ways of thinking, attitudes, and even possibilities for self-fulfilment. Relations with the forest were deeply influenced by socio-economic relations, as well as climate changes. For centuries, serfdom influenced life in the Estonian territory – from the early modern period until its abolition in 1816 in Estonia, and in 1819 in Livonia. Estonia was among the regions with the most entrenched forms of serf dependence in Eastern Europe (Kahk, 1992). During the Soviet period the forest belonged to the state and all forest-related activities were regulated. Belarus belonged to the Russian Empire from the 17th century, and was under the Soviet regime from 1920 to 1991.

C. Lévi-Strauss (1955) proposed in his paper study "The Structural Study of Myth" that myths were manifestations of fundamental units called mythemes, which represent relationships between functions and subjects. His famous thesis is based on the recognition of oppositions – elements that either contradict or mediate each other (Lévi-Strauss, 1955: 224). According to Lévi-Strauss, forest fairies are related to death and hunting, which stand in opposition to life and the non-hunting, agricultural environment. In this system the human experience and its representation are left aside. From the 1970s onwards, folklore texts were analysed using various approaches, including the methodology of Lévi-Strauss (Laagus, 1990). Philippe Descola's neo-structuralist classification represents a form of objectification and includes four subcategories: animism, totemism, naturalism and analogism. All of these were known and used in cultural analysis prior to Descola (2009), but his postulates help categorise human experience.[1] We usually prefer to use the works of the phenomenological school (Arbmann, 1926–1927; Hultkantz, 1953; Paulson, 1958; 1961; 1964), which also considers the social aspect of beliefs. Ivar Paulson, for example, investigated the wider Eurasian area.

A different explanation arises from the triadic categorizations of space and studies on everyday life by Henry Lefebvre (1991 [1974]), as well as from the human and non-human relations described by social anthropologist Tim Ingold (2015: 152). According to Ingold, three elements are important: "/.../ in my triad, intention is replaced by attention,

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[1] Marshall Sahlins' (2014) article is an alternative reading of Philippe Descola's ontological scheme, arguing that animism, totemism and analogism are but three forms of animism, namely communal, segmentary and hierarchical, often found in various degrees of salience in the same society, and they all are versions of anthropomorphism.

the subject by the verb, and human agency by the doing-in-undergoing of humanifying. Together, these three components add up to what I call correspondence." All these aspects, especially the notion of humanifying (as opposed to anthropomorphism), are valuable for analysing the data.

METHODOLOGY

We employed a mixed methodology that combined academic folklore studies (incl. local Estonian and Belarusian schools – mapping motifs and terminology, typology, descriptions of actions in narratives, etc.) with comparative studies, ethnolinguistics and universal explanatory models such as animism.

The article is based on archival data and field materials, including data from the folklore archives of the Estonian Literary Museum (ELM; Skriptoorium), where searches using the terms "*mets(haldjas)*" and "*eksitaja*, *eksitamine*, *eksimine*" yielded approximately 3,500 Estonian texts and 108 Russian texts, dating from the 19th to the 21st centuries. Belarusian folklore sources include the BFELA, ABPA (Alena Boganeva's personal archive), expedition records collected by Belarusian folklorists from 1998 to 2020, and the BREST digital folklore archive and database (each comprising around 300 texts), as well as earlier publications.

COMPARISON OF ESTONIAN, ESTONIAN-RUSSIAN AND BELARUSIAN FOREST SPIRITS BASED ON THEIR NAMES

The semantics of the depictions of forest spirits and spirits wandering among different peoples are predetermined by the attitudes of rural people towards the forest. On the one hand, the forest provides various benefits for households and people, significantly diversifying the diet, providing pasture for livestock and construction material for objects and buildings, etc. On the other hand, a common belief among various rural cultures is that the forest is a place inhabited by forces hostile to humans, or the location of hell, where evil creatures dwell, or that the path to the realm of the dead passes through it (Ivanov, 1992: 49–50). Nionel Krinichnaya identifies oppositions in the spatial structure of the forest based on Slavic folklore: "here, ours, domestic, sometimes the right side" versus "other/another, not here, opposite, left side, woods" (Krinichnaya, 2011: 111–112). She concludes that the forest is not merely a place of oppositions, or an unfamiliar, poorly developed space, but another, parallel realm, in the literal sense – the other world (ibid.: 112).

Folklore studies have repeatedly emphasised that the traditional worldview, when in interaction with people, perceives the world as a subject of communication rather than as an object. This fully applies to certain spatial *loci*, such as embodied spaces and places. These locations are obviously important for the community because they are imagined as places where powerful spirits live. The mental selection of these places determines their humanification, endowing them with spirits that govern a given place and oversee

the observance of unwritten laws, rules, norms and prescriptions. It was forbidden to speak loudly in the forest, to whistle, to shout or to call someone's name. For example, animals and people in the forest were called together by the sound of a shepherd's horn, herding songs with meaningless words, or only by voice (Est. *helletamine*, the screams of shepherds). Besides their acoustic properties, these may also have held a magical meaning. Swearing, cursing, using bad words, fighting and stealing were all prohibited in the forest. Meanwhile, hunting and fishing were prohibited at times when church services were in progress. Similar data exists on the Karelians (see Ivanova, 2012: 143, 181–182), the Livs (see Loorits, 1926: 78), the Estonians (see Paulson, 1971: 70; Laagus, 1990: 123), the Russians (Bayburin, 1993: 153; Novik, 1994: 110–163; Adon'eva, 2004: 72–84; Stepanov, Saifieva, 2006) and the Belarusians (Volodina, 2019: 319).

As a rule, the names of mythical beings speak of their linguistic and cultural contacts, their place in mythology, and their historical and axiological aspects. The names given by Estonians, Estonian Russians and Belarusians to forest spirits also demonstrate the humanification of the forest as well as the endowment of spirits with quite specific properties, which vary according to local cultural context. We also think that names help to solve the problems of origin.

In the Baltic-Finnic languages, there exists an older, likely more archaic, general term – *metsarahvas* ("forest people"), as well as *metsa-inimene* ("forest man"). Both expressions (forest people and *haldjas*) fit the belief system and the conceptualisation of the forest as a home and space for others where one must behave politely.

In contemporary Estonian society the common term for all the spirits that live in the forest is *metshaldjas*. The word *haldjas* is a common term in all the Baltic-Finnic languages (including Votian, Estonian, Finnish, Izhorian and Karelian), and probably comes from the Old Scandinavian *haldija,* meaning "owner" or "protective spirit". Clarifications (whether the spirit or fairy is associated with land, home, forest, water or other domains) are formed by means of compound words, where the first element indicates the field of activity (e.g. *metshaldjas* "forest spirit" or "forest fairy"; *vetehaldjas* "water spirit"). If the domain is evident from the context then such qualifiers are usually omitted. In Estonia, the term *haldjas* was traditionally known in northern and central regions, and on the western islands.

In southern Estonia, kinship terms are used instead of *haldjas*, a practice common in Finno-Ugric belief systems (Harva, 1948; Konakov, 1999; Kuznetsov, 2005; Limerov, 2019; Devjatkina, 2008; Ivanova, 2012). In addition to family and kinship terms (such as father, mother, son, daughter), there are also names that refer to a higher status, such as Lord, Queen, Master, Mistress and King. Examples include *metsaisa* ("father of the forest"), *mõtsa-piiga* ("forest maiden"), *metsa-vana* ("old man of the forest"), *metsa-vaim* ("forest spirit or ghost"), *metsa-oidije* ("guardian of the forest"), *metsataat* ("forest grandfather"), *mõtsa-kuningas* ("forest king"), *metsaisand* ("forest master"), *metsaemand* ("forest mistress"), *mõtsa-jumal* ("forest god"), *metsa-peremees* ("master of the forest") and *metsa-poisid* ("forest boys"). A small number of terms refer to evil spirits, such as *metsa-kurat* ("forest devil"), *metsa pagan* ("forest pagan"), *metsa-hirmutus* ("forest monster") (Saareste, 1997, s.v. (*mets*)*haldjas*).

In southern Estonia, spirits believed to cause people to lose their way are known as *eksitaja* or *essütaj* ("misleader") (Loorits, 1951: 162–184). The same phenomenon is known under different names and belief systems in northern Estonia.

The whole related system is much wider. Respect for certain trees, wild animals and birds also affects the system of protective spirits (Karelia: Ivanova, 2012: 143–165; Veps: Salve, 1995; Vinokurova, 2006; Livs: Loorits, 1926: 78). For example, for the Livs, certain trees, shrubs, foliage and berries, as well as swamps, have their own spirits or fairies. Loorits (1926: 86 ff.) indicates that, for example, in Liv folklore the juniper has a mother while bushes and trees have a mother and a father (Loorits, 1926: 78). The same system exists in Estonia (Loorits, 1949).

If we address the materials of Estonian Russians, the most common names for the forest spirit are *leshy* ("forest goblin"),[2] *lesovik* ("forest man"), *lesnoi ded* ("forest grandfather"), *lesnoi tsar* ("forest king"), but also *lesnoi duh* ("forest spirit"). The naming system is similar to that of Estonian, especially the southern Estonian, Baltic-Finnic and Finno-Ugric systems (cf. Mordva: Devjatkina, 1997; Udmurts: Panina, Vladykina, 2021[3]), where terms such as forest people and kinship terms, as well as forest spirits with a higher status, are central. The general term *lesnoi duh* (Rus. "forest spirit") is also used, along with loanwords from the Estonian language such as *mets(h)aldias* ("forest spirit"), and *(h)aldias* ("spirit") (Kõiva, Boganeva, 2025).

The most common name for a forest spirit among Belarusians is *lesavik* ("forest man") (cf. Romanov, 1891: 93, 215; Czarnowska, 1817: 407–408; Nasovich, 1983: 135). Other known names include *lyasny dzed* ("forest grandfather"), *lyasny khazyain* ("master of the forest"), *lyasnaya khazyayka* ("forest mistress") and *verasovy dzyadok* ("grandfather"). The figure known as *dabrahot*,[4] *dabrahochy* or *vadun,* meaning among other things "forest man", "misleader", "demon", "devil" or "evil spirit", shares characteristics with the forest man who helps people in the forest (Lobach, 2011: 275; ABPA and BREST). Other known terms include *khokhlik* ("devilish creature, demon, the evil spirit") (Dahl, 1882: 580), and *charti lesaviya*, *lyasny chertsi* ("forest devil"). This data comes from Western Belarus, end of the 19th century (Federowski, 1897: 17; Kibort, 1899). As for the names *lesnoy khozyain* ("master of the forest") or *lesnaya khozyayka* ("forest mistress"), they are typical mainly for the Belarusian-Russian or, more precisely, Mogilev-Smolensk borderland (Eastern Belarus). In general, in the Mogilev-Smolensk borderland, the situation with terminology regarding local spirits, including forest ones, looks somewhat atypical compared to other Belarusian regions. Often here, all the spirits

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[2] This is the same word that is used among Russians in the northern Pskov and Novgorod regions (Pskov, 2020).

[3] The *nyulesmurt* ("forest man") is unambiguously considered the main mythological being who acts as the keeper and warden of the woodland. Depending on local traditions, this figure is also known by other names, such as *chachchamurt* ("forest man"), *njulesnjunja* ("forest father/uncle"), *bydz'zym njunja* ("great father/uncle"), *njuleskuz'e/chachchakozjain* ("forest master"), and *leshak* (a borrowing from Russian representing one of the variants of *leshy*) (Panina, Vladykina, 2021).

[4] Also known as invisible bogatyrs, invisible people and blind people, i.e. they are independent mythological characters (Lopatin, 2005: 34–37; 2008: 183–217; Boganeva, 2009a: 14–16; 2017: 16–20; Dorokhova, 2016: 36–40).

of nature and the economy are called by one word *khozyayeva* ("owners") or *domovye* ("house spirits") (ABPA).

In Estonia we find more forest dwellers, such as the *külmking* (the "cold shoe" or restless spirit) on Saaremaa, and *mardus/margus* (a doppelgänger who forecasts death) in northern Estonia, along with many other creatures that live in the forest.

A Belarusian newcomer is *vadun* (a misleader, the one who leads you astray), which was found in texts from 2005 to 2020 (ABPA, s.v. *vadun*). It is an invisible force, or a character. According to Western Slavic beliefs, many forest and swamp spirits were believed to mislead travellers, including the Polish *leśne rusawki* ("forest mermaid"), *czerwona Pani* ("red lady"), *baba jagodowa* ("berry woman"), *borowiec* ("forest man")*, wierzbicki*, *łożiński*, *rokicki* ("devil from willow")*, diabel błotny* ("swamp devil"), and the Czech *divý muž* ("wild man") and *divá žena* ("wild woman"). In addition, Western Slavic mythology includes a large group of spirits known as misleaders (e.g. Polish *bląd* "misleader", *błędnik* "mischievous gnome from Łużyce", *błędny ognik* "white light"). We can find the same types of spirits in Slovak and Czech folklore. They typically appeared at night – most often on Advent nights, on Christmas Eve, but also in spring or autumn – taking the form of people, animals, little people, or remaining invisible (Budovskaya, 1995: 197–199). In Baltic-Finnic, Estonian-Russian and Belarusian folklore, we can find names and creatures with similar semantics. The same features seem to exist in Western Slavic folklore, but there is not enough data to support broader generalisations.

THE BEHAVIOUR OF FOREST SPIRITS TOWARDS PEOPLE

If we consider the appearances of forest fairies, the folklore of all three peoples shows certain coinciding features. Forest fairies have distinct voices, vocalizations and cries. Their forms include phytomorphic elements and each variation also displays richly imaginative traits.

The main figures are as follows (according to Laagus, 1990; Kõiva, Boganeva, 2025; BFELA, BREST, Skriptoorium):

1. phytomorphic forms such as a haystack, an alder bush or alder leaf; a pillar with a wooden hat; a spirit's dress made of spruce bark; a grey beard made of pine bark; or three large spruce trees that later transform into men;

2. zoomorphic representations of a forest spirit include: two white calves, a dog, a white dog, a white bull, a great blue forest bull, a furry, dog-like beast, a cat-like creature, a pig without bristles and a rooster;

3. anthropomorphic representations of forest spirits are the most frequent, with various human figures – mostly men of various ages – described as follows: a man in grey clothes wearing a large, broad grey hat; a naked man with a broom between his legs; a man or a boy; a man with red shins or knee-length black pants, a grey sweater or a white shirt with money jingling in it, etc. In Karelia, female forest spirits are rare (Ivanova, 2012);

4. multiform, half-human appearances have the following features: goat's legs; one horse leg and the other human; a tail; a hoof; a long beak; a human leg;
5. mythical creatures: werewolves.

Forest spirits can be either visible or invisible to humans. The multiformity of spirits is well summarized in a record from the Brest region of Belarus, and it is also true for all other regions:

> Like all other forest spirits, the forest master is invisible, but you can hear him. And he loves to make noises. One can hear whistles, clicks, shouts in different voices, claps, mumbling sounds from the river. The wood goblin loves to perform pranks. He turns into a pine tree, then becomes a stump or a hump, or lures a mushroom picker or a hunter off the path. It is difficult to describe him because everyone sees him differently: some with long hair and a long beard, others all covered with moss, still others say he looks like a person. (BREST 1)

While nudity is very rare in forest fairy traditions,[5] clothing often features striking elements. In Estonian folklore, for example, we find the following features:
1. grey clothing – either entirely or in part (e.g. a grey sweater, grey fur coat); black knee-length trousers, a Russian caftan, white clothes, a red hat, a pink dress, a jacket and trousers that look like birch bark;
2. a strange body – long and thin like Goliath, with a large head, a grey beard, rags, or loose hair;
3. voice – often described as loud or frightening;
4. other features – sometimes something strange is held in the hands.

We see a combination of the unconventional and the ordinary, with highly variable exterior forms. In addition to the gentlemanly forms, these spirits are often portrayed as wild, messy and different from the ordinary, although ordinary shapes also occur.

In the corpus of Estonian Russian folklore (Kõiva, Boganeva, 2025), we encounter a similar division, with additional associations between real and supernatural animals – such as wolves, owls and dogs (often described as black, soft and shaggy) with werewolves. The forest spirit is said to live in a wooden house and to harm cattle. Explanations for the origin of such beings are also rich in imagination and frequently associated with forest people (beings of the wild): "Forest beings are people who fled from their parents to the forest when they were little. They grew up completely wild, lived in trenches, robbed and killed" (ERA, Russian 15, 624 (12)).

Mythical beings living in the same realm are presumed to have common features regarding their habitat, way of life, time of appearance and activity. While narrators speak of the same elements, the forms that convey this content are highly individual and varied (Laagus, 1990).

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5 Water spirits are also rarely naked in Estonia (Kõiva, 2023).

Legends have a common structure: the action begins when a person enters a place outside the domestic sphere – typically a forest, though sometimes a pasture, field or overgrown cemetery – and meets a forest fairy. The introductory part usually highlights the action that triggers the appearance of the forest fairy, followed by a description of the fictional human character's behaviour during the encounter. Sometimes action is taken against the forest fairy. The story usually provides details about the time and place of the event. These are universal elements that frame the unfolding action.

The following groups of narratives occur in the folklore of all three cultures:

1. Human actions associated with the forest – A person enters the forest to hunt, gather firewood, mushrooms or berries, to graze cattle or simply to pass through. These actions provoke the appearance of a forest spirit. The spirit may also be triggered when a person violates prohibitions associated with the forest, such as making a fire and lying beside it, sleeping on a trail used by a forest spirit, or performing any other prohibited activities. Tales belonging to this category emphasize that the forest fairy appears to protect animals or birds, or their own home. The narrators' comments on what not to do in the forest resemble the norms of social etiquette expected in another person's home (including prohibitions on making noise, getting drunk, etc.): "[y]ou just need to be gentle" (Volodina, 2019: 317–349). "A forest spirit presents himself as an extremely tall person or 'tree-tall', wearing bast shoes, and with a long whip in his hand. He is a shepherd of animals, and is always an enemy of hunters in every possible way, leading them away from wild fowl and making them lose their way" (Romanov, 1912: 258).

   The most frequent victims are half-drunk individuals. A forest spirit may lure them into water, shove them into a retting pond (a depression in the ground, pit, etc., for retting flax or hemp), or place them on a stone in a bog – a motif common in all three nations. However, such pranks never end in the person's death. Those who use foul language may also find themselves wandering aimlessly: "There is a master everywhere. But avoid cursing. One must not curse" (BFELA 7).

   In Estonia the motif of finding an unknown child (the child of a forest spirit) and taking them in one's arms ends with the arrival of an upset forest fairy and the human contracts an incurable skin disease (Eisen, 1893: 15). Meanwhile, in 21st century Belarus a person can be rewarded for showing mercy towards a child in the forest, who later turns out to be the child of a *lesovik* or *dobrohozhyi* (Boganeva, 2013: 676–680).

2. People see a forest spirit and what it is doing. No taboo is violated, a person simply sees a spirit walking (meeting them on the way, passing by, going ahead), swinging on a tree branch, sitting on a stone and breastfeeding a child, hanging upside down from a tree, standing still, sometimes leaving the forest with a lot of noise, running, dancing, knitting a stocking, singing, walking around a fire and muttering, whistling, crying, calling out or coming to a fire to warm up.

3. A forest spirit reveals itself through various actions: a) the encounter has negative consequences – for example, a person falls ill or the forest spirit frightens berry pickers; b) the encounter has positive consequences – the spirit leads someone to

the right path, gives a fir cone that turns to gold, teaches hunters the language of animals, indicates the location of a lost horse, or comforts an orphan.

4. There are two main reasons for getting lost in the forest: first, a person can unwittingly follow the tracks of a forest spirit; second, the spirit can deliberately lead people astray (Eisen, 1909: 21).

MAGICAL TRAILS

Leading a human into the forest is considered the most common type of action attributed to a forest spirit. According to Saareste's dictionary (1997) and ETÜ (Metsmägi et al., 2012), the Estonian verb *eksima* ("to wander") is defined as "to accidentally deviate from the right path", "to ride a dead horse", "to end up somewhere accidentally", or "to make a mistake". It is related to *eksitama* ("to lead astray"), which means "to deviate" or "to distort". Semantically related meanings also include "to go into the forest", "to lie down", "to deviate" and "to lead" (Saareste, 1997).

Wandering and straying can occur even close to home, though the person's condition is depicted as changed: "a veil covered my eyes", "my eyes faded with fear", "my mind was misty", or "he forgot his name and no longer knew who he was". There are also descriptions of people going around in circles: "suddenly a large forest appeared before him and there was no escape from there" or "he walked around several times, but kept returning to the same spot" (Scriptorium, s.v. *forest*). The descriptions resemble those of a mental disorder. Uno Harva indicates that a lost person comes into contact with "another world, where everything is different from here, where the course of time is not perceived, where 'right' is replaced by 'left', etc." (Holmberg (Harva), 1923: 18–27). Similar changes in time and space, as well as deformations of perception, are characterized by the common motif of different paces of time in the world of the dead and that of the living, as well as in the worlds of gods, saints and demons (Loorits, 1946: 437; Jason, 1977; Kaasik, 2013; Kõiva, Boganeva, 2023).

In her monograph, Aino Laagus (1990: 32 ff.) identifies three forms of spatial transformation associated with straying: a space may become closed, excessively open, or a once-familiar place may become alien. A person cannot escape a closed space in any way – the forest keeps them within its bounds and refuses to release them from its sphere of influence. In an open space, the person is unable to find a way out and may wander for several days until they find themselves far from home (Laagus, 1990: 135). In her monograph, Laagus also refers to V. Propp, who argues that in fairy tales the forest serves as a barrier: "The forest in which the hero finds himself is impenetrable. It is a kind of net that catches outsiders" (Propp, 1946: 45). In the case of legends, this barrier works with certain story types.

The trail with magical properties exists in the mythology of the Finns, Livs, Veps, Estonians, Finnish Swedes, Russians and Belarusians (Harva, 1948: 293; Ivanova, 2012: 212–213; Vinokurova, 2015: 312–313; Paulson, 1964; Volodina, 2019; Lobach, 2010: 190; San'ko, 2011: 274–275; Boganeva, 2017: 16–20; Laagus, 1990; Kõiva, 2020).

Ordinary people cannot see the trail. A person may become lost by stepping onto the path of a forest fairy or other being, mentioned earlier among the Belarusian, Polish and Slovak traditions. Even more common sites of disorientation are the trails of underground spirits (Kõiva, 2020). A person may be misled by the path of a house spirit, the devil, or a creature called *hüüp* or *hüübjas* (*Botaurus stellaris*). Places where people (including soldiers) have died, the place where a murdered child was killed or buried, or even snakes' trails and mushroom rings, may also lead people astray (cf. Jürgenson, 1996, 1997). In addition, abandoned or unkempt cemeteries or burial places also lead people astray, as illustrated in the story recorded by linguist Paul Ariste in 1934 concerning the old burial site of the Rõngu landlords near the city of Tartu.

There is a German cemetery in Rõngu where people become disorientated. Whoever goes there cannot get out and becomes lost. One day my aunt went there with her children, and they crossed the cemetery several times because they couldn't get out. The children were already crying with fear. They were able to leave the cemetery when they approached a rain puddle but ended up in a different place. (ERA I 7, 36 (20))

In folk narratives, a person may become lost either before meeting the forest fairy or during the meeting itself, although this state of wandering is often associated with the person's own behaviour in the forest, which triggers the subsequent events. However, there is another possibility – the person is misled by the forest fairy's invisible trail, which causes them to experience the above-mentioned mental confusion or cognitive perception disorder, including a change in the perception of time and space.

In Belarus, especially in the central and western regions, it is forbidden to step over a tree that has been knocked down by a whirlwind (*vyvaratsen*). This is due to the belief that such whirlwinds are the weddings or revelries of evil spirits (see Boganeva, 2006/2: 519–520; Boganeva, 2009: 575–578; Boganeva, 2011: 522–524).

The connection between wedding rituals and the motif of wandering becomes clearer when you consider that the bride's departure from her father's house is regarded as death. In wedding songs, the bride's departure from home is depicted as a tragic moment in her life. The groom is depicted as a dangerous figure, associated with forces alien to the bride. Her journey to the new home usually leads through the forest. Meanwhile, the groom and his house are threatened by the bride. The holding back of horses and other delays in the wedding ceremony reflect ideas about the difficulties involved in transitioning from one socio-emotional state to another (Honko, 1964; Laagus, 1990: 140).

Let us take a closer look at one particular figure, a unique form of the forest spirit known for its terrifying voice. In the western and northern coastal areas of Estonia, people believe that the voice of an animal or bird is made by a forest fairy that leads people astray. For example, hunters may go in the direction of a call they think is an animal or bird, only to become lost. Similarly, mushroom-pickers might hear the roar of a bull, follow the sound and lose their way. The sound, reminiscent of a bull's roar, is characteristic of a bird known as the *hüüp* or *(h)üübjas* (*Botaurus stellaris*). This elusive member of the heron family nests in the reed beds of Estonia's western coast and islands, as well as on lakes. Its eerie call is part of the misleading motifs based on the mythical creature *hüüp* (Eisen, 1909; Jürgenson, 1996, 1997; Hiiemäe, 2016: 53–58).

PROTECTION AGAINST FOREST SPIRITS

The appearance of one episode in the narrative triggers the next, creating an interconnected chain of events. The mythology of the Baltic Finns, Estonian Russians and Belarusians offers numerous stories about becoming lost and remedies against it. You can lose your way both near home and far from it. Those who are lost no longer know where they are and cannot reach a familiar path. They may meet a being known as a forest spirit, and usually will not find their way home until they have performed a certain action. Numerous cases and methods of resolution may be grouped into specific subcategories.

The following measures are commonly used to avoid getting lost:

1. Reversal – turning the world back around, freeing oneself from an enchantment, restoring the former order to which one belongs.
    a) Turning the world upside down by standing on one's head, rolling over, or bending down and looking between the legs;
    b) Turning outer clothing such as an apron, skirt, socks or stockings inside out, or swapping shoes (putting the left shoe on the right foot and vice versa). In the Mogilev and Gomel regions of Belarus, a widespread belief associated with the forest master *dobrohozhyi* holds that you must swap your shoes and turn your clothes inside out (Boganeva, 2014: 12).
2. Achieving balance with the soul substance by breathing or spitting. One common method is spitting into one's fist. Many traditional healing and control techniques involve symbolic (or real) spitting (Paulson, 1971; Loorits, 1949; Ivanova, 2012).
3. Prayers or incantations accompanied by ritual actions, such as stepping backwards three times or reading the lines of the Lord's Prayer in reverse, are characteristic of all three peoples (Kõiva, 2011; Novik, 1994; Kõiva, Boganeva, 2025; Boganeva, 2014: 12–13; Volodina 2010: 190; Volodina, 2019: 317–349).

    Here are some examples from various Belarusian archives that belong to the same group: In the region of Brest Polesye and Grodno Ponemanye, a short prayer or phrase is often used for protection: "My mother used to tell me that when you enter a forest for the first time, you must say, 'Christ is risen!' Do that three times" (Boganeva, 2009: 578). Another version is "'Go away Evil One, Jesus Christ was born here, go up an aspen tree, on which Judas choked [hanged himself].' The prayer is so short. When you go to the forest, you must recite it" (Boganeva, 2009: 578). In Luninyets District, the Ascension is referred to – when entering the forest, one was supposed to say, "Ascension is always on Thursday" (Boganeva, 2009: 579–580). According to Aino Laagus, connections with important calendar holidays are not significant in Estonian legends (Laagus, 1990).
4. Carrying frightening objects, foods, etc., that the mythical being cannot tolerate, such as holy bread or a boar's/pig's snout into the forest (Boganeva, 2009: 578).

An account recorded from Russians in Estonia describes a ritual in which one must say three times: "I have a pig snout at home." According to the legend, this declaration prevents the forest man from leading you astray. Another record from the village of Nina in Kodavere Parish recounts that when a pig is slaughtered, its snout should be cut off, dried,

put on a stick and attached under a ceiling beam. If someone becomes lost in the forest, they must say, "Pig snout, where are you?" The words must be repeated three times and you will come out of the forest (Kõiva, Boganeva, 2025). A similar motif of a protective action was recorded in Belarus by V. Dobrovolsky: if you get lost, you must remember that a pig's head is traditionally cooked on New Year's Eve (Dobrovolsky, 1908: 4–5; for more details, see Dobrovolsky, 1891; Antropov, 2014: 16–24; Tsykhun, 2012: 188–196).

DISCUSSION

We propose models inspired by the Ingoldian, Lefebrian and animistic perspectives, for understanding different approaches to forest spirits and systems of protection against becoming lost, as the functioning system of communication with the surroundings. The animistic view of nature and belief in the soul form the basis of beliefs about forest spirits and shape attitudes towards local spirits and nature. Paulson argues that these beliefs are universally pluralistic, indicating the existence of multiple spirits or life principles (Paulson, 1958). Natural phenomena had "force" or "power", which appeared in the form of both certain objects and places, but also through the embodiment or appearance of a specific being – whether in zoomorphic or anthropomorphic form, or as items or objects. According to records, there were a number of different mythical creatures living in the forest, known by various names, some of which are genetically linked to other subtypes or categories of beings. Narratives with highly variable exterior forms (across six subdomains) differ in subtle details of content and axiology. There are four to five different narrative subtypes, and a comparable number of magical protective techniques, common to all the examined cultures.

The character of forest fairies is seen as ambiguous, and their names are chosen depending on whether their benevolent or malevolent aspects dominate in a given context. The devilish nature of spirits is expressed not only through their direct attacks on human beings, but also through their fear of the sign of the cross and Christian formulae (Salve, 1995: 414), their smell, and their ability to invert human perception. In Belarusian tradition (San'ko, 2011: 274–275), and among Estonians and other Baltic Finnic peoples, the forest is seen as good, or at least not inherently dangerous. A trip to the forest will be successful if one strictly adheres to prohibitions and regulations.

Interestingly, in Belarusian (Romanov, 1912: 289), Votic (Arukask, 2000), Seto and Estonian tradition (Kärner, 1996; Jürgenson, 1996, 1997), the echo is attributed to the devil or the forest devil. According to these beliefs, devils send an echo as the only answer to people who are lost and calling for help. Echoes are the voices of devils.

In stories about forest spirits, the main character – the experiencer – is often a man (a hunter) whose success may depend on the forest spirit. Based on the practice of offering sacrifices to forest spirits (see Paulson, 1958; Salve, 1995), it can be inferred that these spirits were once the guardians of animals and birds. Their function was to protect, that is to regulate and sanction human behaviour – an idea that became a broader universal principle. Paulson writes: "Forest spirits were, in any case, guards, protectors, guardians of the

forest and forest birds" (Paulson, 1966: 65–66). The idea of a protective spirit associated with a certain territory (*genii loci*) or wild species (*genii speciei*) also coincides with the idea of a protective spirit of an individual animal or an entire species (cf. Mencej, 2001).

Reports about forest spirits are individual and variable in form, although they draw on specific categories found in belief narratives, such as the spirit's appearance, its activities, experiences of getting lost, and the actions and rituals used to protect humans from both the spirit and getting lost.

At the beginning of the 20th century, folklorist M. J. Eisen hypothesized that perceptions of the forest spirit predate the linguistic terms used to denote it – terms that may have changed over time (Eisen, 1919: 69), yet seem to be still valid. Among the three groups examined (and in some other ethnic groups), the use of terms such as "forest people" and kinship terms suggest an older layer of belief. All the data point to close cultural connections, which resulted in the borrowing of the term *haldjas* into Estonian, and subsequently into the traditions of Russians living in Estonia. The names vary, as do the main themes, such as those concerned with the spirits that cause people to become lost in the forest.

Among the topics of interest is the origin of forest spirits. According to legend, the Archangel Michael, together with the angels who defied God, was cast down to Earth and became benevolent or evil forest spirits. In folk texts, there are rare reports of forest fairies rising from the dead, yet scientists at the beginning of the 20th century and even in the 21st century claim this was very popular. In their opinion, the prerequisite for the emergence of fairies and spirits was the cult of the dead. Looking at the thematic divisions, this connection does not seem to be true, as the connection with demonic forces is not exclusive but rather reflects different functions and experiences. Also noteworthy is the fact that, in transcripts from the 19th to 21st centuries, encounters with the forest fairy are experienced by different groups: hunters (men), berry-pickers (especially women and children), forest workers (mostly men), those who take horses to night pasture (young people, particularly young men) and those who spend time in or pass through the forest.

SOURCES[6]

ABPA – Alena Boganeva's personal archive.

BFELA – Database of Belorusian folklore and ethnolinguistics, Centre for Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature Research, National Academy of Sciences, Minsk.

BREST – Database of Belorussian folklore and mythology, National Academy of Sciences, Centre for Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature Research in Brest, Belorusia.

H, E, ERA, ERA, Vene, RKM – manuscript collections of ERA (Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv; Estonian Folklore Archive), located in the Estonian Literature Museum (ELM, Eesti Kirjandus-muuseum) in Tartu, Estonia. ERA Vene contains 17 volumes or 10.656 pages of records made from 1927 to 1944.

Skriptoorium, Estonian Literary Museum, Department of Folkloristics, digital archive and tool.

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[6] Detailed metadata for this article are stored in the repository at www.folklore.ee/repo/metshaldjas.

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ЛЕСНЫЕ ДУХИ И ИХ ФУНКЦИИ В ТРАДИЦИЯХ ЭСТОНЦЕВ, ЭСТОНСКИХ РУССКИХ И БЕЛОРУСОВ

В этой статье мы рассмотрели верования, связанные с лесным духом, в трех этнических группах (эстонской, русской и белорусской) и пришли к выводу, что, хотя в лесном хозяйстве участвует больше мужчин, чем женщин, в сказаниях отражены встречи людей разного возраста и пола с лесным духом - духом-защитником леса.

Названия лесных духов указывают на различных групп: 1) термины родства; 2) защитники или покровители леса, также как фигуры более высокого статуса (например, господин или госпожа); и 3) демонические существа или дьявол. Последние встречаются в основном в славянских преданиях, где более заметны вредоносные функции и действия. Обилие названий лесных духов отражает жизнеспособность преданий внутри отдельных этнических групп. Контактные зоны отличаются переносами и заимствованиями из соседних языков.

Примечательно, что связь между лесными духами и мертвыми, или представление о лесных духах как персонификациях умерших, в нашем материале практически отсутствует. Это, по-видимому, связано с более ранними теоретическими попытками объяснить мифологические иерархии и персонажи.

Мифологические рассказы эстонцев, русских Эстонии и белорусов содержат ряд ярких параллелей в мотивах о причинах гнева лесных духов (например, человек слишком шумно ведет себя в лесу, аукает сам и отвечает на ауканье лесного духа, наступает на *след* лесного духа, у белорусов еще может нечаянно пересечь *переход* – невидимую дорогу доброхожих и др.). Также имеются типичные совпадения в способах защиты человека от лесного духа – чтение молитв/заговоров при входе в лес, выворачивание одежды наизнанку, переобувание и др.

В комплексе текстов о блужданиях у рассматриваемых народов отражены в большинстве случаев представления о нечистой силе, сбивающей человека с дороги, а также запретах и предписаниях, которые человек должен соблюдать для безопасного посещения леса.

белорусов и русских Эстонии восходят к общим славянским корням, к тому же значительная часть русских пришла в Эстонию из Псковской области, которая граничит с белорусским регионом Подвинья.

Примечательно также, что связь между лесными духами и мертвыми или представление о лесных духах как персонификациях умерших в нашем материале практически отсутствует. Это, по-видимому, связано с более ранними теоретическими попытками объяснить мифологическую иерархию и персонажей с культом умерших.

В нарративах часто рассказывается об индивидуальном опыте и событиях, и, как правило, в них представлено одинаковые количество действий и табу для всех групп. Постоянной темой является важность соблюдения установленных социальных границ и норм, что объясняет значительное число эпизодов, связанных с заблуждениями.

Наши результаты указывают на необходимость пересмотреть данные, собранные за длительный период времени, и использовать их для переоценки характеров и функций мифологических существ.

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Če jaz ne praznujem svoje slave, kdo jo bo?: Pomeni in funkcije *slave* Srbov v Novi Gorici v kontekstu (trans)migracijske izkušnje in oblikovanja identitet(e)

Sara Vukotić

Članek raziskuje, kako srbska manjšina v Novi Gorici dojema pomen in funkcijo *slave*, osrednjega rituala v njihovi domovini, ter kakšne posledice ima ta za oblikovanje in utrjevanje identifikacijskih praks v kontekstu migracij. Na podlagi terenskega raziskovanja, ki je temeljilo na antropoloških metodah – vključno z intervjuji, opazovanjem z udeležbo in avtoetnografijo –, članek osvetljuje *slavo* kot transnacionalno prakso, ki povezuje posameznike z domovino, hkrati pa oblikuje kulturno identiteto v diaspori. Študija ugotavlja, da ima *slava* dvojno vlogo: spodbuja kulturno kohezijo in čustvene vezi z domovino, obenem pa je prostor pogajanj o osebni in kulturni identiteti v večkulturnem okolju. Ti izsledki prispevajo k boljšemu razumevanju migrantske izkušnje Srbov v Sloveniji, saj poudarjajo preplet med ohranjanjem kulture in preoblikovanjem identitete.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: *slava*, migracije, transnacionalizem, identiteta, Srbi, Nova Gorica, ritual

This article explores how Serbian minority in Nova Gorica perceive the meaning and function of *slava*, a central ritual in their homeland, and its implications for construction and strengthening identification practices in the context of migration. Based on field research conducted using anthropological methods – including interviews, participant observation, and autoethnography – this article highlights *slava* as a transnational practice that bridges individuals with their homeland while simultaneously shaping cultural identity within a diasporic context. The study concludes that *slava* plays a dual role: it fosters cultural cohesion and emotional ties with the homeland but also serves as a site of negotiation for personal and cultural identity in a multicultural environment. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the migration experience of Serbs in Slovenia, emphasizing the interplay between cultural preservation and identity transformation.[1]

KEYWORDS: *slava*, migration, transnationalism, identity, Serbs, Nova Gorica, ritual

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[1]   Ta članek je del avtoričine magistrske naloge z naslovom *(Pre)oblikovanje identitet (trans)migrantov na primeru prakticiranja rituala: ali Srbi v Novi Gorici praznujejo slavo?*, ki je bila uspešno zagovarjana septembra 2024 na Fakulteti za humanistiko Univerze na Primorskem, Oddelek za kulturne študije in antropologijo, pod mentorstvom izr. prof. dr. Katje Hrobat Virloget.

UVOD

Ritual *slava*[2] je splošno razširjen med Srbi v matični domovini in izseljenci. Čeprav je izrazito sinkretičen in polifunkcionalen, ga lahko opišemo kot družinski praznik, v okviru katerega se enkrat letno z vrsto ritualnih praks, katerih funkcija je nekje na meji med religiozno in družbeno, praznuje svetnik – zaščitnik družine (Prelić, 2004: 109–110; Sinani, 2012: 175).[3] V članku se raziskava ne osredotoča na opis rituala, kot je bilo značilno v starejših etnografskih raziskavah, kjer je bila pozornost namenjena njegovim posebnostim in raznovrstnosti elementov. Pod drobnogled postavljam *slavo* kot medij, na osnovi katerega lahko povemo nekaj o identitetnih implikacijah za ljudi, ki jo prakticirajo − v specifični situaciji migracijske izkušnje in Srbov v Sloveniji.

Poleg tega je treba omeniti, da se v Srbiji za opisovanje *slave* pogosteje reče, tako v okviru etnoloških razprav[4] kot znotraj vsakodnevnega javnega diskurza, da je to običaj, ne pa ritual. Kljub temu sem se odločila, da bom *slavo* interpretirala v kontekstu njene ritualnosti, pri čemer sem se opirala na terminološko distinkcijo med običajem in obredom/ritualom. Prvi pomeni zgolj ponavljajočo se akcijo, »izpraznjeno« konotativne plasti pomena, drugi pa tiste prakse, pri katerih obstaja vera v fizično ali simbolično funkcionalnost (Cazeneuve, 1986: 12–13). Pri tem ritual razumem kot performativno in ponavljajočo se prakso z močnim simbolnim potencialom in funkcijo (glej Davis-Floyd, Laughlin, 2022: 6) ter kot obliko komunikacije, prek katere med člani iste skupnosti krožijo deljene vrednote (Rothenbuhler, 1998).

Ključna raziskovalna vprašanja, na katera želim odgovoriti, so najprej, kakšen pomen in funkcijo ima *slava* za Srbe v Novi Gorici, in nato, kako razumevanje pomena in funkcije *slave* vpliva na oblikovanje identitet znotraj srbske skupnosti v tem prostoru. Ti vprašanji sta še posebej pomembni, če upoštevamo, da je *slava* kot družinski praznik tesno povezana s pravoslavno identiteto, Srbi, ki so ciljna skupina mojega raziskovanja, pa živijo v slovenskem in prevladujoče katoliškem kulturnem prostoru. V tem smislu me zanima, kakšne implikacije ima izvajanje rituala, ki »odstopa« od dominantne kulture, ki tega rituala ne prepozna kot svoj element, predstavlja pa pomemben simbolni element pri konstruiranju identitete tistih, ki ga prakticirajo.

Tematizacija odnosa rituala *slave* in njegovega praznovanja pri Srbih v Sloveniji se mi zdi posebej pomembna v kontekstu transnacionalno razumljenih migracij, torej teoretičnega usmerjenja, ki se upira zanemarjanju vezi in odnosov, ki jih migranti po preselitvi ohranjajo z domovino (glej Čapo, 2019: 92). V tem smislu (trans)migrantke in (trans)migrante (Glick Schiller, Basch in Blanc-Szanton, 1995) razumem kot aktivne subjekte,

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[2] Naziv rituala, ki je predmet preučevanja v okviru tega prispevka, je skozi celotno besedilo naveden v poševnem tisku, da bi bil grafično ločen in da ne bi prišlo do prekrivanja pomenov z (po SSKJ) oblikami glagola »slaviti« (sinonimi: praznovati, izkazovati slavo čemu) ali samostalnikom »slava« v pomenu »splošno priznanje velike vrednosti, veljave / velik ugled, veljava«.

[3] Na tem mestu je pomembno poudariti, da so poleg družinskih, hišnih *slav* znane tudi druge vrste kolektivnega praznovanja tega rituala, kot so občinske, cerkvene, šolske ali vaške *slave* (Vlahović, 1972: 5; Milićević, 1985: 76).

[4] Glej na primer prispevke v zborniku: Kovačević, Velmar Janković, 1985.

ki konstruirajo svojo identiteto, pri čemer po eni strani izbirajo elemente, ki označujejo povezavo z domovino, po drugi strani pa se na različne načine vključujejo v »novo« družbo (Levitt, Jaworsky, 2007: 130).

METODOLOŠKA ZASNOVA RAZISKAVE

Terensko raziskovanje, na katerem temeljijo podatki in rezultati, predstavljeni in analizirani v osrednjem delu tega prispevka, ki je potekalo od aprila do julija 2024, je zasnovano na uporabi antropoloških metod, predvsem neformalnih in polstrukturiranih intervjujev ter opazovanja z udeležbo (glej Spradley, 1979; Eriksen, 2012). Poleg tega sem v raziskavi uporabila tudi kvalitativno metodo avtoetnografije (glej Ellis, Adams in Bochner, 2010), kar pomeni, da sem pri preučevanju izbranih kulturnih in družbenih fenomenov upoštevala lastne izkušnje, saj sem se tudi sama preselila iz Srbije v Slovenijo in trenutno živim v Novi Gorici. Zaradi tega sem se odločila, da bo ta kraj osrednja točka mojega raziskovanja. Čeprav sem se na začetku raziskave želela osredotočiti zgolj na srbsko skupnost v Novi Gorici, sem med terenskim delom in spoznavanjem sogovornikov in sogovornic ugotovila, da vsi ne živijo v mestu. Nekateri namreč prebivajo v okolici Nove Gorice, na primer v Vipavi ali Goriških Brdih, nekateri pa tudi čez mejo, v italijanski Gorici. Ker pa so vsi na nek način povezani z Novo Gorico – bodisi prek vsakodnevnih aktivnosti, družinskih odnosov, izobraževanja ali dejavnosti v srbskem kulturnem društvu – sem se odločila obdržati Novo Gorico kot glavno območje mojega raziskovanja.

V prvi fazi terenskega raziskovanja sem vzpostavila stik s člani Srbskega kulturnega društva Sloga v Novi Gorici. Začela sem pri dolgoletnem predsedniku društva Goranu,[5] ki je postal tudi moj glavni sogovornik, vpeljal me je v društvo in iskanje nadaljnjih stikov. Predstavil mi je folklorno sekcijo društva, kjer sem spoznala številne sogovornike in sogovornice ter obiskovala vaje dveh skupin – starejše (20–60 let) in mlajše (do 15 let). Z metodo opazovanja z udeležbo sem zbirala podatke in vzpostavljala stike za intervjuje.

Med starejšimi člani sem opravila intervjuje z Mihailom, Mileno, Markom in Majo (20–30 let). Milena in Marko sta odrasla v italijanski Gorici, a sta zelo dejavna v društvu. Maja se je pred leti preselila iz Republike Srbske[6] v Novo Gorico, Mihailo pa se je v Slovenijo preselil pred štirimi leti in trenutno živi ter dela v Novi Gorici. Med vajami mlajše folklorne skupine sem spoznala starše otrok, ki so člani te sekcije v okviru društva, med njimi Rado (30–40 let), ki je bila rojena v Ljubljani in zdaj živi v Novi Gorici. Prek predsednika društva sem vzpostavila stik tudi z Draganom, sekretarjem društva, ki se je iz Srbije preselil v Novo Gorico pred več kot desetimi leti.

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[5] Vsa imena sogovornikov in sogovornic so izmišljena, da bi se zaščitila njihova zasebnost.

[6] Republika Srbska, neuradno imenovana tudi Srbska, je ena izmed dveh entitet, ki sestavljata Bosno in Hercegovino, poleg Federacije Bosne in Hercegovine.

Metodo polstrukturiranega intervjuja sem izbrala za osnovo terenskega raziskovanja, saj verjamem, da je, kot pravi Praprotnik,

> [i]nteres raziskovalca /…/ v tem, da ugotovi, katere identifikacije posameznik zares uporabi, katere značilnosti nosi takšna identifikacija, katerih identitet posameznik ne izpostavlja ali jih celo (implicitno) zamolči. Identitetne kategorije in njene značilnosti je mogoče ugotoviti samo v razumevanju, ki ga izraža sam posameznik (Praprotnik, 2012: 106).

Večino intervjujev sem zato izvedla v živo, pri čemer sem z dovoljenjem svojih sogovornikov in sogovornic pogovore snemala in kasneje transkribirala.

OD DELOVNIH BRIGAD DO SODOBNE SKUPNOSTI: SRBI V NOVI GORICI

Miran Komac uvršča Srbe v Sloveniji skupaj z drugimi narodi nekdanje Jugoslavije med *»nove« narodne skupnosti* (Komac, 2004), ki obstajajo na etnično heterogenem območju Slovenije poleg manjšin: italijanske, madžarske in romske skupnosti (Zelenik, 2008: 1). V literaturi o Srbih v Sloveniji je pogosto najti enotno mnenje, da se je srbska skupnost v Sloveniji oblikovala skozi več migracijskih valov: najprej med turško invazijo v 15. in 16. stoletju, nato med obema svetovnima vojnama in neposredno po drugi svetovni vojni (Prelić, 2009: 54). Najštevilčnejše in »[n]ajintenzivnejše naseljevanje Slovenije je bilo zabeleženo /…/ v sedemdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja, ko so mnogi [Srbi] iz Srbije, Črne gore in Bosne in Hercegovine v iskanju zaposlitve odšli v najrazvitejšo republiko tedanje skupne države« (Pavlović, 2010: 72). Gotovo je treba omeniti tudi nedavne migracijske tokove Srbov proti Sloveniji s konca devetdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja, ki so večinoma zajeli mlade intelektualke in intelektualce, ki so bežali pred bombardiranjem (1998–1999) ali so se preselili zaradi političnih razmer ali ekonomskih razlogov (prav tam). Poleg tega je pomembno omeniti tudi trenutni migracijski tok, v okviru katerega vse več mladih iz Srbije prihaja študirati in hkrati delati v Slovenijo.

Srbi so skupaj z drugimi narodi nekdanje Jugoslavije v Novo Gorico – ki se jo pogosto, tako v literaturi kot v vsakdanjem diskurzu, opisuje kot novo, mlado, modernistično in obmejno mesto (Fakin Bajec, 2022: 65), »zgrajeno iz nič«, *ab initio* (Ramšak, 2015) – prišli kot del prvih delovnih in mladinskih brigad, ki so konec štiridesetih let 20. stoletja pripravljale teren za začetek gradnje novega središča (Jerman, 2004: 108; Kolenc, 2017: 12). Ko razpravlja o pomenu zgodovinskih spoznanj o gradnji Nove Gorice in zbranih spominov mladinskih brigad pri oblikovanju kulturne dediščine mesta, Fakin Bajec piše tudi o Srbih, ki so kot del brigad gradili občinsko stavbo in stanovanjske Ruske bloke (Fakin Bajec, 2024: 76). Poleg tega so bili tudi prvi meščani, ki so se naselili v novozgrajene novogoriške bloke, iz okoliških ruralnih krajev ali iz drugih delov nekdanje Jugoslavije (Jerman, 2004: 114). Delovne in prostovoljne brigade, ter celoten projekt izgradnje Nove Gorice kot novega središča Goriške regije, so imele izrazito močan socialistični duh (glej Kolenc, 2017; Fakin Bajec, 2024). Ta se je odražal v predanem delu mladine

iz celotne Jugoslavije, ki so ga spremljali različni kulturno-izobraževalni dogodki, vse v duhu socialističnega bratstva in enotnosti (Jerman, 2004: 109).

Čeprav se je v času izgradnje Nove Gorice, delovnih brigad in ideološko propagirane enotnosti bolj ali manj uspešno stremelo k izbrisu etničnih razlik in razdelitev, danes kulturno življenje Srbov v Novi Gorici, ali drugače povedano, del kulturnega življenja, ki je v zvezi s transnacionalno povezanostjo z domovino (glej Ulf, 1996), poteka predvsem znotraj Srbskega kulturnega društva Sloga. Društvo si prizadeva za ohranitev srbske identitete, tradicije in kulture med prebivalci severnoprimorske regije, zlasti v Novi Gorici in njeni okolici. Na podlagi navedenega ni težko opaziti, da obstoj društva predstavlja močan občutek transnacionalne povezanosti s tradicijo domovine in srbsko kulturno identiteto, kar napeljuje na sklep o obstoju srbske diasporične skupnosti v Sloveniji kot produkta transnacionalne kulture in »zgledne skupnosti transnacionalnega trenutka« (Clifford, 1997: 283).

RITUALNOST *SLAVE*: TRANSCENDIRANJE VSAKDANJOSTI V SVETI PROSTOR

Slava je splošno razširjen ritual pri Srbih, in čeprav posamezni ritualni elementi variirajo glede na to, kje se praznuje, je njena osnovna struktura v bistvu enostavna (Prelić, 2004: 109–110) – enkrat letno celotna družina proslavlja svojega svetnika, za katerega verjamejo, da je njen zaščitnik (Vrčević, 1985; Milićević, 1985; Vlahović, 1985). Kot navaja Vlahović, se *slava* kot družinski praznik prvič omenja 15. avgusta 1018 v okolici Ohrida. Tega dne je grški kronist Skilica zapisal, da je arhon Evstatije Dafnokin iz Ohrida, ki je sledil običaju, da na dan *slave* vsakdo sprejme obiskovalce, nepričakovano obiskal grad vojvode Ivca, podložnika Samuila. Z zvijačo mu je uspelo, da je vojvodo oslepil (Vlahović, 1985: 136).

Bakić-Hayden navaja, da se prav s tem, da predpostavlja družinsko, ne pa osebne ali širše družbene slovesnosti, *slava* razlikuje od drugih ritualov, kot so god, božič ali velika noč (Bakić-Hayden, 2019: 517). V literaturi pa lahko najdemo tudi mnenja, da je bila *slava* prvotno povezana z lastnino in ozemljem, ne pa z določeno družino (Vuković, 1981: 100). *Slava* je ritual, sestavljen iz številnih posameznih ritualnih praks, ki se lahko izvajajo en dan ali več dni, odvisno od želja in zmožnosti posamezne družine (Sinani, 2012: 176; Prelić, 2004: 110). Te ritualne prakse bi lahko razdelili v dve skupini – na tiste religiozne narave in tiste, ki zadevajo družbene konvencije *slave*. Nekatere izmed najpomembnejših praks so: pripravljanje *slavske* mize, hrane in pijače na predvečer *slave*, obiskovanje cerkve s strani družinskih članov, kjer se posveti *slavski* kolač in berejo molitve, sprejemanje gostov v družinski hiši, prižiganje sveče, kadilo celotne hiše in izgovarjanje molitev in zdravic, *slavsko* kosilo z druženjem, pogovorom ali petjem (Vrčević, 1985).

Iz takšnega opisa *slavskega* rituala izhajata tudi njegovi dve osnovni funkciji: religiozna in družbena (Milićević, 1985: 79; Prelić, 2004: 110; Sinani, 2012: 176). Na eni strani se s praznovanjem *slave* proslavlja tudi svetnik, ki je zaščitnik družine in njen mediator z Bogom (Milićević, 1985: 78; prim. Sinani, 2012: 175). V tej funkciji se odraža močna

povezava tega rituala z religiozno osnovo, še posebej s pravoslavjem, čeprav, kot opaža Vlahović (1985: 146), o *slavi* skorajda ni nobenih cerkvenih predpisov. Ta povezava se posebej izraža v domeni *slavskih* simbolov, simboličnih »žrtev«, ki se jih med *slavo* daruje svetniku (Sinani, 2012: 176). Najpomembnejši med njimi so sveča, kolač, *slavsko žito* (srb. *koljivo*), kadilo, olje, vino in ikona. Njihov specifičen in jasno določen razpored med *slavo* ter številne prakse, ki jih spremljajo, pa pomembno prispevajo k uresničevanju simbolične komunikacije prek tega rituala. Ne glede na to, ali se religiozne prakse odvijajo v cerkvi ali v domu domačina, se s temi praksami vsakdanji prostor pripravi za delitev ritualne gostije, katere pomembna funkcija je slavljenje svetnika in doseganje stanja harmonije (Bakić-Hayden, 2019: 517). Na ta način družinski dom na dan *slave* doživi svojevrstno ritualno preobrazbo, pri čemer se vzpostavita ritualni čas in prostor, ki sta drugačna od profanega in vsakdanjega – dom takrat postane svetišče, cerkev v malem, izpolnjena z duhovnim bogastvom (Milićević, 1985: 75). Z drugimi besedami, med *slavo* dom postane »ceremonialni center« (Halpern, 1958: 15).

Po drugi strani je v okviru družbene funkcije *slave* posebej pomembno omeniti, da »/…/ družinska slava deluje kot posebna oblika institucije gostoljubnosti« (Sinani, 2012: 189). Poleg tega *slava* s svojo družbeno funkcijo pomembno vpliva na oblikovanje recipročnih medsebojnih odnosov in močnega občutka pripadnosti in tvorjenja skupnosti.

Slika 1: Gospodinja opravlja ritualno okrasitev družinskega *slavskega* kolača (Hrani Etnografski muzej v Beogradu, avtor fotografije Miloš Matić).

Slika 2: Posvetitev družinskih *slavskih* kolačev v cerkvi (Hrani Etnografski muzej v Beogradu, avtor fotografije Saša Milutinović).

Slika 3: Molitev in posvetitev *slavskega* kolača doma (Hrani Etnografski muzej v Beogradu, avtorica fotografije Dušica Živković).

Slika 4: Svečana gostija v domačem domu na dan družinske *slave* (Hrani Etnografski muzej v Beogradu, avtorica fotografije Dušica Živković).

Slava se v glavnem prenaša znotraj družine iz roda v rod po moški liniji, od očeta na sina, razen če v družini ni moškega potomca (Prelić, 2004: 110). Spolno zasnovane delitve v okviru tega rituala so opazne tudi v kontekstu razdelitve nalog – ženski del družine večinoma pripravlja *slavo*, tj. skrbi za pripravo *slavskega* kosila, medtem ko so moški »zadolženi« za odhod v cerkev, posvetitev kolača in hiše ter sprejem gostov. Poleg tega obstaja možnost, da se *slava* pridobi z nakupom ali dedovanjem posesti (Bakić-Hayden, 2019: 522), prav tako se lahko zgodi, da ena družina slavi več svetnikov, pri čemer ima hiša svojo »preslavo« (Sinani, 2012: 175). Kot najpogostejše družinske *slave* v literaturi so izpostavljeni sveti Nikola, sveti Aranđel, sveti Đorđe, sveti Jovan, sveti Dimitrije, sveta Petka in podobno (Vuković, 1981: 100; Milićević, 1985: 82–83).

Pomembno je poudariti, da je tako v akademskem kot tudi v javnem diskurzu v Srbiji globoko zakoreninjeno stališče, da je *slava* izključno srbski ritual, čeprav se v literaturi lahko najdejo mnenja, ki to tezo ovržejo in poudarjajo, da ta praksa obstaja tudi pri drugih, tako pravoslavnih kot katoliških narodih (glej Vuković, 1981: 100; Vrčević, 1985: 28; Prelić, 2004: 110; Mišur, 2018). Kljub temu da *de iure* ne odraža povsem realnega stanja, je to mnenje *de facto* prevladujoče v Srbiji, pri čemer lahko rečemo, da prav zaradi tega *slava* predstavlja pomemben element srbske kulturne identitete (Bakić-Hayden, 2019: 159). Pomembno je omeniti, da je bila *slava* leta 2014 vključena na Unescov reprezentativni seznam nesnovne kulturne dediščine človeštva, kar potrjuje njen pomen kot ključni

Slika 5: Ritualno ugašanje *slavske* sveče skupaj z družinskimi člani ob zaključku gostije (Hrani Etnografski muzej v Beogradu, avtor fotografije Miloš Matić).

element srbske kulturne identitete. Ta tradicija ne samo, da je del vsakodnevnega življenja, temveč pri Srbih razvija tudi poseben občutek ponosa, ki se odraža v ljudskih pregovorih, kot sta: »Kjer je slava, tam je Srb!« ali »Nihče nima, kar Srb ima: / Srb ima svojo krstno slavo, / Krstno slavo in Svetega Savo« (glej Vuković, 1981: 101).

OD SVETNIKOV DO SKUPNOSTI: *SLAVA* KOT KRIŽIŠČE VERE IN DRUŽBENE KOHEZIJE

Čeprav je pomembno poudariti, da se funkcije *slave*, kot so religiozna, družbena, kohezivna in druge, nikakor ne morejo strogo ločevati, bom v tem delu skušala prikazati vsako posebej s posebnim poudarkom na tistih elementih, ki so jih sogovornice in sogovorniki izpostavili kot zanje primarno pomembne.

Milena na primer poudarja, da je zanjo pri praznovanju *slave* najpomembnejša njena verska, pravoslavna osnova, torej utrjevanje lastnega verskega občutka in praznovanje svetnika oziroma povezovanje z več-kot-človeškim. Iz njenih besed je očitno, da krepitev njene osebne identitete, ki je v veliki meri povezana s (pravoslavno) religijo, temelji predvsem na usklajenosti vrednot, ki jih intimno čuti, in tistih, ki se jih je naučila med prvo socializacijo v okviru prve skupnosti – družine (glej Lukšič Hacin, 1995: 92–100). Na ta

način se s prakticiranjem *slave* po preselitvi identificira tako z »zamišljeno« skupnostjo (glej Anderson, 2007) »mi-Srbi-pravoslavci« kot tudi s svojo družino, v okviru katere poteka kroženje skupnih vrednot:

> *Zame je [slava] zelo pomembna, mislim, da je to, seveda, povezano z osebnimi občutki in s tem, kako je posameznik navezan na vero. Za nas, še posebej pravoslavce, je to zelo povezano s tem, koliko je nekdo blizu veri. Ko je nekdo blizu veri, bo imel ta občutek za slavo, drugače pa ostane samo kot običaj. Ker, pač, delamo to, ker so tako delali babica, dedek, prababica, in to se pač tako dela. Zakaj se to tako dela? Pač, tako se dela. To je pri nas pogosto ostajalo na tem, pa zakaj, pač tako, in potem ni nekega posebnega razloga, kar je do neke mere v redu, ker, mislim, to je bilo tisto obdobje, ko je bil komunizem in tako dalje, vse to se je potihnilo in zdaj ima posledice.[7] Sedaj lahko slaviš in vse, ampak še vedno ima to tudi neke, recimo, psihološke posledice in odnos do vere. Po mojem mnenju slava spada prav k temu, je delček tega. Zato je zame osebno zelo pomembna, ker mislim, da so vsi svetniki pomembni, seveda, ampak slava je prav tisti svetnik, ki pripada družini, je bolj intimna. Vsak bi moral biti ponosen na svojega svetnika. Na primer, sveta Petka je zaščitnica žensk, in menim, ker sem ženska, je vse to še bolj pomembno.* (Milena, 2024)[8]

Kot vidimo, Milena prav tako, če upoštevamo terminologijo Cazeneuvea, poudarja razliko med razumevanjem *slave* kot običaja in kot obreda. Razlaga tudi, da je za razumevanje *slave* kot simbolično pomembnega rituala nujno, da mu tisti, ki ga izvajajo, pripišejo določen smisel in pomen, oziroma, kot dodatno pojasnjuje, da prakticiranje *slave* povežejo s pravoslavno simboliko in vrednostnim sistemom. Če do tega ne pride, Milena poudarja, da *slava* v smislu vrednosti in učinkovitosti ostane na ravni običaja, torej prakse, ki se izvaja brez vere v njeno učinkovitost, ter da postane oblika, izpraznjena

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[7] Nekateri avtorji poudarjajo, da je bila v času Jugoslavije in komunističnega režima *slava* kot simbol religiozno-nacionalne identitete in pripadnosti sporna (glej na primer Perica, 2002). To je pripeljalo do tega, da je po razpadu nekdanje skupne države *slava* postala del revitalizacije pravoslavne religije v Srbiji in se uveljavila kot pomemben, če ne tudi ključen element etnično-nacionalne in religiozne kolektivne identitete Srbov (Sinani, 2012: 190; Bakić-Hayden, 2019: 521). Kot poudarja Fakin Bajec (2011: 119), podobno velja tudi za božič v Sloveniji, kjer se praznovanje povezuje z etnično identiteto in kulturo.

[8] (srb.): a meni je jako važno, mislim da je to, dobro naravno povezano je dosta sa subjektivnim i za posebnu osobu, ali mislim da je to jako povezano sa time koliko je neko blizak veri, za nas posebno pravoslavlju, zato što kad je neko blizak veri on će imati taj osećaj za slavu, dok ovako ostaće samo kao običaj, jer eto kao radimo zato što tako baba i deda i prababa i eto oni su tako radili i to se tako radi, zašto se to tako radi, pa to se tako radi, to je dosta kod nas tako ostajalo ono kao pa zašto, pa eto tako, i onda kao nema neko objašnjenje što kao je okej do neke mere jer opet to je mislim vreme koje je bilo pre ovaj ono kad je bilo i komunizam i tako dalje to se sve stišalo i sve tako da ima posledice toga i sada okej ti možeš da slaviš i sve ali i dalje to mora da ima i neke da kažem psihičke posledice i odnos do vere, jer po meni slava u tome spada, to je samo delić ovaj toga, i onda po meni mislim, meni je lično jako bitno zato što mislim svako ima svi su svetitelji bitni naravno ali eto slava ti je znači onako baš ovaj svetitelj od porodice intimnije je nekako, svako sa svojim svecem treba da se ponosi plus eto sveta Petka je na primer ovaj zaštitnica žene na primer i onda eto meni pošto sam još i žensko još više nekako mi je sve to važno. (Milena, 2024)

pomena (glej Cazeneuve, 1986: 12–13). Zato meni, da je za sprejem *slave* kot elementa identitete nujno verjeti v njeno učinkovitost − torej, da ima prakticiranje *slave* določene »psihične posledice«, ki krepijo občutek varnosti, še posebej v obdobjih negotovosti in gospodarske krize. Poleg tega kot še eno raven identifikacije izpostavlja identifikacijo na spolni osnovi, pri čemer je, kot pravi, na intimen način povezana s sveto Petko, ki jo njena družina praznuje in za katero se verjame, da je zaščitnica žensk.

Podobno pravi Dragan − da je praznovanje *slave* po preselitvi zanj posebej pomembno, saj na ta način utrjuje svojo versko identiteto in podedovane družinske vrednote: *»Zame je najpomembnejše približevanje družine Bogu in pravoslavni veri. To je pri slavi najpo-membnejše – da se duh pravoslavja združi z družinskimi vrednotami«* (Dragan, 2024).[9]

Marko v podobnem duhu poudarja, da je bistvo *slave* zanj v spoštovanju svetnika, zaščitnika družine, ter tudi v tem, da praznovanje *slave* deluje kot zbirna transnacional-na točka, prek katere se tisti, ki ne živijo v družinskem domu, ponovno zberejo ob tej priložnosti:

> *pač [bistvo slave je] spoštovanje našega svetnika, družinskega zaščitni-ka, in to, da se zberejo dobri ljudje. Tudi tisti, ki sicer niso vedno tukaj [misli na tiste, ki so se odselili, živijo v tujini], da preživimo čas skupaj, se pogovorimo z nekom, ki ga že dolgo nismo videli, in da se spet srečamo.* (Marko, 2024)[10]

Mihailo prav tako razume *slavo* kot platformo za doseganje kohezivnosti znotraj družinskega kroga:

> *Glavna značilnost slave in zame najpomembnejša je priložnost, da vidiš družino, ki je že dolgo nisi videl. To je velika gostija, kjer je namen gostiti zate pomembne ljudi in ustvariti priložnost za njihovo druženje. Spomnim se, ko sem bil majhen, so bili otroci, ki sem jih srečeval samo na slavah, in samo takrat smo se igrali skupaj. To je bila neka posebna kategorija poznanstev, kar se mi zdi lepo.* (Mihailo, 2024)[11]

Poleg tega poudarja, da sprejetje *slave* kot konstitutivnega elementa identifikacijskega procesa ne pomeni nujno, da se posameznik hkrati identificira z njenim verskim ozadjem. Hkrati intimno zavrača perpetuiranje esencialističnih razumevanj identitet in se zavzema

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[9] (srb.): Za mene je to približavanje porodice Bogu i Pravoslavnoj veri. I to je kod slave najvažnije, da se duh pravoslavlja kombinuje sa porodičnim vrednostima. (Dragan, 2024)

[10] (srb.): pa [suština slave je] da poštujemo tog našeg svetitelja, porodičnog zaštitnika i onako da se okupe dobri ljudi, i ko inače nije tu [misli na one koji su se odselili, žive u inostranstvu], da se provede vremena zajedno i da se ispriča koga nisi vidio dugo da se opet vidite i tako. (Marko, 2024)

[11] (srb.): Glavna odlika slave i meni najvažnija je povod da se vidi familija koju nisi video dugo. Jedna velika gozba gde je namera da ugostimo sebi bitne ljude u kreiramo platformu za njihovo druženje. Sećam se kad sam bio mali, postojala su deca koju samo viđao samo na slavama i samo tad se s njima igrao, to je bila neka posebna kategorija poznanstava i to mi se čini lepo. (Mihailo, 2024)

za aktivno vlogo posameznika v identifikacijskem procesu, ki z zavestnim izborom gradi heterogeno identiteto:

> *[Ali si kdaj slišal rek »Nema Srbina bez slave« (slov. Ni Srba brez slave)? Se*
> *strinjaš s tem stališčem?] Slišal sem, ja, vendar se absolutno ne strinjam z izjavo,*
> *da ni Srba brez slave, saj je slava pravoslavna reč in niso vsi Srbi pravoslavci.*
> *Na splošno imam težave s takimi izjavami, saj menim, da perpetuirajo nacio-*
> *nalizem in povzročajo delitve. Zavedam se tudi, da veliko ljudi razmišlja tako.*
> *Zame je Srb tisti, ki se tako čuti, slava pa je lahko le del tega.* (Mihailo, 2024)[12]

Nasprotno temu stališče izraža Milena, ki praznovanje *slave* razume v kontekstu toposa »srbske duše in srca« ter jo povezuje z gotovo romantičarsko idejo duha naroda (glej Leersen, 2013). Preplet religiozne, nacionalne in kulturne identitete razume kot homogeno in medsebojno pogojeno mešanico, ki je v Srbiji »naravna«:

> *Mislim, da je vera del kulture, del našega naroda, da se je ne da ločiti, ker*
> *je prav to v naši duši. Zaradi tega je tudi slava pomembna, zato bi rekla, da*
> *je slava povezana z vero, ker je del identitete, ne more se ločiti od Srbije.*
> *Srbsko srce in vse to je eno in seveda je tudi del tradicije, običajev in kulture*
> */.../ Preprosto, to je v nas tako naravno.* (Milena, 2024)[13]

Maja meni, da je posebna vrednost *slave* v tem, da je specifično družinsko obeležje, kar jo ločuje od drugih ritualov religiozne narave, kot sta velika noč ali božič. Pri tem poudarja tudi občutek ponosa ob svoji *slavi*, kar na čustveni ravni dodatno utrjuje njeno identifikacijo s podedovanimi družinskimi vrednotami:

> *Slava je nekaj, kar gre iz roda v rod in kar mora biti, recimo, sveča, slavsko*
> *žito, kruh. Seveda je to prisotno tudi za božič in veliko noč, vendar je slava*
> *nekako posebna. To je družinska zadeva, intimno je. Če jaz ne praznujem*
> *svoje slave, kdo jo bo? To je zame zadovoljstvo. Medtem ko za božič pra-*
> *znujejo vsi nekako.* (Maja, 2024)[14]

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[12] (srb.): [Da li si nekada čuo za izreku »Nema Srbina bez slave«? Da li bi se složio sa takvim stanovištem?] Čuo sam, da, ali apsolutno se ne slažem sa izjavom da nema Srbina bez slave, jer je slava pravoslavna stvar, a nisu svi Srbi pravoslavci i generalno imam problem sa takvim izjavama, jer mislim da perpetuiraju neki nacionalizam izazivaju podele. Svestan sam takođe i toga, da dosta ljudi razmišlja tako. Za mene je Srbin ko se tako oseća, a slava može biti samo deo toga. (Mihailo, 2024)

[13] (srb.): pa mislim da je vera deo kulture isto, deo našeg naroda, da ne može da se izdvoji, zato što je baš to u našoj duši i da po meni zbog toga i slava je važna u tome, pa zato bih rekla da je slava znači sa verom znači zato što je deo identiteta znači ne može da se odvaja od Srbije nekako, znači srpsko srce nekako to je sve jedno i naravno to je deo i tradicije i običaja ovaj i deo kulture naravno i rekla bih to je istina /.../ zato što eto jednostavno to je tolko u nama jednostavno prirodno. (Milena, 2024)

[14] (srb.): [Šta bi izdvojila kao osnovno obeležje slave za tebe?] pa slava je nešto što ne znam nešto što ide s kolena na koleno i što treba ne znam ta svijeća to koljivo taj hljeb jeste da ima to i za Božić i za Uskrs i sve al nekako je slava posebna to je porodična stvar intimno bude ako ja ne slavim svoju slavu ko će, meni je to zadovoljstvo, a za Božić opet svi slave nekako. (Maja, 2024)

Rada kot intimno najpomembnejše pri praznovanju *slave* omenja sodelovanje v specifični praksi, ki jo je razvila njena družina, zaradi katere čuti ponos, saj, kot pravi, je pomemben *»ta obred, ki ga imamo, kar nima nihče drug«*. Verski vidik *slave* je v njenem primeru v ozadju, čeprav je še vedno pomembno spoštovati *slavske* simbole, kohezivna funkcija *slave* pa je*, predvsem na mikroravni družinskih članov, v ospredju: *»Glavno pri slavi je to, da se družina zbere«*[15] (Rada, 2024).

Goran pa pri prakticiranju *slave*, zlasti v kontekstu življenja izven domovine, poudarja, da je najpomembneje ohraniti povezavo s pravoslavno vero in kulturno identiteto Srbov, pri čemer izpostavlja *slavo*, srbski jezik in cirilico kot ključne elemente. V skladu z izvajanjem »misije« srbskega kulturnega društva, ki ga vodi v Novi Gorici, meni, da je *slava* pomemben element (srbske) tradicije, ki jo poskuša prenesti na nove generacije. V tem smislu lahko rečemo, da izraža enodimenzionalen in statičen pogled na pojme tradicije, kulture in primarno kolektivne identitete, ki jih v kontekstu migracijskega doživetja poskuša ohraniti. Poleg tega je v njegovem odgovoru prisotno tudi prevladujoče (čeprav ne povsem pravilno) mnenje, da je *slava* izključno srbski ritual, in zato pomemben pokazatelj razlikovanja Srbov v novem okolju:

> *Mi Srbi že stoletja govorimo, da lahko samo složnost Srba reši, in vemo, da smo po praznovanju slave prepoznavni. Menim, da smo edini narod, ki praznuje slavo. Pri tem obredu je izjemno pomembno, da se slava in očenaš bere v srbščini, saj je tu veliko cirilice in se naši otroci in vnuki srečujejo s to pisavo, kar v njih vzbuja zanimanje za to pisavo.* (Goran, 2024)[16]

Zanimivo je tudi poudariti, da Goran izpostavlja, kako bo, kljub temu da mu je pomembno, da *slavo* v Novi Gorici praznuje po strukturi, ki si jo je zapomnil od svojega očeta, in je zanj pri praznovanju tega rituala ključno, da se drži »tradicije« (ki jo razume kot statično in nespremenljivo), njegova *slava* prešla na hčerko. V tem smislu nekoliko preoblikuje podedovano družinsko tradicijo prenosa *slave* po moški liniji z namenom, da prakso *slave* kot tako »ohrani« v novem okolju:

> *Zanimivo je, da nimam sina, ki običajno podeduje slavo. Ko sin podeduje slavo, mu starši na dan slave dajo četrtino slavskega kruha in malo slavskega žita, da lahko naslednje leto začne praznovati. Dogovoril sem se s svojo starejšo hčerko Tatjano, da bo ona prevzela mojo slavo in ji podaljšala njen vek.* (Goran, 2024)[17]

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[15] (srb.): Pa glavno za slavu jeste da to da se porodica okupi. (Rada, 2024)

[16] (srb.): Mi Srbi vekovima govorimo samo Sloga Srbina spašava a znamo da smo mi Srbi po slavljenju slave prepoznatljivi, mislim da smo mi jedini narod koji slavi slavu, kod toga čina je izuzetno važno da se slava i očenaš čita na srpskom jeziku, tu je dosti ćirilice i tu naša deca i unuci se susreću sa tim pismom i u njima se pojavljuje zanimanje za tim pismom. (Goran, 2024)

[17] (srb.): Zanimljivo je da ja nemam sina koji obično nasledi slavu i kada sin nasleđuje slavu roditelji mu na dan slave daju jednu četvrtinu slavskog hleba i malo koljiva da on može sledeću godinu početi da slavi, ja sam se dogovorio sa mojo starijom ćerkom Tatjanom da ona posle preuzme moju slavu i da joj produži vek trajanja. (Goran, 2024)

Na ta način Goranov primer, čeprav se zavzema za to, da je tradicija statična in se ohranja le, če se prenese v nespremenjeni obliki, vendar priča o transformativni moči ritualov in tradicije, ki se znova oblikuje in prilagodi potrebam tistih, ki jo ohranjajo. Čeprav je v pogovoru poudaril, da meni, da sta starodavnost in kontinuiteta vodilni značilnosti tradicije, njegov primer vendarle dokazuje ustvarjalno in aktivno vlogo posameznika pri transformaciji naučenih in podedovanih vzorcev iz preteklosti, pri čemer se tradicija v sodobnosti preoblikuje in prilagaja, da služi (ljudem v) novim kontekstom (glej Poljak Istenič, 2013). Tako se ritualna praksa *slave* v Goranovem primeru nahaja nekje med tradicijo in inovacijo (prim. Fakin Bajec, 2011) oziroma med potrebo po ohranjanju tradicije kot oznake (z njegove perspektive) edinstvene kulturne in etnične identitete, kot njegovega »preživetja« (angl. *survival*) in njene (re)konstrukcije v sedanjosti (Poljak Istenič, 2012). Poleg tega iz njegovega odgovora izhaja tudi jasna dihotomija med instancami »Mi« in »Oni«, pri čemer druga predstavlja domeno slovenskega in katoliškega, s katero se intimno ne identificira. Kot pomemben element prepoznavanja znotraj kategorije »Mi« izpostavlja *slavo*, ki jo, kot je bilo prej omenjeno, razume kot sredstvo za doseganje kohezivnosti tako na ravni svoje družine kot širše srbske skupnosti v Novi Gorici.

(NE)PRIPADANJE »TUKAJ« IN »TAM«: *SLAVA* KOT »NAJDENA SRBSKA IDENTITETA«

Marko izraža zelo podobno mnenje, ko pravi, da je *slava* pomemben element »naše« (srbske) kulture in tradicije in da jo je zato treba »ohraniti«. Takšno pozicioniranje in (samo)opredelitev sta pri njem posebej zanimiva, če upoštevamo, da je Marko rojen v italijanski Gorici in nima neposredne izkušnje s preselitvijo. Pri tem njegova identifikacija s »tistim, od koder smo prišli« na določen način odraža posredno usvojen sistem vrednot, pri čemer se z ene strani postavlja kot »različni« v primerjavi z okoljem, v katerem je odraščal, po drugi strani pa kot del svoje identitete izbere »podobnost« s člani srbske skupnosti. Ko piše o kompleksnosti pojma identitete, Jenkins navaja, da ta izhaja med drugim iz dejstva, da znotraj sebe združuje navidezno paradoksalno situacijo sočasne podobnosti in različnosti (angl. *similarity and difference*) (Jenkins, 2008: 17) oziroma na simboličen način »govori«, kam nekdo pripada. Pri tem sta še posebej pomembni kategoriji samopodobe (angl. *self-image*) in Drugih (angl. *Others*) (Golubović, 2011: 25). Jenkins v tem kontekstu razlaga, da pojem identitete zajema več različnih procesov hkrati: vedenje o tem, kdo smo Mi, vedenje o tem, kdo so Drugi, vedenje Drugih o tem, kdo smo Mi in kdo so Oni, mišljenje o omenjenih kategorijah ter njihovo izražanje, najpogosteje skozi jezik (Jenkins, 2008: 5).

V tem kontekstu je zanimivo omeniti, da glede na pripovedi Marka in Milene lahko opazimo obstoj narativa o pogojno rečeno »najdeni srbski identiteti«, katerega pomemben element je tudi praznovanje *slave*. S tem je mišljeno, da je pri njiju opaziti situacijo, v kateri sta odraščala zaznamovana z manjšinsko identiteto. Nato sta si prek tesnih stikov z drugimi Srbi izoblikovala (izbrala) srbsko identiteto. Lahko rečemo, da je izoblikovanje osebne identitete skozi deljene vrednote »svoje« skupnosti v tem primeru povezano z

osebno krizo ter iskanjem varnosti, korenin in boljšega sveta. V tem iskanju sta varnost in stabilnost poiskala v tradiciji, folklori in povezanosti z domačo skupnostjo, da bi presegla občutek »manjšinske identitete« v novem okolju. Ko posameznik ali skupnost doživita krizo, iščeta trdne korenine, ki jih pogosto najdeta v družinski tradiciji in dediščini. To kaže na socialno vlogo dediščine in tradicije (glej Habinc, 2020), ki zagotavljata občutek stabilnosti in prispevata k dobremu počutju posameznika in skupnosti. Marko na primer govori o pomenu družine in srbske skupnosti v Novi Gorici med procesom (samo)identifikacije, pri čemer opaža, da se je v Italiji čutil »izoliranega« in »samega«:

> *Rodil sem se v Italiji, moj prvi jezik je italijanščina, ampak bolj ali manj sem od začetka govoril oba jezika. Z bratom sem vedno govoril italijansko, s starši pa tudi včasih, ampak bolj pogosto srbsko. Šele potem, ko sta se moji starša ločila pred kakšnimi 12 leti, smo začeli bolj govoriti srbsko. Ne vem, zakaj je tako prišlo, ampak v zadnjih letih sem začel pogosto hoditi v Bosno, tudi na slavo in folkloro. [Kako si začel hoditi na folkloro?] Ne vem, najprej sem hotel spoznati naše ljudi malo, v Italiji, kjer živim jih ni toliko in tudi sem nekak bil, ne vem, prvi vtis, malo sem se izoliral od vseh prijateljev, ki jih imam med Italijani in sem nekako ostal sam, kar me je pripeljalo do tega, da sem začel hoditi na folkloro. Imam tudi sorodnico tukaj, preko nje sem začel in si pridobil ljubezen do tega. Hvala Bogu, da se je to zgodilo. Resda nisem znal plesati, niti kol, ampak zdaj je super. Imamo tudi te slave in družabne dogodke, kar je tebi zanimivo, vsi se zberemo in je lepo.* (Marko, 2024)[18]

Na podoben način Milena pravi, da je prej čutila, kot da ni del nečesa »niti tukaj niti tam«, saj se je nahajala »na obeh straneh«, ker del družine živi v Italiji, del pa v Srbiji. Vendar pa je, kot pravi, v zrelejših letih s procesom identifikacije z elementi, kot so folklorni plesi, petje, pravoslavna vera in *slava*, ter diferenciacijo od »italijanske mentalitete«, oblikovala svojo identiteto kot »Srbkinja iz Homolja«:

> *Ko sem bila, joj, najstnica, zdaj imam 22 let in sem že malo prešla skozi ta proces, ampak ko sem bila mlajša, okoli 14, 15 let, mi je bilo to zelo pomembno vprašanje [identitete], ker si nisem mogla točno odgovoriti. /…/ Tako sem gledala in ugotavljala, da se v Srbiji ne počutim popolnoma domače,*

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[18] (srb.): Ja sam rođen u Italiji, moj prvi jezik je italijanski, ali manje više od početka dva jezika, ali na primer s bratom sam uvek pričao italijanski sa roditeljima isto poneked, ali češće i srpski, tek mogu reći prije kad su se moji rastali, prije nekih 12 godina, da smo više ovaj krenuli na našem [srpskom], ne znam zašto se to tako dogodilo, i ništa, zadnjih godina sam isto tako često počeo ići u Bosnu i tako to, više sam i na slavu išao, i folklor ovo ono [A kako si počeo na folklor da ideš?] pa otkud znam, prvo ajde da upoznam naše ljude malo, u Italiji tamo kod mene nema naših ljudi toliko znaš, i onda nekako sam bio nekako prvi utisak, malo sam se izolovao od svih prijatelja što imam Italijana, pa sam kao osto sam jedan period, pa sam rekao ajde da počnem ovde na folklor, imam i rodicu tu isto pa sam preko nje, ovaj počeo i zavolio i hvala Bogu što se to desilo, doduše nisam znao ni igrat, nisam znao ni kolo poigrat, al sad je eto super, imamo i te slave društva to je tebi zanimljivo, okupimo se svi naši tu i bude fino. (Marko, 2024)

ampak v Italiji se tudi ne počutim popolnoma domače. Še posebej, ker me vleče k temu, obožujem folkloro, petje, igranje, pravoslavno vero, vse srbsko. Ko sem videla, da me italijanske pesmi, običaji in vse to niso prav posebej pritegnili, mi je bilo lažje. Zdaj že vem, da je moja identiteta Srbkinja, Vlajna, kakorkoli že, Srbkinja iz Homolja. Zato mi je pomembno, da praznujem [slavo], čeprav sem tukaj. (Milena, 2024)[19]

Milenin in Markov primer govorita o poziciji »bilokalnosti« in »bifokalnosti«, torej »dvodomnosti«, ki, kot piše Čapo, izhaja iz specifične situacije (trans)migrantke in migranta. Namreč, zaradi primarne čustvene navezanosti na prostor izvora in razvijanja čustev do novega okolja pri migrantkah in migrantih pride do pomnožitve lokacij, ki jih doživljajo kot svoj dom (Čapo, 2019: 216). Na podlagi te dvojne in sočasne življenjske reference se pri (trans)migrantkah in migrantih pojavi občutek posedovanja dveh domov v dveh državah oziroma dvojne pripadnosti, s čimer avtorica zavrača tezo, da je prevladujoča pozicija migrantov dvojno izključevanje in status »dvojnega tujca« (Čapo, 2019; Hrobat Virloget, 2021: 222). Čapo nadalje dodaja, da je za takšno liminalno migrantsko pozicijo sočasnega (ne)pripadanja dvema prostoroma značilno tudi občutenje, da se ne najdejo v nobenem od njih: »V določenem trenutku lahko celo zanikajo pripadnost tako eni kot drugi lokaciji, trdeč, da se nenehno nahajajo »med« dvema svetovoma« (Čapo, 2019: 216). Takšno na videz paradoksalno stališče sočasnega občutka dvojne pripadnosti in dvojne izključenosti dejansko priča o heterogenosti (trans)migrantske pozicije (Čapo, 2019: 217), ki se oblikuje zaradi obstoja v liminalnosti in vmesnem prostoru med državo izvora in novim okoljem.

Maja mi je v podobnem duhu »dvodomnosti« (Čapo, 2019) govorila o občutku strahu in »vrženosti« v nov prostor, ki ga je imela, ko se je šele preselila v Novo Gorico. Najtežje ji je bilo, kot pravi, ločiti se od starih staršev, na katere je močno navezana, ter razviti občutek pripadnosti in bližine v novem okolju. Kljub temu da ji je težko vsakokrat, ko se mora ob koncu obiska domovine posloviti od dragih ljudi, kot pozitivno točko »udomačenja« v novem prostoru izpostavlja spoznavanje drugih članov srbske skupnosti v Novi Gorici, povezovanje z mladimi in vadbo folklornih plesov, kar ji je omogočilo, da v okviru kolektiva izrazi tudi intimno blizu vrednote: *»In zdaj, ko me kdo vpraša, ali bi se vrnila tja [v Bosno], rečem: ne vem, ne vem, ne vem prav dobro«* (Maja, 2024).[20] V tem smislu prakticiranje *slave* tako v domovini kot v novem okolju deluje kot medij, na podlagi

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[19] (srb.): Kad sam bila, joj, tinejdžerka, pošto sad imam 22 godine pa sam malo i prošla kroz taj proces, ali kad sam bila mlađa, oko 15, 14 godina, jako mi je bilo bitno to pitanje [identiteta] jer nisam mogla sebi baš da odgovaram /…/ i onda gledam kao okej i najviše mi je bila činjenica što kad budem u Srbiji ne osećam se skroz da sam od tuda ali u Italiji isto se ne osećam skroz od tuda, pogotovo što ja vučem baš ka tome, volim i folklor znači i pevanje i sviranje i igranje, folklorna muzika pravoslavna vera, znači baš baš onako srpsko sve i dok sam to videla malo da mene nije nikako ni privuklo ovaj italijanske pesme ni običaji ni ništa i onda to mi se više još onako olakšalo i sad na primer već mogu, znači već sam onako već mi je jasno da moj identitet je znači ono Srpskinja Vlajna kako god, tako da ono Srpkinja iz Homolja, tako da zato mi je i važno da slavim [slavu] iako sam ovde. (Milena, 2024)

[20] (srb.): i sad bogami kad me neko pita dal bi se vratila dole ja kao ne znam, ne znam, ne znam baš. (Maja, 2024)

katerega Maja utrjuje svojo »bifokalno« pozicijo (glej Čapo, 2019, 216). Pri tem se od začetnega občutka »vrženosti« v nov prostor in dvojne nepripadnosti kasneje identificira z obema prostoroma hkrati, s čimer oblikuje heterogeno (trans)migrantsko identiteto.

SLAVA KOT »PRISOTNA ODSOTNOST« IN NEGATIVNO OBELEŽJE

V popolnoma nasprotnem duhu mi je Dragana povedala, da ni želela prevzeti praznovanja *slave* v novem okolju, saj meni, da bi jo to »zaznamovalo« na enostranski in enodimenzionalen način. V njenem govoru je implicitno poudarjeno, da je pri ustvarjanju svoje identitete upoštevala »pogled drugih«, saj noče biti označena kot drugačna. V tem smislu je njen primer jasen pokazatelj tendence, da se značilnosti okolja, v katerem je in ki ga označuje kot heterogeno in večkulturno, prenesejo tudi na raven identitetnih elementov, saj se (samo)opredeljuje kot »večnacionalni tip«:

> *[Ali ste morda razmišljali o tem, da bi praznovali slavo tukaj, ali da bi vaša otroka to počela?] Ne, ne, jaz [nisem], niti ne bi želela. Emo [ime hčerke] sem peljala na folklorne plese, ko je bila majhna, imela je pet let, ker mi je folklora zelo všeč. Ampak, ker sem iz mešanega zakona, si nisem dovolila, da bi se [omejila] samo na eno, na primer samo na srbsko.* (Dragana, 2024)[21]

Kot vidimo, Dragana kot pomemben dejavnik v svoji odločitvi, da ne praznuje *slave*, navaja tudi to, da je iz »mešanega« zakona, saj je poročena s Hrvatom v katoliški cerkvi. Hkrati implicitno nakazuje, da *slavo* razume kot pomemben element srbske, pravoslavne kulturne identitete, s katero se intimno ne identificira, kar lahko razumemo tudi v kontekstu določenega »žalovanja za Jugoslavijo«, ki ga je omenila v pogovoru: *»Žal mi je, da je Jugoslavija razpadla /.../ ne vem, ni to neka nostalgija, ne morem trditi, ampak nekatere stvari me res zadenejo«* (Dragana, 2024).[22]

Žalovanje za Jugoslavijo in željo, da se oddalji od enostranskih in enoznačnih (identitetnih) oznak ter se približa kategoriji »multinacionalnosti«, lahko v Draganinem primeru razumemo tudi kot posledico strahu pred marginalizacijo in stigmatizacijo, ki bi ju potencialno lahko prineslo prakticiranje rituala iz njene domovine v novem okolju. V tem smislu jasno nakazuje, da se zaveda večkulturne in večetnične narave prostora, v katerega se je priselila, saj pravi, da se v takem prostoru ne želi *»omejevati samo na eno, na primer samo na srbsko«*. Zato lahko tudi občutje žalovanja za Jugoslavijo, ki ga izraža, razumemo kot simbolično manifestacijo prostora, katerega pomembna značilnost je večkulturalnost, ter kot težnjo po preseganju enostranskih (etno-nacionalnih in religioznih)

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[21] (srb.): [Da li ste Vi možda razmišljali da proslavljate slavu, ili Vaša deca?] nene, ne, ja [nisam], niti ne bih htela, ja sam Emu [ime ćerke] vodila na folkloru, da bi išla, bila je mala, imala je 5 godina, meni je tako lepa folklora, ali pošto sam ja iz mešanog braka ja nisam dozvolila, sebi dozvolila, da bi se samo na jedno, da se na primer samo na srpsko [ograničim]. (Dragana, 2024)

[22] (srb.): Meni je žao što se Jugoslavija raspala /.../ ne znam, nije to neka nostalgija, mislim ja ne mogu da tvrdim, ali neke stvari me tako pogode. (Dragana, 2024)

kategorij z namenom doseganja heterogene družbene podobe (glej Perica, 2002). V tem duhu lahko govorimo tudi o njenem razumevanju, da se identitete, podobno kot kulture in tradicije, nenehno spreminjajo. Na ta način lahko v Draganinem primeru (ne)prakticiranja *slave* opazimo identifikacijo tako na materialni (s fizičnim prostorom Nove Gorice) kot tudi na simbolni (z zamišljenim prostorom Jugoslavije) ravni, prostor, iz katerega se je kot majhna izselila (Pančevo v današnji Srbiji), pa ne upošteva kot konstitutivni element pri oblikovanju identitete.

V Draganinem primeru lahko rečemo, da je *slava* kot pomemben konstitutivni element identitete prisotna skozi svojo odsotnost – ona razume pomen *slave*, še posebej v kontekstu dragih ljudi, starih staršev, ki so kljub režimu, ki takšni praksi ni bil (ideološko) naklonjen, uspeli ohraniti njeno kontinuiteto. Vendar pa *slave* ne izbira kot svoje identitetne oznake, čeprav, kot pravi, podpira druge večkulturne prakse – neguje večjezičnost, s svojim možem se kot gostja udeležuje *slav* drugih v Novi Gorici, praznuje katoliške praznike in kot poudarja, nikoli ni čutila sramu zaradi tega, da prihaja iz Srbije, četudi so jo prej klicali »prekleta Bosanka«.

SKLEPNE MISLI

Ta prispevek predstavlja prvo celovito raziskavo v okviru srbske skupnosti v Novi Gorici, ki analizira praznovanje pomembnega rituala *slave* iz domovine in njegove identitetske implikacije v migracijskem kontekstu. Pomembna je tudi kot prispevek k dajanju glasu srbski skupnosti v obmejnem in večkulturnem okolju, kjer se akademski diskurz običajno osredotoča predvsem na slovensko in italijansko skupnost.

S pričujočo raziskavo sem pokazala, da *slava* pri Srbih v Novi Gorici ohranja dvojno vlogo tako verske kot družbene prakse, kar poudarja njen pomen kot ključne transnacionalne vezi, ki povezuje posameznika z domovino. Številni sogovornice in sogovorniki so navedli, da s praznovanjem *slave* čutijo obnovljeno povezanost s krajem svojega izvora. Kljub fizični oddaljenosti ostaja praznovanje *slave* globoko zakoreninjeno v kulturno in čustveno krajino njihove domovine.

Kontinuiteta *slavskih* praks med Srbi v Novi Gorici poudarja pomen tega rituala pri ohranjanju kulturne identitete in kohezije skupnosti v diasporskem kontekstu. Poudarja, da je *slava* ne le verski obred, ampak tudi sredstvo za ohranjanje kulturne dediščine in spodbujanje občutka pripadnosti v manjšinski skupnosti. Vendar nekateri primeri govorijo tudi o poziciji »iskanja« identitete, sočasnega (ne)pripadanja »ne tukaj ne tam«, pri čemer se z ene strani oblikuje pozicija »bifokalnosti« in heterogenosti, po drugi strani pa se oblikuje enotna »srbska« identiteta. Majin primer prikazuje še eno zanimivo stvar – praznovanje *slave* tako »tukaj« kot »tam« dokazuje možnost, da ista tradicija (kulturna praksa) v bifokalnem kontekstu deluje kot identifikacijski medij, hkrati pa predstavlja tudi pomembno transnacionalno nit. Tako »konstitutivna zunanjost« (Hall, 1996: 4) dvostransko vpliva na proces konstrukcije identitete, ki je vedno relacijski proces (prav tam) – po eni strani prek diferenciacije od »Drugih« in po drugi prek identifikacije s podobnimi.

Ko razmišljamo o pomenu in funkciji *slave*, je le-ta povezana predvsem z ohranjanjem vezi z ožjimi družinskimi člani, krepitvijo transnacionalnih vezi in nadaljevanjem priučenega izročila. Z izpostavljanjem posebnosti *slavskega* rituala želijo posamezniki potrditi svojo kulturno posebnost in si s tem zagotoviti pravico do pravične prepoznavnosti v širši družbi. Zato je *slava* za Srbe v Novi Gorici pomemben simbol etnične in kulturne identitete, ki je tesno prepletena z njihovo pravoslavno versko identiteto. Po drugi strani se *slava* zavrača kot negativen označevalec enodimenzionalne identitete, pri čemer gre pogosto za strah pred stigmatizacijo manjšinske identitete v dominantni družbi, kar vodi k izbiri večnacionalne samoopredelitve. Na družinski ravni igra ključno vlogo pri ohranjanju tradicije in se s tem povezuje s širšo srbsko identiteto. Vendar pa obstajajo različni pogledi na to, kako se ta identiteta izraža – nekateri menijo, da je *slava* sama po sebi srbska in osrednja za njihovo identiteto, drugi pa menijo, da je »srbstvo« bolj osebna identifikacija, pri čemer je *slava* potencialno del te identitete.

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IF I DON'T CELEBRATE MY SLAVA, WHO WILL?: THE MEANINGS AND FUNCTIONS OF *SLAVA* AMONG SERBS IN NOVA GORICA IN THE CONTEXT OF (TRANS)MIGRATION EXPERIENCES AND IDENTITY FORMATION

This article examines how Serbs in Nova Gorica perceive the meaning and function of *slava*, a significant ritual, and explores its identity implications in the context of their migration experience. Based on anthropological methods, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and autoethnography, this research highlights the crucial role of *slava* in understanding the transnational experiences and self-determination of Serbs living in Slovenia.

The findings reveal that *slava* serves as both a religious and social practice, acting as a vital transnational thread that connects individuals with their homeland. Many participants emphasized that the ritual fosters a renewed sense of belonging to their place of origin, even when physically distanced. Despite being embedded in a new environment, the celebration of *slava* remains deeply rooted in the cultural and emotional landscape of the Serbian community, balancing nostalgia, pride, and longing.

In Nova Gorica, *slava* reinforces family ties, maintains cultural heritage, and fosters a sense of belonging within the diasporic community. It operates not only as a religious ceremony but also as a means to sustain cultural identity and cohesion. However, the ritual's role in identity formation is complex and multifaceted. For some, *slava* affirms a unified "Serbian" identity, while for others, it represents a more fluid and bifocal perspective, navigating between "here" and "there". This bifocality allows the ritual to function as a medium of identification across spatial and cultural boundaries.

At the same time, some individuals perceive *slava* as a restrictive marker of a one-dimensional identity. In such cases, the ritual is rejected in favor of a multinational self-definition, reflecting an awareness of the potential stigmatization of minority identities within a dominant cultural framework. These divergent approaches to *slava* underscore its dual function as both a means of preserving cultural specificity and a site of negotiation for identity in a multicultural environment.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how *slava* operates as a cultural and transnational practice among Serbs in Nova Gorica. It demonstrates the ritual's pivotal role in sustaining emotional and cultural connections with the homeland while also serving as a lens through which the complexities of migration, identity, and self-determination are articulated and negotiated.

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»A ni to malo strašljivo?« – doživljanje stika z umrlimi

Eva Poklukar

Prispevek z antropološkega vidika obravnava človekovo doživljanje stika z umrlimi, pri čemer to razume kot spontani stik živih posameznikov z umrlimi osebami v različnih pojavnih oblikah – od pomenljivo »resničnih« sanj o umrlih in mentalnega komuniciranja z njimi do čutnih in drugih zaznavanj pokojnikov. Avtorica glede na lastno terensko raziskavo in nekatere tuje študije o posmrtnih stikih prevprašuje splošno razširjeno prepričanje, da so stiki z umrlimi bolj ali manj strašljiva in nezaželena izkušnja. Na podlagi prvoosebnih pričevanj predstavi paleto raznolikih odzivov pričevalcev na taka doživetja in ugotavlja, da sta strah in odpor v trenutku izkušnje najmanj pogosta odziva na stik z umrlimi.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: antropologija, mrtvi, nenavadne izkušnje, stik z umrlimi, posmrtno življenje, strah pred mrtvimi, smrt, pokojniki

This paper explores the personal experience of contact with the dead from an anthropological perspective, defining such contact as spontaneous interactions between living individuals and the dead. These encounters can manifest in various forms, ranging from meaningful dreams and mental communication with the dead to sensory and other perceptions of the deceased. The author challenges the prevalent notion that contact with the dead is inherently frightening and unwelcome, drawing on her own fieldwork as well as relevant studies on afterlife communication. Through the presentation of first-person testimonies, the paper highlights the wide range of reactions to such experiences and demonstrates that fear and rejection are, in fact, among the least common responses to encounters with the dead.

KEY WORDS: anthropology, the dead, extraordinary experiences, contact with the dead, after-life communication, fear of the dead, death, the deseased

Ko ljudem povem, da se moje raziskovalno zanimanje vrti predvsem okoli stika z umrlimi,[1] me najprej presenečeno pogledajo, nato pa vzkliknejo, da gre za resnično zanimivo tematiko – tako se odzove približno polovica mojih sogovornikov, druga polovica pa pripre oči in me zelo resno vpraša: »Ampak – a ni to malo strašljivo?«

Pri obravnavi takih odzivov je smiselno najprej omeniti, da se interpretacije stikov z umrlimi med pripadniki različnih družbenih skupin lahko močno razlikujejo, saj je že odnos do pokojnikov družbeno in kulturno pogojen. Antropološke raziskave na nekaterih

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[1] V angleščini je v tem kontekstu uveljavljen izraz *after-life communication*, ki bi ga lahko dobesedno prevedli kot »posmrtna komunikacija«, a se zdi ustreznejši prevod kar »komunikacija z umrlimi«. V tem članku bom vseeno večinoma operirala z izrazom »stik z umrlimi«, saj zajema širok spekter raznolikih izkušenj in namesto omejitve na dvostransko izmenjavo z umrlimi poudarja spontanost srečanja z njimi.

območjih Afrike, Južne Amerike, Oceanije in drugod so bogato popisale tamkajšnje tradicije stikov z umrlimi. Take etnografije dokazujejo, da se interpretacije stikov z umrlimi med avtohtonimi prebivalci drugih celin bistveno razlikujejo od zahodnih ter so izrazito kulturno pogojene. Za razliko od odklanjanja in strahu, prevladujočih v našem okolju, so v številnih neevropskih skupnostih mrtvi doživljani, sprejeti in vključeni v prakse živih na povsem drugačen način. Po drugi strani pa so v tehnološko razvitih državah (našega) t. i. zahodnega sveta stiki z umrlimi v širši javnosti (a pogosto tudi v strokovni literaturi) še vedno nekaj neobičajnega[2] in se kategorično umeščajo med kontroverzne tematike »nadnaravnega« ali »paranormalnega«.[3] Na te teme se, zaradi manka logike pri njihovem pojasnjevanju (Cooper, 2018: 202) in neujemanja s prevladujočimi zahodnimi znanstvenimi paradigmami (Hayes, Steffen, 2018: 166) oziroma predstavami o tem, kaj je resnično in kaj ne, še vedno gleda skozi prizmo tabujev in stigme.

Vse omenjeno sem občutila tudi sama, ko sem se začela ukvarjati s to tematiko in sem ob pomenkih z znanci in prijatelji pogosto dobila občutek, da jih zgolj omemba umrlih in njihovega spontanega pojavljanja spravlja v resnično zadrego. Kot sem ugotovila pozneje, so bili velikokrat prepričani, da so stiki z umrlimi strašljiva in neprijetna izkušnja – tako so mislili zaradi vzpostavljene analogije s smrtjo in njeno dokončno tragičnostjo, strahom pred minljivostjo in izgubo svojih bližnjih, pa tudi zaradi neobičajnosti in ontološke mejnosti takih doživetij. Kot sta ugotovila tudi Hayes in Steffen (2018: 166), so vse te izkušnje še vedno sporne.

V prispevku se ne bom podrobneje ukvarjala z razlogi za splošno razširjeno prepričanje, da je srečanje z umrlimi grozljiva izkušnja. Mnenje številnih morda sloni na zgodovinsko pogojenih družbenih normah in odnosu do posmrtnega življenja, na dolgotrajnem izpostavljanju in poudarjanju izključno negativnih primerov stikov z umrlimi ali pa na številnih medijskih reprezentacijah interakcij z umrlimi, ki skušajo v gledalcu vzbuditi kar največ strahu, včasih na račun verodostojnosti dejanskega stanja stvari. Vendar pa se glede na raznolikost pričevanj o posmrtnih stikih splošna družbena bojazen pred umrlimi ne zdi povsem upravičena. Nekatere raziskave namreč kažejo, da priljubljenost posmrtnih stikov s pokojniki narašča, saj ljudje vse pogosteje prepoznavajo njihove možne koristi (glej Kwilecki, 2009). Prav tako številne etnografske študije potrjujejo, da so za nekatere pričevalce stiki z umrlimi pozitivni dogodki, saj prinašajo podporo in tolažbo žalujočim, pomagajo pri razreševanju težkih življenjskih situacij, dajejo občutek stalne povezanosti s pokojnimi ter olajšajo prebolevanje težke izgube bližnjih svojcev in prijateljev ipd. (Klass, Steffen, 2018: 4; glej tudi Parker, 2005; Bennett, 1999; Kwilecki, 2009; Klass, Silverman, Nickman, 1996; Kosminsky, 2018; Calhoun, Tedeschi, 1999; Beischel, Mosher, Boccuzzi, 2018).

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[2]   Zanje se zaradi odstopanja od običajnih izkušenj in sprejetih razlag resničnosti uporablja tudi izraz »anomalne« izkušnje (*anomalous experiences*), saj jih pričevalci izkušajo preko »neobičajnih mehanizmov kot so miselna telepatija ali čutne zaznave brez znanega verodostojnega izvora« (Parker, 2005: 258).

[3]   Oba izraza sta že sama po sebi problematična, saj izražata družbeno konstruirano normativnost določenih verovanj, kjer je določeno, kaj (v primeru »nadnaravnega«) še spada pod »naravo«, kaj pa že sega preko, oziroma kaj je (v primeru »paranormalnega«) še »normalno« in družbeno sprejemljivo in kaj ne več (Eaton, 2021: 13, 14; glej tudi Waskul, Eaton, 2018).

Pa vendar – zakaj se večina ljudi stikov z umrlimi še vedno boji? Zdi se, da je bojazen prisotna predvsem pri tistih, ki te izkušnje (še) niso imeli. Pri ljudeh, ki pa izkušnje imajo, ti stiki sprožajo zelo raznolike odzive, ki so med drugim odvisni tudi od tega, ali umrlega poznajo. Gillian Bennett (1999) je na primer ugotavljala, da vdove iz Manchestra srečanja z nepoznanimi umrlimi dojemajo izrazito negativno ter umrle zaznavajo kot škodoželjne, »nezaželene vsiljivce«,[4] srečanja s poznanimi in zanje pomembnimi umrlimi (svojci in prijatelji) pa vidijo kot »obiske dobrih mrtvih«, ki se jih veselijo in jim dovolijo, da ohranjajo svojo nekdanjo vlogo v njihovem življenju (Bennett, 1999: 49, 66, 67). Tudi pričevalci v raziskavi Abby Day (2012) razločujejo med poznanimi in nepoznanimi umrlimi, Hufford (1995: 34–37) pa v svojih delih piše o »obiskih preminulih ljubljenih oseb« ter o »obiskih neidentificiranih ljubečih prisotnosti«. O stikih z umrlimi je v kontekstu nadnaravnega na Islandiji pisala tudi Ana Svetel v *Studia mythologica Slavica* 27 (Svetel, 2024).

Leta 2024 sem v okviru pisanja svoje magistrske naloge z naslovom *Izkušnje stika z umrlimi: prvoosebne pripovedi* (Poklukar, 2024) izvajala terensko etnografsko raziskavo, v kateri sem zbirala prvoosebna pričevanja o nenavadnih izkušnjah s pokojniki. Ob branju tuje strokovne literature in pričevanj o tem sem namreč ugotovila, da tematika v slovenskem prostoru še ni dobro raziskana – kvalitativno terensko etnografsko raziskavo na tem področju je opravljala le prof. dr. Mirjam Mencej (glej Mencej, 2015; Mencej, 2021) –, zato me je zanimalo, do kakšnih ugotovitev bi lahko prišla z lastnim raziskovanjem. Po dogovoru z mentorico prof. dr. M. Mencej sem v začetku leta na oddelku za Etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani pripravila dispozicijo z okvirno začrtano tematiko, nato pa od marca do junija po vsej Sloveniji iskala ljudi, ki so na lastni koži izkusili stik s poznano ali nepoznano umrlo osebo. Ker sem v svoji širši okolici že dlje časa opažala zanimanje za posmrtno življenje, nisem pričakovala težav pri iskanju sogovornikov. Vendar pa se je izkazalo drugače, saj sem se za intervju lahko dogovorila le s tistimi, ki so me že poznali, ali pa so mi zaradi priporočil drugih prijateljev zaupali. Ker sem želela priti v stik tudi s širšim krogom (meni nepoznanih) sogovornikov, sem na oglasne deske po različnih predelih Ljubljane nalepila male oglase, v katerih sem vse z izkušnjami pozivala k sodelovanju v raziskavi. Ker odziva na te oglase ni bilo (prejela nisem niti enega klica, čeprav je bilo nekaj listkov s telefonsko številko odtrganih), sem poziv objavila še na družbenem omrežju Facebook v eno od skupin alternativne duhovnosti, ki mi jo je predlagala znanka. Odzvala se je ena oseba: ženska srednjih let, ki je trdila, da komunicira s pokojniki. Po spletu naključij sem prek vez spoznala še eno, mlajšo odraslo posameznico, ki je prav tako trdila, da je medij.

Na koncu sem zbrala sedem pričevanj, dobro polovico sogovornikov sem našla naključno v svojem okolju: med prijatelji, sorodniki in drugimi znanci, ko je pogovor nanesel na mojo raziskovalno temo. Razen enega spletnega stika sem do ostalih pričevalcev prišla s tehniko snežne kepe oziroma priporočili. Uporabila sem tudi metodo opazovanja z udeležbo. S posameznicami – naključje je hotelo, da je vseh sedem ženskega spola – sem

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[4]   Nepoznane umrle so označevale tudi z izrazi kot so »duhovi« ali »prikazni« (Bennett, 1999).

posnela pogovore v obliki polstrukturiranih intervjujev, v katerih so z mano delile svoje nenavadne izkušnje z mrtvimi.

Pričevalke prihajajo iz treh različnih delov Slovenije (v največji meri z Gorenjske, nekaj pa iz Osrednjeslovenske in s Koroške). Njihov starostni razpon je od 23 do 66 let, enakomerno zastopan po desetletjih, razen obdobja tridesetih let, ki šteje tri pripadnice. Starejša polovica pričevalk ima enega ali dva otroka. Politično so različno usmerjene. Dobra polovica jih prihaja s podeželja, ostale živijo v mestih, prav vse pa pripadajo srednjemu ekonomskemu razredu. Vse razen ene pričevalke je bolj ali manj zaznamovalo odraščanje v tradiciji rimskokatoliške veroizpovedi, čeprav se je stopnja kasnejšega upoštevanja verskih dogem razlikovala od posameznice do posameznice. Razen dveh so ostale pričevalke v odraslem življenju (pogosto tudi zaradi lastne izkušnje stika z umrlimi) opustile družinsko religiozno pripadnost. Kljub temu da se ne strinjajo s krščansko interpretacijo posmrtnega življenja, zavračajo ateizem in ostajajo na nek (svoj) način »verujoče«, saj so zaradi lastnega duhovnega izkustva neomajno prepričane v obstoj duhovnega sveta. Čeprav same niso uporabljale identifikacijskih oznak ali poimenovanj, njihova prepričanja sovpadajo z idejami alternativnih duhovnosti (za katera se uporablja tudi angleški izraz *new age*), s katerimi so se srečale v različnih knjigah, ki obravnavajo to tematiko.

Na izkušnje stika z umrlimi, o katerih so mi pripovedovale, so se kljub temu odzivale zelo različno in glede na različne dejavnike – poznanost umrlega, starost ob izkušnji ipd. Njihove pripovedi so me presenetile, saj se je izkazalo, da strah ni bil najpogostejše čustvo, ki so ga občutile ob stiku z mrtvimi, prav tako pa je večina stikov potekala brez pretiranih (ali negativnih) čustev. Prav to me je spodbudilo, da v pričujočem prispevku problematiziram splošno prepričanje, da so izkušnje stika z umrlimi nekaj neizpodbitno srhljivega in nezaželenega. Najprej bom opredelila različne oblike stika s pokojniki, nato pa na primeru sedmih pričevanj prikazala raznoliko paleto doživljanja in odzivov na take nenadejane stike. S tem želim dokazati, da srečanja z umrlimi niso vselej zgolj zastrašujoča izkušnja, temveč so lahko tudi pomirjujoče in prijetno doživetje.

IZKUŠNJE STIKA Z UMRLIMI

Strokovnjaki stik z umrlimi v splošnem opredeljujejo kot spontani pojav oz. stik živih posameznikov z umrlimi osebami[5] (Penberthy, Pehlivanova, Kalelioglu, 2023). Zavzemajo lahko različne oblike: od miselnega prejemanja sporočil umrlih, pomenljivo »resničnih« sanj o umrlih in spontanih misli v zvezi z njimi, vizualnega in zvočnega pojavljanja pokojnikov (videnje ali slišanje pokojnikovega glasu), zaznavanja specifičnih vonjav, povezanih z umrlimi, občutka prisotnosti umrlih ali drugih senzoričnih izkušenj (na primer občutek njihovega dotika) pa do prekognitivnih vizij,[6] interpretacij simbolnih sporočil

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[5] Različni strokovnjaki stik in komunikacijo z umrlimi različno opredeljujejo: glej npr. tudi Kwilecki, 2009; Parker, 2005; Guggenheim, Guggenheim, [1995] 2008; Streit-Horn, 2011.

[6] V ezoteriki *prekognicija* pomeni sposobnost napovedovanja prihodnosti, v psihologiji pa označuje predhodno spoznanje.

in dogodkov (tudi sinhronost določenih pomembnih dogodkov ali pojavov), motenega delovanja elektronskih naprav ter drugih nenavadnih in nerazložljivih (naravnih) pojavov (Bennett, 1999: 109; Parker, 2005: 258; Stroebe, Schut, 2005: 477; Thomas, 2007: 27, 29, 31, 33; Kwilecki, 2009: 101; Cooper, 2018: 202; Beischel, Mosher, Boccuzzi, 2018: 178; Blécourt, 2024: 1–4). Stiki s pokojniki so univerzalne narave: pojavljajo se v vseh kulturah, družbenih slojih in starostnih kategorijah ter niso pogojeni z izobrazbo, verskimi prepričanji ali spolom (Streit-Horn, 2011 po Beischel, Mosher, Boccuzzi, 2018: 178). V vseh primerih gre za »občutek živečega posameznika, da izkuša neposreden stik s klinično že umrlo osebo, ki ga sam ni iskal ali izzval in pri katerem ni bilo vmešavanja drugih oseb, ki imajo sposobnosti komunikacije z umrlimi (medijev, šamanov, jasnovidcev …), niti niso bili uporabljene nobene naprave ali rituali, ki bi omogočili stike z umrlimi« (Poklukar, 2024 po Penberthy, Pehlivanova, Kalelioglu, 2023).

V raziskavi je bila paleta odzivov na izkušnjo stika z umrlimi pri pričevalkah zelo raznolika – od začudenja, vznemirjenja, strahu in obremenjenosti pa do dejavnega odziva, občutka pomirjenosti ter vtisa, da gre za nekaj povsem »normalnega«. Njihovi odzivi so se razlikovali glede na več dejavnikov, med drugim glede na poznavanje in bližino z umrlim v času njegovega življenja; glede na predhodne izkušnje, seznanjenost in držo do tematike duhovnosti in posmrtnega življenja ter glede na kontekst in okoliščine izkušnje same. Da bi dobili čim jasnejši pregled nad doživljanjem izkušnje stika z umrlimi, odzive mojih sogovornic v nadaljevanju navajam razvrščene glede na njihova prevladujoča občutja v trenutku izkušnje – ta občutja zapisujem z emskimi termini, torej kakor so jih poimeno-vale moje sogovornice same. Naslednjih pet podpoglavij vsebuje pripovedi pričevalk, naslovljena pa so po čustvu, ki so ga najintenzivneje občutile ob stiku z umrlimi: strah in neugodje; vznemirjenost; (za)čudenje; umirjenost in občutek »normalnosti«; občutek preobremenjenosti in dejavna pomoč umrlim. Na koncu dodajam še odstavek o *zavračanju* takih izkušenj nekaterih bližnjih družinskih članov mojih sogovornic.

STRAH IN NEUGODJE

Psihološke definicije strah opredeljujejo kot neprijetno čustvo, saj ga oseba doživlja kot boleče in negativno. Strah naj bi bil odziv na zaznano nevarnost, ki je lahko realna, zunanja ali pa namišljena (Psihološki raziskovalni inštitut, 2021). Za občutek bolečine se lahko uporabi tudi izraz neugodje, ki pomeni čustveno, telesno ali duševno stisko (Inštitut za razvoj človeških virov, b. d.). Le tri pričevalke v moji raziskavi so poročale, da jih je stik s pokojniki prestrašil. Ena od pričevalk, Eneja[7] (ki trdi, da je medij in da z umrlimi komunicira vsakodnevno), v tem kontekstu izpostavlja splošno zmotno prepričanje, da naj bi umrli žive prihajali strašit. Po njenem se namreč to dogaja zelo redko in je takšno prepričanje do umrlih celo krivično.

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7 Imena vseh mojih sogovornic so v prispevku zaradi zagotavljanja anonimnosti psevdonimizirana, nekatere druge, za raziskavo nebistvene podrobnosti, so prav zato spremenjene.

Mislim, dostikrat se mi ne zdi fer, ker [umrle] prikazujejo, kakor da prideje samo strašit. In jaz si mislim: »Ne, ne prideje samo strašit,« pismo. Zelo redko prideje strašit. Samo od same duše je odvisno, na kakšen način bo pristopila in če zna pristopiti. Seveda če bo izbrala nek določen način, se lahko otrok tudi ustraši, ker ne ve [kaj se dogaja].

Eneja meni, da je predvsem otroški strah pred umrlimi povezan z načinom pokojnikovega pojavljanja in z dejstvom, da otroci ne razumejo, kaj se dogaja v trenutku stika s pokojniki. Strah je bil v moji raziskavi prisoten v primeru dveh pričevalk, ki sta izkušnjo z mrtvimi doživeli v zgodnjem otroštvu; tako Anuša kot Marta pravita, da sta bili premladi, da bi lahko razumeli ali si razložili dogajanje okoli njiju.

V zgodnjem otroštvu je Marta po smrti svojega dedka v vhodni veži velikokrat slišala škrtanje v ključavnici, odpiranje vrat in hojo po stopnicah. Ostali družinski člani so ji namignili, da gre verjetno za pokojnega dedka, ki je prišel na obisk, a kljub temu da je imela tega dedka zelo rada, si je želela, da vse skupaj preneha. Nenehno zaznavanje pokojnikove prisotnosti jo je navdajalo s tesnobo in strahom, bila je celo prepričana, da se ji blede. Šele pozneje je kot odrasla o svoji izkušnji premislila in si jo pojasnila.

Ko se je prvič nekaj takega zgodilo, me je bilo zelo strah ja. Samo to sem bila še otrok, a veš. /.../ Tisto res nisem hotela več, da pač slišim te stopinje in to, jaz sem kar mislila, da se mi bo zmešalo na neki točki [smeh]. Čeprav so vsi rekli: »Saj ata si poznala!« Ampak meni je bilo to tak [dokaz]: »Aha, res je nekaj«. Zdelo se mi je, da je to nekaj nenavadnega, da to ljudje po navadi ne doživljajo, uuu, to pa ni kar tako. Pa še tisti čas sem ogromno te Dosje X in te paranormalne pojave [na televiziji] gledala [smeh] in potem me je bilo res strah no, dokler nisem malo predelala to, da stvari se dogajajo, samo da niso ravno take, kakor jih v filmih in v serijah gledamo.

Anuša je kot sirota pogosto močno pogrešala svoja starša. Ko je bila stara deset let, je v dnevni sobi pregledovala stare albume s slikami in naenkrat je začutila izredno močno prisotnost svoje pokojne matere – ob tem je imela občutek, da se je »zrak začel zgoščevati«. Ker ni vedela, kaj se dogaja, se je močno preplašila.

Takrat sem veliko razmišljala od mami, pa njene stvari sem gledala, slike pa zlatnino. In potem sem bila na eni točki zelo osamljena in sem začela čutiti eno zelo močno prisotnost in me je zelo prestrašila ta prisotnost, tako da sem se mogla streznit, da sem tako odslovila to. Nisem več želela tega čutit, ker me je bilo strah. Nisem vedela, kaj je to je. /.../ Zelo sem jokala, pa močno sem mami pogrešala in potem je začel [biti] ta občutek močno prisoten in me je bilo strah. Zdelo se mi je neznano, pa mami hkrati. In nisem, nisem mogla tega sprejet, ne vem. /.../ Samo strah me je bilo, samo strahu se spomnim. Strahu neznanega in močnega, in potem tega, da sem ga odgnala. In sem se tako streznila in nehala jokat in nehala na to mislit

in začela nekaj drugega delat, da bi presekala to. Strah me je bilo. Zdaj ne vem, res je bil močan občutek, in potem se je stopnjeval tudi ta občutek strahu istočasno. /.../ Hudo željo po kontaktu z njo sem sicer imela. Nisem pa zmogla potem tega, kar se je začelo naprej dogajati. Zelo me je prestrašilo, kot da nisem več imela kontrole nad stvarmi.

Ko se je občutek prisotnost pokojnice stopnjeval, je po Anušinih besedah hkrati naraščal tudi njen strah. Naposled je iz bojazni želela prekiniti stik s pokojno materjo in odgnati neznane občutke, zato je zbistrila svoje misli in jih preusmerila. Meni, da takrat ni bila zmožna sprejeti stika s pokojnico, čeprav si ga je v resnici že dolgo časa močno želela. Ko se je to dogajalo, je čutila, da ji situacija uhaja izpod nadzora. Anuša je prepričana, da je na njen prestrašen odziv (poleg rosne mladosti) vplivalo tudi dejstvo, da do takrat ni verjela v življenje po smrti, hkrati pa je vero v presežno avtomatično povezovala z institucionaliziranimi oblikami religije.

Ta vera mi je bolj to strahospoštovanje pomenila, da moraš biti tako pa tako pa tako, pa priden, pa ne vem kaj. Da moram res vse prav narediti, da moram biti pridna. Ni mi bila nekaj podpornega, ne nekaj lepega, ampak bolj strahovlada. Tako sem tudi to doživljala in res sem vedno mislila, da moram vse pravilno narediti, da ne bom kaznovana. No, te prisotnosti, ki sem jo začutila, pa sigurno nisem čutila kot kazen, ampak kot eno močno silo, ki je nisem poznala in sem se jo bala. In strah me je bilo, kaj bo z mano, kaj bo ta sila naredila zdaj meni. Tega me je bilo strah.

Zaradi vpliva rimskokatoliškega okolja je vse duhovno doživljala z velikim strahospoštovanjem, zato jo je stik s pokojnico močno prestrašil. Poleg strahu, da bi ji neznana sila kaj storila, je bila po svojem mnenju tedaj še premlada, da bi se lahko pomirjeno odzvala in jasno zaznala, kaj se dogaja.

Občutja strahu in nelagodja so bila pri pričevalkah prisotna tudi, ko je šlo za prvo izkušnjo stika s pokojniki. Tako je bilo z Vesno, ki je vse od smrti svojih staršev po prazni hiši velikokrat slišala nepojasnjene zvoke (hoja po stopnicah, zapiranje oken ipd.), nekoč je celo zaslišala, kako jo je njena, takrat že nekaj mesecev mrtva mati, glasno poklicala po imenu. Poleg tega Vesna prepoznava tudi številna znamenja, ki jih razume kot sporočila pokojnikov (npr. ptičja peresa, bele vrtnice). Pravi, da se je sprva stika z umrlimi zelo bala, saj ni vedela, kaj se dogaja. Nepojasnjeni glasovi so jo plašili, ker si jih ni znala razložiti: »*Na začetku sem se itak tega zelo bala, ker mi je bilo tako nepoznano.*«

VZNEMIRJENOST

Vznemirjenost je stanje, v katerem so možgani brez jasnega vzroka zelo aktivni in vzburjeni, kar se kaže kot nemir, živčno vzburjenje, neugodje, tesnoba ali napetost (Inštitut za razvoj človeških virov, b. d.). Takšno vznemirjenje je ob izkušnji dvakrat doživela Silvija.

Pri prvi izkušnji je šlo za slišno komunikacijo s pokojno živaljo – njena družina je imela psa, ki je nenadoma umrl. Tri dni po smrti je Silvija hkrati z drugimi družinskimi člani zaslišala jasen in glasen pasji lajež, značilen za njihovega pokojnega psa. Najprej je bila prepričana, da ima prisluhe, nato pa je ugotovila, da so tudi ostali v prostoru slišali enako. Rekla je, da se je »začela tresti«, s sestro pa sta si padli v objem, da bi se pomirili in opogumili. Ni vedela, kako bi si razložila dogodek, vendar so potem skupno presodili, da se je pokojni kuža prišel še zadnjič poslovit.

Do drugega dogodka je prišlo med družinskim kosilom, ko se je vsakdanji pomenek sprevrgel v manjši prepir, pri katerem so vsi začeli govoriti eden čez drugega. Takrat pa je nenadoma z velikim truščem na tla padla omarica, polna steklovine, ki je bila pritrjena na zid v jedilnici. V tišini so se spogledali in jedli naprej, vsak pa je pri sebi premleval možne razloge za dogodek – preveč so bili pretreseni, da bi takoj pospravili črepinje. Omarica je bila sicer že več kot leto dni pritrjena na steno, vzvodi in nosilci pa so bili po poznejšem pregledu popolnoma trdno pričvrščeni na svoja mesta. Zaradi sočasnosti in nenavadnosti dogodka so bili vsi pretreseni: »*Najprej sploh nismo pospravili, ker nam je bilo tako strašljivo.*« Ker je šlo za fizično nerazložljiv pojav, je dogodek v družini sprožil razpravo, ali obstaja nekakšna »nevidna pomoč pokojnikov«, in nazadnje so padec omarice označili kot znamenje oziroma opozorilo, naj se ne prepirajo in naj se imajo raje radi.

(ZA)ČUDENJE

Čudenje se kot kratkotrajen čustveni odziv navadno pojavlja ob nenadnih, nenavadnih dogodkih, ki jih doživimo (Inštitut za razvoj človeških virov, b. d.). Ko se je Marta v mladostnih letih ponovno srečala s pokojniki, je ti niso več prestrašili, čeprav je šlo za umrle, ki jih ni poznala. Vedela je namreč, za kaj gre, in tudi ideja o posmrtnem življenju ji ni bila več tuja, saj je o tem prebrala številne knjige in članke na spletu. Tako sedaj ob stiku s pokojniki »ne čuti strahu, ampak tudi ne umirjenosti« – samo »malo čudno« in »nenavadno« se ji vse skupaj zdi. Imela je dve nenavadni izkušnji: prva je bila stik z umrlim moškim v dolgem plašču, ki jo je nekaj časa obiskoval v njenem stanovanju, ko je bila stara okoli dvajset let. Obraza moškega ni prepoznala, saj je nosil velik črn klobuk, vendar pa se ji je dozdevalo, da ga morda sploh nima. Vsakič se je molče usedel na rob kavča, nato pa čez nekaj časa brez besed tudi odšel.

> *Videla in slišala sem ga [smeh]. Ja, spomnim se, ko sem bila v svojem stanovanju, da me je dostikrat obiskoval, ampak jaz ne vem, za katero osebo gre, samo da me je dostikrat obiskoval nek moški, ki je sedel na sedežno v dnevni sobi, pa imel je klobuk gor, pa dolg plašč. Silhueta tega je bila, taka temna senca, pač tako, kot da je neka črnina no, na ta način. Ampak ta klobuk je imel zmeraj gor, tako da ga nikoli nisem mogla videti v obraz, samo klobuk je bil, pa tako dol je gledal. Samo hodil je do mene in se je usedel in bil tam, vedno na istem koncu kavča se je usedel.*

Marta se je z neznancem skušala pogovarjati, ampak od temne silhuete ni nikoli dobila odgovora.

> *Jaz sem se samo usedla zraven, da bi ga kdaj pogledala, uzrla, če bi sploh lahko bila zmožna videt, ne vem, obraza, nekega obrisa obraza, ampak ga ni imel. Tako zelo je bilo čudno, sam plašč in klobuk. /…/ Ampak ga nisem dojemala kot škodoželjnega, a veš, ni bilo tisto začutiti »o, res te nočem tukaj v prostoru«, ali pa »kaj delaš tukaj«.*

Zmedo in bojazen, ki ju je Marta pri srečanju s pokojniki občutila kot otrok, je nadomestilo preprosto čudenje in zavedanje, da gre le za srečanje z umrlo osebo, ki se morda ne počuti dobro. Ob prisotnosti neznanega umrlega se je začudila, nato pa odzvala povsem umirjeno in trezno. Do umrlega ni čutila nobenega odpora, niti strahu, saj ga »ni dojemala kot škodoželjnega«.

Drugi stik z neznanim umrlim je imela, ko se je sprehajala ob reki: naenkrat ni več mogla nadaljevati poti – fizično ni zmogla premakniti nog. Imela je občutek, kot bi se v nekaj zaletela. Nazadnje se je obrnila, da bi se vrnila domov, takrat pa je za svojim hrbtom začutila, da »nekaj hodi za njo«, kot nekakšen »obris«, ki se želi »prisesati na njeno energijo«. Popolnoma enako se je zgodilo vsakič, ko se je sprehajala po tej poti, kar se ji je zdelo le »zelo čudno«. Pozneje je izvedela, da je tudi njen fant na približno istem kraju ob reki imel podobno izkušnjo s čutenjem nenavadne prisotnosti.

> *Smo imeli tam, kjer sem prej živela, eno pot ob reki dol, kjer sem hodila. In včasih enostavno nisem mogla po tisti poti naprej stopat. Kot da se v nekaj zabijem, tako, a veš, ne gre, ne gre, ne gre naprej. In potem, ko sem se obrnila, da grem nazaj do svojega bloka, je pač ta stvar tako prav hodila, čutila sem za sabo nek tak obris, nekaj, kar hodi za mano, a veš. Kot da bi se hotel nekdo prisesati na mojo energijo… To se mi je vsakič zgodilo, ko sem potem šla tja na sprehod. Vsakič na neki točki jaz ne morem več naprej stopit, moram se obrnit pač domov in potem gre ta stvar kar z mano, a veš. Tako zelo čudno. Prav vedno isti scenarij.*

Martina babica pa naj bi doživela nenavaden stik s svojim pokojnim možem. Po njegovi smrti je namreč vsak večer pred spanjem začutila, kako se je žimnica na drugi strani zakonske postelje ugrezinila, kot nekdaj pod težo telesa njenega moža. Čeprav se je pojavu močno čudila, pa pri tem ni občutila nobenega strahu: »*Tisti del postelje je vsak večer šel dol in je ona čutila tisto težo, a veš, kot da se uleže. In je bilo to zelo čudno, a ne. Ni pa bilo nekega strahu prisotnega.*«

Anuša je med šotorjenjem s prijatelji v Ospu doživela vizualni stik z umrlim, ki ga ni poznala. Sredi noči se je zbudila in na široki plezalni steni zagledala velikansko črno postavo. Da bi se prepričala, da ne gre za privid ali sanje, se je uščipnila in si pomela oči, a črna pojava je bila še vedno tam. Nato je postava odprla nekakšna vrata v kamnito steno, in ko se je namenila skozi, jo je Anuša vprašala, kam gre. Ne da bi se zmenila zanjo,

je postava vstopila skozi vrata v kamnito steno, Anušo pa pustila brez odgovora. Ob stiku s tem nepoznanim pokojnikom Anuše ni bilo strah, se ji je pa vse skupaj zdelo zelo »nenavadno« in jo je zbegalo, saj ni vedela, kaj naj bi videni prizor pomenil. Večkrat si je pomela oči, nato pa brez razlage zaspala nazaj.

> *Ne vem, kaj je bilo. To sem se sredi noči zbudila, gledam, taka ogromna postava. To je bila res velika, štiri metre velika. To smo bili v Ospu, plezali smo. Pod steno smo naštimali spalne vreče pa spali smo. Pa leče sem imela notri, ker so me zelo oči bolele. In vem, da ko sem oči odprla, sem si jih močno pomela, »a jaz to zdaj vidim, kaj, ali imam zdaj privid?« Ne, to ni, pa sem potem zamižala, pa še enkrat pogledam, pa desetkrat sem to naredila, pa to je tam bil. Ena črna postava, štiri metre velika. Ogromna. In potem kakor da je vrata odprl in skozi steno je šel. In sem potem rekla: »Kam greš?« Jaz točno vem, ker mi je bilo tako nenavadno, da je to res bil tam, ker sem se res velikokrat tako skloftala, saj ne spim! Pa še vseeno ga vidim tam. Pa vrata je odprl. Potem pa jaz pravim, ker je bilo res po tolikšnem času, »kam greš?« Da rečem potem: »kam pa greš«. To je pa iz mene šlo ven. Kam greš? Zato, ker je bilo to tako res prisotno, da sem potem že vprašala, ja kam pa zdaj greš. V glavnem, drugi dan je prijateljica rekla, da me je slišala, da sem rekla »kam greš«. Veš, ker so vsi spali. Pa ni odgovoril, samo notri v steno je šel. /.../ To mi je bilo tako nenavadno, da je to res bil tam. Nič mi ni bilo jasno. Čisto sem bila zbegana. /.../ Pa ne, ni me bilo čisto nič strah. Potem sem pa naprej šla spat, ker sem si rekla: »Ne vem, kaj naj si mislim.«*

UMIRJENOST IN OBČUTEK »NORMALNOSTI«

Umirjenost je po psihološki definiciji stanje spokojnosti in stabilnega zadovoljstva, ko ni nikakršnih motenj ali vznemirjenja (Inštitut za razvoj človeških virov, b. d.). Pomirjenost ob stiku z umrlimi in občutek, da gre za nekaj povsem »normalnega«, sta se pri mojih sogovornicah pogosto prepletala. Tudi Abby Day (2012: 76, 77) je ugotavljala, da so pričevalci v njeni raziskavi ob obiskih pokojnih bližnjih kljub nenavadnosti izkušnje imeli občutek, da gre za normalno in povsem vsakdanjo izkušnjo. Tako je čutila tudi Klementina, ki je po nenadni smrti svojega skoraj polnoletnega sina v prometni nesreči še približno pol leta izrazito čutila njegovo (po njenih besedah skoraj fizično) prisotnost vsakič, ko se je usedla v svoj avto:

> *Neprestano sem imela občutek, da se je on z mano vozil v avtu. Takrat ko sem bila v avtu, imaš pa pač razdaljo, kakršno koli imaš, in takrat sem bila umirjena in sem imela nenehno občutek, da se on z mano pelje. Fizično sem ga čutila. In tisto, da je on umrl, sploh ne dojameš. In se je ene pol leta to dogajalo, neprestano. Ves čas sva komunicirala! Ves čas! To je bilo miselno.*

> *Mislim, tako kot takrat, ko je sam vozil. To si čutil energijo celo. Jaz sem*
> *jo neprestano čutila. Pol leta. Ampak potem pa res ne več. Takrat se je*
> *poslovil in potem pa tudi te energije ni bilo več.*

Sinovo energijo je čutila tik ob sebi, na sovoznikovem (sicer praznem) sedežu. Med njimi naj bi potekala zelo jasna miselna komunikacija; med temi pomenki sta se »vse zmenila«, kot bi bil fant še živ. Po šestih mesecih se je pojavil v njenih sanjah in se od nje poslovil (čeprav so bile »zgolj sanje«, so se ji zdele presunljivo resnične in povsem drugačne od običajnih sanjskih podob). Odtlej ni nikoli več čutila njegove prisotnosti – ne v avtu ne kje druge. Pravi, da pri izkušnji stika s pokojnikom ni imela nikoli občutka, da gre za nekaj izrednega in nenavadnega – nasprotno, sanje so se ji zdele povsem realne, sinova navzočnost v avtu pa prav tako resnična in po njenih besedah celo pomirjujoča. Prisotno ni bilo niti vznemirjenje, niti pretirana žalost, prej je imela Klementina občutek, da gre za nekaj povsem »normalnega«.

> *Pri meni je bil takrat pač samo zraven, neprestano je bil [zraven nje v avtu].*
> *Ampak nikoli ne tako, da bi rekla, da bi bil [pokojni sin] v razpoloženju, da*
> *je prestrašen, pa da potem odide – … ne, zmeraj je to bil tako pomirjujoč*
> *[občutek]. Nič takšnega, kot da je zdaj pa strašna žalost tukajle, ali pa,*
> *ne vem, vznemirjenje tàko. To je bilo meni prej pomirjujoče, da je bil tam.*
> *Nekaj normalnega, ja.*

Pri naslednjem primeru pa lahko vidimo, da tudi stika z nepoznano umrlo osebo pričevalka ni občutila kot izreden dogodek. Silvija se je nekoč v otroštvu sredi noči zbudila, saj je začutila, da jo nekdo opazuje. Odprla je oči in sredi sobe zagledala visoko črno postavo. Ta je še malo postala, nato pa stekla skozi zaprta balkonska vrata. Naslednjo noč se je dogodek ponovil, vendar pa je nastopila druga, malce nižja črna silhueta (Silvija je nagonsko vedela, da ne gre za isto pojavo). Obe sta bili v človeške oblike, a precej večji in nista imeli obraza. Obakrat sta počakali, da se je Silvija zavedala njune prisotnosti, nato pa izginili.

> *Prvi dan je bil zelo visok. Ravno to je bil point, pač samo taka črna pojava,*
> *pa skoraj do stropa je bil. In zelo ozek in samo bil je tam tako. In potem*
> *ko sem ga videla, je samo malo še postal in potem je šel tako proti vratom*
> *na balkon in potem je samo zginil. Skozi vrata, zaprta vrata, ponoči. Ni*
> *imel obraza. Taka črna pojava je bil, ampak v obliki človeka. Ampak ne*
> *čisto, pač tako, v obliki človeka, ampak precej višji, tako, čisto do stropa,*
> *res zelo visok. In potem naslednji dan je pa še eden prišel, je bil pa ravno*
> *malo nižji od njega. Tako ravno malo pod stropom je bil. Ni bil pa isti kot*
> *prvič. To pa vem po občutku – ker še nekdo drug je bil. Ampak je naredil*
> *identično stvar. Pač pojavil se je, sem ga videla, vstala sem sredi noči,*
> *ravno to. Sredi noči me je to zbudilo in sem se tako gor postavila in gledala*
> *in tako ravno toliko časa je bil, da sem lahko dojela, da ne sanjam ali pa*

da ne spim. Sem ga tako gledala in potem tako počasi, samo tako, a veš
prav naglo, tako… šjuu, šjuu, tako je šel tam skozi vrata.

Silvije izkušnja ni niti malo pretresla ali prestrašila, ravno nasprotno. Bila je povsem umirjena, čeprav je imela komaj osem let in je bila sicer precej plašen otrok, ki se je bal teme in sredi noči hodil spat v materino posteljo, ker se je bala, da bi »kdo prišel v njeno sobo«. Presenetljivo pa je po izkušnji dejanskega stika z nepoznanima postavama ostala čisto mirna in je celo sama zaspala nazaj:

Zelo je bilo vse umirjeno … tudi zelo lepo sem potem zaspala nazaj. Videla
sem to, okej, sem rekla, in sem se obrnila in zaspala. Ker [ostale noči] mi
je bilo po navadi grozno, po navadi sem vedno neke oči in sence gledala,
pa šla potem k mami spat.

Prav zaradi mirnega doživljanja dogodka je Silvija prepričana, da je bilo njeno videnje resnično. Zavedala se je, da ji neznani postavi ne želita škodovati, njuna prisotnost pa se ji je celo zdela nekaj naravnega in normalnega. Čutila je, da sta »del vsega«, in čeprav je pogosto imela ponoči grozljive privide in nočne more (za katere je vedela, da niso resnični in so zgolj plod njenih blodenj), se črnih pojav ni prestrašila, saj je šlo za drugačne vrste izkušnjo – po njenih besedah je zanesljivo vedela, da se ne dogaja le v njeni glavi.

Zelo sem bila mirna. Zelo. Ravno zato mi je bilo čudno, ker jaz sem
drugače zelo pogosto imela nočne môre. Ravno to … ravno takrat sem
bila zelo mirna. Ravno zato mi je bilo zelo čudno. Ravno zato sem verjela
temu najbolj. Zato ker prej je bilo vse kakor eni prividi, ki sem jih imela v
glavi malo, a veš tisto, ko imaš ene občutke, zdaj bo pa tam nekaj … videla
sem nekaj, ampak vem, da se mi je bledlo. Tisto, ko veš, da se ti blede, da
pač ni resnično, ampak … ravno to, ker to je pa bilo zelo resnično in tudi
spominjam se, da sem čisto na drugačen način povedala mami. Pač samo
tako, da je nekdo prišel.

V naslednjih pričevanjih Anuša in Vesna pripovedujeta o svojih občutkih, da njuni pokojni starši na nek način še vedno ostajajo z njima. Anuša prisotnost svoje pokojne matere ob sebi občuti že nekaj časa. Dolgo se sicer ni zavedala, da je dotični občutek prav ta materina nevidna podpora in spremstvo, vendar se sedaj v odraslosti pogosto obrača k njej po oporo ali tolažbo v težkih trenutkih. Svojega prvega stika s pokojnico se je v otroštvu sicer ustrašila, ampak z leti je strah splahnel – danes pomirjena živi z občutkom njene stalne prisotnosti: »*V bistvu sem se sama dokopala do tega miru na koncu. In potem čutiš tudi bolj to prisotnost njeno v ljubečem, nič drugega. Ker vem, da je ta podpora z njene strani, čutim to* [prisotnost pokojnice] *kot mir.*«

Tudi Vesna pravi, da ima vse od smrti svojih staršev naprej občutek, da sta še vedno ob njej. Njuno prisotnost zaznava prek različnih simbolnih predmetov (kovanci, peresa, vrtnice),

ki se pojavljajo v njenem življenju, znamenj v naravi, v motenem delovanju električnih naprav ipd. Najpogosteje občuti prisotnost svoje matere, čeprav je že sedem let mrtva; ta jo pogosto z znamenji opozarja na prihajajoče dogodke, nekoč pa jo je celo poklicala po imenu: »*A veš, ta občutek, da je še zmeraj z mano … Čutim jo. /…/ Pa slišala sem, kot da nekdo hodi, ali pa kot da nekaj poka. Zdaj mi je pa že čisto navadno to.*«

O identiteti pokojnice se je prepričala pri prijateljici, ki je medij. Ta je dejala, da gre res za dušo njene matere. Vesna pravi, da se je njenih znamenj sprva precej bala, ampak se je sčasoma tako privadila nanje, da se ji zdaj prisotnost umrlih zdi nekaj normalnega, celo vsakdanjega.

Občutek, da gre ob izkušnji stika z umrlimi za nekaj povsem »navadnega«, imata tudi medijki Sandra in Eneja, ki se s pokojniki srečujeta skoraj vsak dan in zanju zato taki stiki niso nič posebnega. Sandra ima osemletnega sina, ki prav tako zaznava prisotnost pokojnikov in komunicira z njimi. Poleg tega, da naj bi podedoval sposobnost komunikacije z umrlimi, je že vse življenje posredno in neposredno obdan s tematiko pokojnikov, tudi prek stika s Sandrinim krogom prijateljic, ki jih zanimajo podobne duhovne tematike, in o katerih veliko in sproščeno govorijo. Tako je fantu svet umrlih skoraj tako blizu kot svet živih – v vsakem primeru mnogo bližji kot nekomu, čigar starši se ne ukvarjajo s tem – zato ni čudno, da se mu pristnost pokojnikov ne zdi »nič kaj tako posebnega«. Na vprašanje, kako njen otrok živi s to neobičajno sposobnostjo zaznavanja pokojnikov in kako umrle doživlja, je Sandra dejala: »*Ej zelo v redu, njemu je to tako normalno, ker že jaz sem taka, in to je njemu čisto normalno.*«

OBČUTEK PREOBREMENJENOSTI IN DEJAVNA POMOČ UMRLIM

Nepretrgan in stalen stik z umrlimi pa po pričevanju treh mojih sogovornic vseeno ni vedno najbolj prijeten. Medijki Sandra in Eneja pristnost umrlih zaznavata praktično vsak dan, zato take izkušnje zanju niso posebno ali nenavadno doživetje. Ravno obratno – videvanje, poslušanje ter druge vrste zaznavanja prisotnosti umrlih doživljata tako pogosto, da ju to včasih celo »moti« in obremenjuje pri preživljanju prostega časa ali pri vsakodnevnih obveznostih. Preobremenjenost z odnosi po definiciji Psihološkega raziskovalnega inštituta izhaja iz zahtev, konfliktov ali pričakovanj drugih (v našem primeru umrlih) ljudi. Zato se počutimo ujete, smo izčrpani, občutimo nemoč, tesnobo, krivdo ali jezo, kar lahko spremljajo tudi telesni simptomi, na primer utrujenost, motnje spanja ali glavoboli (Psihološki raziskovalni inštitut, 2025).

Kot trdi Eneja, pa svojega nadčutnega zaznavanja ne more »kar izklopiti«, čeprav si kdaj pa kdaj to želi. Ko je nekega jutra navsezgodaj na robu svoje postelje zagledala neznanega umrlega, ki se ji je »zelo intenzivno prikazal«, si je mislila: »*Joj, a lahko malo kasneje?* [smeh] *Čisto prezgodaj je še.*« Tudi Marta zase pravi, da je »hipersenzibilna oseba« in da zaznava veliko večji spekter energij kot večina ljudi (čeprav ni zares medijka). A ker ima »vse čute na potenco«, pravi, da je pogosto utrujena in preobremenjena. Dogajanja, ki ga občuti okoli sebe, namreč ne more enostavno prezreti, čeprav ga včasih poskuša, da bi imela vsaj malo miru.

Včasih ti je tako, overwhelming,[8] ja, včasih so te stvari veliko preveč [naporne] in potem nočeš dajati toliko pozornosti temu, daš tako na stran, ali pa nočeš dajati pomembnosti nečemu. Ampak ko se ti potem nekatere stvari konstantno dogajajo, potem že moraš [temu] dati pozornost, ne moreš dati kar na stran.

Marta sprva ni vedela, kaj točno se ji dogaja in kaj pomenijo nepojasnjene zaznave energij, ki jih s prostim očesom ni videla. Opazovala je občutja, ki so se ji porajala ob zaznavah, in začela s pomočjo literature in spleta poglobljeno raziskovati posmrtne komunikacije. Predvidevala je namreč, da bo s pomočjo zavedanja širše slike in konteksta posmrtnih pojavov morda lažje sprejela svoje zaznave in dogajanje v svoji okolici.

In potem sem ugotavljala, ker me je tako motilo, ne vem, ugotavljala sem, kako se jaz počutim ob tem ... ali me je tega strah, a mi je prijetno, a mi je neprijetno, a želim sploh vedeti, kaj se dogaja. Ampak ker sem zelo vedoželjne narave, sem pač itak hotela potem [razumeti]. Ker sem mislila, da je samo na tak način, da to stvar razumem, da grem globlje vanjo, da se pač lahko tudi umiri, pa da sem zmožna videti to kot celoto, da lahko tudi sprejmem potem take stvari, ki se dogajajo.

Prav poglabljanje in raziskovanje jo je pripeljalo do tega, da se je Marta na stike z umrlimi začela odzivati drugače kot večina drugih – na podlagi znanja, ki ga je pridobila o pokojnikih in njihovih dušah, je začela zavestno in dejavno delovati v njihovo korist. Namesto pasivne vloge opazovalke in žrtve je z umrlimi raje dejavno poskušala vzpostavljati dialoge ali pa jim pomagati na drug način. Na podoben način se je odzvala že ob srečanjih z neznanim možem v plašču, ki jo je obiskoval v njenem stanovanju in ga je (zaman, a vseeno) ogovarjala (glej poglavje (Za)čudenje). Pripovedovala pa je še o svojih drugih dveh izkušnjah.

Prvi je primer sesalnika, ki ga je Marti in njenemu fantu ob vselitvi podarila fantova babica. Pospravila sta ga v shrambo, kjer je bil pritrjen na steno. Ko je pozneje babica naredila samomor, je sesalnik začel nenadoma padati na tla – sredi noči, včasih tudi podnevi, se je sam od sebe s truščem zrušil na tla. Ker se je padanje kar naprej in kljub številnim preventivnim ukrepom ponavljalo, je Marta pomislila na možnost, da gre pri tem nenavadnem dogajanju morda za nakazovanje prisotnosti umrle babice (sesalnik je bil njeno darilo in povezava se ji je zdela očitna). Dejavno je ukrepala in zavestno poiskala stik s pokojnico. V sobi, kjer je bil shranjen ta sesalnik, je organizirala »sestanek« s pokojnico. Prižgala je svečo, v prostor namestila zaščitne kristale, ki naj bi spodbujali komunikacijo s pokojniki, ter zaprla okna, da bi plamen reagiral samo na pokojnico in ne na morebitne tokove vetra. Prek sveče se je s pokojnico pogovarjala kakšnih 20 minut, naposled pa jo je »pospremila ven, da najde mir in odide«. Marta je s pogovorom

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8   Angl. *overwhelming*, »preobremenjujoče«.

»pomirila« dušo pokojnice, da je lahko »šla naprej«,[9] in tako razrešila nenavadno situacijo, saj odtlej sesalnik nikoli več ni padel na tla.

Drugi primer Martinega ukrepanja je že zgoraj opisani občutek nepoznane prisotnosti (v poglavju (Za)čudenje), ki ga je Marta zaznavala na poti ob reki, kjer se je sprehajala. Čeprav ni vedela, za koga gre, je ukrepala: na kraju, kjer je zaznala umrlega, je začela izvajati štirinajstdnevni zaščitni ritual, ki je vključeval recitiranje staroindijskih manter in naj bi dušam umrlih pomagal pri prehodu na drugi svet.

> *Sem potem tam delala neke rituale [smeh]. Veš, jaz imam zelo rada te rituale in to. Takrat sva prišla [s fantom] do nekih manter v bistvu staroindijskih, ki jih uporabljajo prav v te namene: za zaščito doma, za zaščito ljudi in svoje energije, pa če kdo umre ob prehodih. In sem potem štirinajst dni v bistvu delala ta ritual.*

Marta je dejala, da se na stik z umrlimi zmore dejavno odzivati predvsem zato, ker je podobne izkušnje z umrlimi imela že pred tem: »*Ampak če imaš pa prvič to izkušnjo, zna biti pa kar naporno.*«

ZAVRAČANJE IZKUŠNJE STIKA Z UMRLIMI

Nobena od mojih sedmih sogovornic ni zavračala[10] svojih izkušenj stika z umrlimi. Kljub temu bom za ponazoritev takšnega odnosa navedla pripoved ene od pričevalk, ki je videla odklonilen odziv svojega očeta na tako nepojasnjeno izkušnjo.

Martin oče je bil prisoten na nenavadnem dogodku motenega delovanja elektronskih naprav – baterijska svečka za torto, ki sicer ni oddajala zvokov, je na babičinem rojstnodnevnem praznovanju na lepem in brez vstavljene baterije začela predvajati rojstnodnevno melodijo. Ženske članice družine so dogodek sprejele kot znamenje in se družno strinjale, da gre za pozdrav pokojnega dedka, Martin oče pa je prebledel in zapustil prostor. Če je pozneje pogovor nanesel na ta nenavadni dogodek, je vse skupaj označil za veliko norost.

> *In je bil ravno takrat ati zraven, ki sicer ne verjame v te stvari, in ko je videl, da ni baterije notri, je samo bled postal – prav tako zeleno bled – in je šel gor [po stopnicah v spalnico]. »Grem jaz fuzbal gledat,« je rekel. In od takrat naprej noče več slišati za te stvari. Je rekel, da to se je nam malo bledlo, in to je to. Ne more si nekako razložiti niti ne dopusti si, da bi to*

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[9] Po evropskih tradicijskih verovanjih naj bi način smrti vplival na usodo duše pokojnika. Babica Martinega fanta je naredila samomor, kar po tradicijskih verovanjih prinaša t. i. »slabo« smrt in posledično obsodbo na bivanje med dvema svetovoma – svetom živih in svetom mrtvih. Takšne duše naj bi večno trpele v tem liminalnem medprostoru, nezmožne najti svoj mir (Mencej, 2013: 134), razen če jim ne pomaga kdo od živih ljudi in jih »pospremi« na oni svet.

[10] Zavračanje razumem kot nepriznavanje ali izražanje negativnega odnosa do česa (SSKJ[2], s. v. »zavračati«).

lahko bilo možno, da bi kaj obstajalo. /.../ Ampak baje potem tisto noč ni spal, je mami rekla, ga je kar malo napralo, mu ni bilo všeč. Tudi kadar koli je téma na to prišla, se je zmeraj hotel izmakniti, pa je rekel: »Daj, vi ste nori,« pač tako, »daj, vi ste nori vsi.« On to ni mogel sploh dopustiti.

Po Martinem mnenju njen oče zaradi nezmožnosti logične in razumske razlage preprosto ni zmogel sprejeti ali dopustiti, da se je dogodek, ki mu je bil priča, dejansko zgodil, saj po njegovem osebnem prepričanju stvari ne morejo obstajati izven vidne, otipljive materije. Enako je sicer ugotavljala že Julie Parker (2005: 278), da naj bi posameznik precej težje sprejel svoje nenavadne izkušnje, če niso v skladu z njegovim pogledom na svet, ali pa če bi jih lahko razumeli kot »na meji razuma« (Raaghauge, 2016: 89). Čeprav Martin oče o svojem doživljanju ni nikoli več spregovoril z nikomer v družini, po besedah Martine mame tiste noči, ki je sledila dogodku, ni spal. Raaghauge (2016: 92, 93) v raziskavi opaža, da so o svoji nenavadni izkušnji neradi govorili predvsem tisti pričevalci, pri katerih je bila izkušnja v očitnem nasprotju z njihovo racionalnostjo in osebnimi prepričanji.

RAZPRAVA

Odnos do izkušenj stika z umrlimi se je v moji raziskavi izkazal kot izrazito sprejemajoč, na kar je brez dvoma vplivala naravnanost mojih sogovornic. Nobena od njih ni stika z umrlimi doživljala z grozo,[11] nobena ni prevpraševala verodostojnosti ali ontološke resničnosti svojih doživetij zaznavanja umrlih, prav tako jih nobena ni zavračala. Presenetljivo so prav vse pričevalke stik z umrlimi sprejele kot izkušnjo, ki jim je pokazala le še eno mogočo obliko obstoja in delovanja sveta, ponekod pa so izkušnje z umrlimi celo pripomogle k spremembam v njihovih dotedanjih nazorih in prepričanjih, saj so začele sprejemati idejo o posmrtnem življenju. Treba pa se je zavedati, da sta njihova interpretacija in vrednotenje takih izkušenj stika z umrlimi poleg osebnih okoliščin in naravnanosti zagotovo v veliki meri odvisna tudi od družbenega okolja in kulturnega konteksta, v katerem živijo in delujejo. Izpričani odzivi na izkušnje stika z umrlimi so bili – po naključju – pri mojih sogovornicah nadpovprečno sprejemajoči, kar pa izkazuje zgolj njihova osebna, intimna prepričanja v odnosu do takih pojavov. Marsikateri drugi posamezniki bi se na podobne izkušnje lahko odzivali povsem drugače – med obstoječimi raziskavami na primer Parker (2005: 278) navaja primere, kjer so posamezniki namenoma prezrli svoje nenavadne izkušnje s pokojniki ali pa jih kar v celoti zavrnili.

Pričevalke v moji raziskavi so se sicer na izkušnjo stika s pokojniki odzivale različno. Strah in nelagodje ob stiku so občutile tri pričevalke od sedmih, pri čemer jih je prestrašil zgolj prvi stik z njimi, vsa nadaljnja občutenja prisotnosti umrlih pa jih niso več strašila, ampak so se jim zdela nekaj »normalnega«. V dveh primerih je šlo za izkušnjo iz zgodnjega

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[11] Groza po psiholoških opredelitvah pomeni intenziven občutek skrajne ogroženosti, kjer je strah tako močan, da osebo povsem ohromi (Inštitut za razvoj človeških virov, b. d.).

otroštva in starost se je pri odzivanju na stik z umrlimi izkazala kot pomemben dejavnik. Obe pričevalki sta svoj strah pripisovali mladosti in z njo povezanemu nerazumevanju nenavadne izkušnje, ena pa je izpostavila še dodaten vpliv vzgoje Rimskokatoliške cerkve, ki naj bi ji vcepila omejujoče strahospoštovanje do vsega duhovnega. Še en dejavnik, ki je pri mojih sogovornicah ponekod vplival na doživljanje srečanja z umrlimi, so bile predhodne izkušnje takih stikov ter predhodno znanje o duhovnih tematikah. Tiste pričevalke, ki so pred svojim srečanjem z umrlimi že doživele, raziskovale ali se spraševale o umrlih ter obstoju onstranstva, so izkušnjo stika z umrlimi bistveno hitreje in lažje interpretirale kot tiste, ki so se s takimi pojavi srečale prvič; zato v njihovih odzivih ni bilo zaznati bojazni pred neznanim. To lahko pojasnimo s trditvijo Jeannie Banks Thomas (2007: 29, 30), da naj bi ljudje v vsakodnevnem življenju stremeli h kategorizaciji svojih izkušenj in njihovemu umeščanju v konceptualne okvire, ki nam nato pomagajo razumeti naše izkušnje.

Manj intenzivno nelagodje je ob izkušnji stika z umrlimi občutila še ena pričevalka, ki je (kljub dejstvu, da si je dogodek takoj razumsko interpretirala) čutila veliko vznemirjenje in pretresenost v trenutku izkušnje. Sicer pa sta se dve pričevalki ob stiku z umrlimi zgolj močno začudili. Štiri pričevalke od sedmih so stik s pokojniki doživele kot nekaj povsem »naravnega«, »normalnega« in celo »logičnega«, saj so čutile, da so pokojniki »del vsega [stvarstva]«, za tri pa je srečanje s pokojniki poleg »normalnosti« bilo celo prijetna izkušnja, ob kateri so čutile pomirjenost in jasno zavedanje o dogajanju.

Dve posebni in izstopajoči vrsti odziva na izkušnje stika z umrlimi sta se pokazali v pripovedih treh nadpovprečno senzibilnih pričevalk, ki vsakodnevno zaznavajo široke spektre energij. Prisotnost pokojnikov občutijo tako pogosto, da so je že povsem navajene, zato jim stiki z njimi včasih predstavljajo celo vrsto psiholoških preobremenitev. Morda se prav zato, ker svojega zaznavanja ne morejo kar prezreti ali »izklopiti«, vsaka od njih na nek način dejavno odziva na to prisotnost: dve s »kanaliziranjem« oziroma predajanjem sporočil iz onstranstva pomagata pri komunikaciji med živimi in umrlimi tudi drugim osebam, ena pa izpostavlja, da ob spontanem stiku z umrlimi vselej aktivno deluje in pomaga trpečim dušam umrlih z izvajanjem individualnih ritualov za njihov »pravilen« prehod v onstranstvo.

Izkušnje sedmih pričevalk so se razlikovale tudi v doživljanju poznanih in nepoznanih pokojnikov. Stika s poznanimi umrlimi niso doživljale kot izredne, nenavadne ali negativne izkušnje. Nasprotno – večina ga je (zlasti ob neprvih stikih) doživljala kot nekaj pomirjujočega, tolažečega in normalnega, celo vsakdanjega. Čeprav bi lahko predvidevali, da bodo po drugi strani stiki z nepoznanimi umrlimi pri pričevalkah predstavljali bolj grozljiva doživetja in jim povzročali travmatične spomine, pa ni bilo tako. Čeprav so nekatere pričevalke prvič v življenju doživele vizualni stik z neznanimi pokojniki, ob tem niso čutile bojazni in so se na take izkušnje večinoma odzivale le z velikim (za)čudenjem in/ali s preprostim zavedanjem, da gre za neobičajen dogodek. Po njihovih besedah jih ni bilo strah, saj so čutile, da jim neznani umrli »ne želijo škodovati«.

ZAKLJUČEK

Etnografsko raziskovanje izkušenj stika z umrlimi se mi zdi ključno prav zaradi pridobivanja vpogleda v človeško doživljanje ob zaznavanju pokojnikov. Zgoraj opisana raznolikost odzivov mojih sogovornic dokazuje, da take izkušnje lahko sprožajo različne odzive, ki se pri posameznikih zelo razlikujejo, tako po intenzivnosti kot obliki – nikakor pa ti odzivi niso zgolj in samo enoznačno negativni. Čeprav nekateri dejavniki v določenih primerih vplivajo na doživljanje pričevalk, se enaki dejavniki v drugih, nekoliko spremenjenih okoliščinah, izkažejo kot nepomembni in obrobni, zato se zdi, da je na področju tako subtilnih in intimnih doživljajev, kot je zaznavanje sveta umrlih, v ospredju predvsem posameznikova subjektivnost. Naš odnos do stikov z umrlimi je konec koncev v celoti podvržen našim osebnim prepričanjem o ustroju sveta in vesolja, ki se med drugim odražajo tudi na ravni samega doživljanja tovrstnih pojavov. Vendar pa posameznikove partikularnosti in »psihološke« ustrojenosti, ki usmerjata njegova prepričanja, mnenja in odzive na zunanje dražljaje in dogodke, še zdaleč ni mogoče označiti za edina dejavnika, ki lahko vplivata na odzivanje na izkušnje stika z umrlimi. Slednje so v resnici bistveno pogojene s kulturnim in družbenim kontekstom, v katerega so (bile) vključene pričevalke oziroma v kakršnem živijo danes. Mislim, da lahko s podajanjem pripovedi o izkušnjah stika z umrlimi pripomoremo vsaj k zmanjšanju strahu pred mrtvimi in morda vplivamo na to, da se takih tematik ne odriva več na rob družbenega diskurza.

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"ISN'T IT A BIT FRIGHTENING?" – EXPERIENCING THE CONTACT WITH THE DEAD

Contact with the deceased, defined as a spontaneous phenomenon or interaction between living individuals and the dead (Penberthy, Pehlivanova, Kalelioglu, 2023), is still regarded as a controversial topic in the broader public and often classified as the "supernatural" or "paranormal".[12] Due to the lack of logical explanations (Cooper, 2018: 202) and their incongruity with prevailing Western scientific paradigms (Hayes, Steffen, 2018: 166), as well as societal perceptions of what constitutes reality, such experiences continue to be viewed through the lens of taboos. When the author introduces her research focus, people often ask: "Isn't that a bit frightening?" This response is rooted in the established association with death and the ontological uncertainty of such experiences, leading many to assume that contact with the dead is inherently unpleasant, even terrifying.

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[12] However, both terms are inherently problematic, as they reflect socially constructed normative frameworks surrounding specific belief systems. These frameworks delineate what is considered to fall within the boundaries of »nature« (in the case of the »supernatural«) and what transgresses those boundaries, or what is deemed »normal« and socially acceptable (in the case of the »paranormal«) versus what is not (Eaton, 2021: 13, 14; see also Waskul, Eaton, 2018).

However, contrary to common belief, numerous ethnographic studies indicate that, for some individuals, such encounters can be profoundly positive, offering support to the grieving, fostering a sense of ongoing connection with the dead, and aiding in coping with loss (Klass, Steffen, 2018: 4; see also Klass, Silverman, Nickman, 1996). The author challenges the prevailing assumption that encounters with the dead are inherently disturbing or unwelcome, drawing on her own research to illustrate that such experiences can elicit a broad spectrum of responses.

Indeed, all participants in the author's study acknowledged their encounters with the dead as legitimate experiences, interpreting them as manifestations of an alternative mode of existence. While some initially experienced fear, it was limited to their first encounter; subsequent interactions with the dead no longer frightened them, and they came to regard them as "normal". In many cases, these experiences contributed to changes in their previous beliefs, leading some participants to embrace the concept of life after death. Those with prior knowledge of spiritual matters were quicker to interpret their experiences. For many, contact with the dead was not only perceived as "natural" but also as a source of reassurance and calm. Encounters with the deceased known individuals were predominantly experienced as comforting, while, somewhat unexpectedly, interactions with unfamiliar deceased individuals seldom elicited fear.

Three individuals with heightened sensitivity, who regularly perceive a wide range of energies, have become habituated to frequent encounters with the deceased; however, at times, these interactions have been experienced as a psychological burden. Finally, the age of the witnesses at the time of the encounter, their personal beliefs, their prior knowledge of concepts related to the afterlife, and familiarity and emotional closeness to the deceased were important factors that, in some cases, shaped individuals' responses to the encounter with the dead. Ethnographic research on such encounters is crucial for understanding the broad spectrum of reactions and the role of individual subjectivity.

Ethnographic research on experiences of encounters with the dead is crucial precisely because it provides insight into human perception when sensing the presence of the dead. The diversity of responses among my interlocutors, as described above, demonstrates that such experiences can elicit a wide range of reactions, varying in both intensity and form from person to person. These encounters are not universally perceived as distressing or negative; rather, they are mediated by a complex interplay of personal, psychological, and sociocultural factors. While certain determinants may significantly shape an individuals' interpretation in a given instance, they may hold little or no relevance in slightly altered circumstances. This variability highlights the primacy of subjective perception in the phenomenology of encounters with the dead.

Ultimately, attitudes toward contact with the dead are deeply embedded in individual cosmologies and ontological frameworks, which, in turn, shape the ways in which such phenomena are interpreted and experienced. However, while psychological predispositions and personal belief systems play a crucial role in

framing these experiences, they cannot be regarded as the sole determinants. Rather, the sociocultural environment – both past and present – profoundly influences the ways in which individuals perceive and make sense of encounters with the dead. The ethnographic examination of narratives about encounters with the dead can contribute to reducing the fear of the dead and fostering a more open engagement with these phenomena. By disseminating narratives of these encounters, we may at the very least contribute to reducing the fear of the dead and perhaps encourage the reintegration of such topics into the broader social discourse and challenge the marginalization of these topics in contemporary society.

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Book reviews

Jelena Marković, *Šutnje straha*, Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Biblioteka Nova etnografija, 215 str.

Tema straha jedno je od najvibrantnijih istraživačkih fokusa u društvenim i humanističkim znanostima posljednjih četvrt stoljeća, s osobitim usponom interesa nakon atentata na WTC 2001. godine. Posvetile su joj se različite discipline: psihologija, lingvistika, sociologija, etnologija, antropologija, a historiografija je temu uklopila u šire područje povijesti emocija. Globalnom znanstvenom interesu za temu straha valja pribrojiti važnu činjenicu da su prije procvata interesa u zapadnoj odnosno angloameričkoj akademskoj zajednici, tijekom devedesetih godina, na području zapadnog Balkana i povodom ratova koji su pratili raspad Jugoslavije, provedena značajna etnološka istraživanja „terenskih" zbivanja. Među najinovativnije doprinose tim istraživanjima ubrajamo onaj zagrebačkog Instituta za etnologiju i folkloristiku, čije su suradnice, opservacijskim, participativnim i analitičkim radom na ratom pogođenim područjima u Hrvatskoj, usustavile područje *ratne etnografije* (L. Čale Feldman, I. Prica, R. Senjković, *Fear, Death and Resistance: An Ethnography of War*, Zagreb, 1993; R. Jambrešić Kirin, M. Povrzanović, *War, Exile, Everyday Life. Cultural Perspectives*, Zagreb, 1996; časopis *Narodna umjetnost* 1/1992).

Godine 2017. na istom je Institutu pokrenut projekt *Naracije straha: od starih zapisa do nove usmenosti*, čija je voditeljica bila dr. sc. Renata Jambrešić Kirin, a financirala ga je Hrvatska zaklada za znanost. Jelena Marković bila je suradnica na tom projektu, pa se ova njezina knjiga nadovezuje na rasprave koje su o temi vođene unutar projektne skupine i u interakciji s vanjskim suradnicima projekta, kao i s autorima priloga u dva zbornika koja su izdana u okviru projekta, a na kojima je Jelena Marković bila su-urednica: *Naracije straha* (uredile N. Badurina, U. Bauer i J. Marković, Leykam international d.o.o. i Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Zagreb, 2019) i *Encountering Fear* (uredile N. Badurina, U. Bauer, R. Jambrešić Kirin, J. Marković, Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Zagreb, 2020). Unaprijed zacrtanim temama s početka tog projekta i globalnom znanstvenom interesu koji se u dvijetisućitima bavio strahom od terorizma, ekonomske krize i klimatskih promjena, godine 2020. pridružile su se nove, ranije neslućene teme: pandemija, potres, i konačno, od veljače 2022, strah od novog svjetskog, možda i nuklearnog rata. Autorica ove knjige zna da je temu straha nemoguće monografski ili enciklopedijski obuhvatiti i iscrpiti, jer svijet za nju nudi stalno nove okidače, no smatra da je zadatak etnologa i antropologa da ju pokušava ukorak hvatati u njezinim različitim pojavnostima, sa sviješću o vlastitoj upletenosti u afektivnoj atmosferi straha, ali i s ciljem da svojim alatom i zaključcima poveća sposobnost društva da svoje strahove imenuje, ispripovijeda, a time dijelom njima i ovlada.

Temi narativizacije u ovoj se knjizi međutim prilazi iz osobite istraživačke perspektive, one koja ju naizgled potire: naime, iz perspektive šutnje.

Autorica posjeduje zavidni uvid u dosadašnja istraživanja fenomena šutnje (iz aspekta lingvistike, muzikologije, kulturne antropologije, folkloristike, historiografije, komunikologije, psihologije, sociologije, pravne znanosti, filozofije, znanosti o umjetnosti; usp. Ephratt, 2008, Tannen, 1985; Saville-Troike, 1985; Jaworski, 1997; Kurzon, 1998, i dr.). Iz tih znanja crpi ono što je spojivo s afektom straha krećući se u međuprostoru između

narativizacije i prešućivanja, komunikacije i ne-komunikacije, izricanja riječju i izricanja gestom, i pokazujući kako te dvije naizgled suprotne manifestacije zapravo čine dio istog polja emotivnih reakcija, i kako njihovi učinci nisu nipošto nedvosmisleni: moguće je naime, suprotno našim očekivanjima, da naracija ne donese lijek za strah, kao što je moguće i da šutnja ne bude znak predaje i poraza, već naprotiv nepristajanja i otpora. Narativizacija i šutnja kao pratiteljice straha u ovoj se knjizi dakle promatraju usporedno i bez apriornih sudova o njihovoj (ne)učinkovitosti, odnosno društvenoj blagotvornosti ili šteti. Iz teorijske literature o šutnji autorica fokusirano odabire ono što joj može pomoći u boljem razumijevanju etnografskih primjera koje je prikupila terenskim istraživanjima i odabrala kao paradigmatske. Tako je moguće da, polazeći od iskaza kazivača, istovremeno potvrdi valjanost međusobno suprotnih teorijskih teza, kao na primjer stava prema kojem je šutnja posljedica duboke i neizlječive traumatiziranosti, te, s druge strane, mišljenja da je ona kreativno oruđe samozaštite govornika i zaštite sugovornika, pa i (samo)izlječenja, odnosno da funkcionira kao transgeneracijski prijenos znanja gestama, predmetima, znakovima i tijelom. U promišljanju odnosa straha i tjelesnosti važna je teorijska referenca *Kulturna politika emocija* Sare Ahmed.

Narativizacija traume, u središtu antropoloških istraživanja posljednjih dvadesetak godina, potakla je nastanak posebne discipline, najčešće u vezi sa studijima Holokausta. Studiji traumatskog diskurza bavili su se kategorijom neizrecivosti i tvrdili kako govor izdaje traumu (npr. Cathy Caruth). Taj većinom psihoanalitički i dekonstrukcijski rukavac teorije traume nije središnji u ovoj knjizi jer se u njoj šutnja promatra ne samo kao vjernost traumi, autentično svjedočenje odnosno položaj (agambenovskog) primarnog svjedoka, već joj se otvara širi društveni prostor u kojem se šutnja pokazuje kao moguća strategija komunikacije, ljubazna zaštita sugovornika prožeta ironijom, nadilaženje vlastite nemoći tihim aluzijama na teorije zavjere ili čuvanje dostojanstva pred govorom mržnje. Za razliku od spomenutih studija neizrecivog, u ovom istraživanju šutnja nije (samo) izolacija traumatiziranog subjekta, nego je društvena pojava koja se događa u nekoj afektivnoj zajednici i ima mnogostruke funkcije i ishode, ponekad i terapeutske, i to podjednako za traumatiziranog pojedinca kao i za mikro-zajednicu u kojoj se odvija etnografski intervju.

Knjiga se sastoji od sedam poglavlja, podijeljenih u dvije cjeline. Prva cjelina, pod naslovom *Strahovi, šutnje i teško (po)ratno iskustvo* okuplja četiri poglavlja od kojih su prva tri plod autoričinih dugogodišnjih terenskih istraživanja (osobito u Lici, kao prostoru opterećenom nataloženim povijesnim slojevima anksioznosti, ali i Puli i Zagrebu). Razgovori o nasljeđu rata koje je autorica vodila pretežno s pripadnicima manjina pokazuju kako u hrvatskoj društvenoj zajednici postoje „poželjna" i „nepoželjna" teška ratna iskustva. Kako se pripadnici manjine nose sa svojim neizrecivim i potisnutim pamćenjem? Okidač za istraživanje bio je susret sa svjedokinjom do koje je autorica došla s namjerom da čuje njezino strašno iskustvo, a koja je pričala o svemu (svakodnevnom, neutralnom, općenitom, pa i banalnom), samo ne o tom iskustvu. Na kraju susreta svjedokinja je gošći-istraživačici iskazala zahvalnost, manifestirajući osjećaje olakšanja i rasterećenja. Autorica je tako izbliza doživjela kako ono što zove „brbljivom šutnjom" ima svoju važnu ulogu u etnografskom susretu, mnogo veću nego što bi imalo npr. u okviru istraživanja usmene povijesti, koja bi takav intervju otpisala kao neupotrebljiv.

U knjizi se navodi niz primjera iz iskaza u kojima se prešućivanje manifestira formulama neizrecivosti („ne znam da li postoji riječ kojom bi se to moglo opisati"), opažajima prirodnih pojava kao metaforama beživotnosti ratom pogođenog područja (tišina zbog odbjeglih ptica), minimiziranjem i potiskivanjem proživljenog, vanjskim znakovima (predmetima, uspomenama) koji iskazuju verbalno neizrečenu strepnju od ponavljanja rata. Pitanje koje pokreće ovo istraživanje je sljedeće: „Je li šutnja negativno obilježena odsutnost koja opterećuje pojedince i zajednice ili je katkada i konstitutivno okružje, imaginacija slobode?". Odgovor je ne samo potvrdan za obje hipoteze, već se proširuje i na (samo)refleksiju o uključenosti akademskog diskursa u različite učinke šutnje, argumentirano odabirući (tijekom čitave knjige) prešućivanje kao znak otpora ondje gdje bi verbalizacija mogla banalizirati sadržaj, učiniti ga politički aktualnim umjesto znanstveno univerzalnim, povrijediti svjedoke ili doprinijeti širenju govora mržnje. Na to prešućivanje unutar akademskog diskursa u ovom ćemo se prikazu još višekratno vraćati.

Posebno poglavlje unutar prve cjeline posvećeno je teorijama zavjere kao narativnim fragmentima na rubu vjerovanja, sličnih predaji i traču, i subverzivnih prema dominantnom diskursu. Teorije zavjere autorica povezuje s urbanim legendama, uz oslanjanje na domaće i strane istraživače te teme. Folklorističkim ih alatom promatra kao slične predaji, osobito po fragmentiranim narativnim oblicima te po pitanju vjerovanja. Njihovu istinitost odnosno lažnost razrješava folklorističkom referencom na isto pitanje u slučaju predaje („možda je tako, a možda i nije"), ali i postmodernom tezom o supostojanju kompetitivnih „režima istine", među kojima je i sam akademski diskurs. Autoričina je perspektiva (na Gramscijevu tragu) vernakularna: ona zavjereničke iskaze svojih sugovornika ne patronizira iz pozicije znanstvene ili političke racionalnosti, nego promatra način njihova funkcioniranja i njihovu psihičku i društvenu ulogu u ratom obilježenim zajednicama. Tu se teorija zavjere pokazuje kao način svladavanja traume koji stupa na mjesto otvorenih pitanja o razlozima nasilja. „Zašto nam se sve to dogodilo?" je pitanje bez odgovora i stoga psihički razorno. Na njegovo mjesto dolazi zavjerenički polu-utješni narativ koji i nije cjelovita pripovijest nego natuknica, aluzija, možda čak i samo neverbalna gesta, a koji daje bar kakav-takav odgovor, ukazujući na nedokučive aktere moći koji su upravljali ljudskim sudbinama u ratu. Autorica dakle odbacuje analitički aparat sociologije, historiografije, politologije, upregnut u objašnjenje rata, i umjesto toga nastoji „dati prilog razumijevanju sukoba kao događaja koji je za 'obične ljude' i cijele zajednice dezintegrirajući, nerazumljiv, zbunjujući" (str. 57), što se odražava na nekoherentnim, isprekidanim ili posve utihnutim narativima, na njihovom jazu u odnosu na onaj dominantni. Vrijednost ovog pristupa vidimo prije svega u tome što kroz osluškivanje vernakularnih priča autorica pokušava razumjeti njihovu genezu i širenje, njihov oslobađajući učinak za skupinu koja se njima služi. Premda ova knjiga nema političke intencije, u pristupu društvenim temama marginaliziranih skupina ona pokazuje angažiran stav i brigu o dobrobiti svih članova zajednice. U tekstu se to omeđuje autoričinom ulogom slušačice – odnosno barem jedne slušačice kao minimumom za izvedbu nečijeg svjedočenja. No činjenicom da je od tog slušanja nastala knjiga koja upravo postaje dijelom javne sfere, domet toga angažmana postaje neusporedivo veći.

Poglavlje posvećeno govoru mržnje (na osnovu građe iz medija, interneta, društvenih mreža) i njegovoj vezi s nasiljem i zločinom pokazuje kako šutnja objekta govora mržnje odražava njegovu izolaciju, nemoć, anksioznost i strah od ponavljanja nasilja, te predstavlja strategiju samoobrane od retraumatizacije. To je prešućivanje katkad povezano s (auto)ironijom i humorom, na što će se autorica vratiti i u drugom dijelu knjige. Kako je cilj antropološki, a ne povijesni ili pravni, i kako autorica ima na umu moguću reverzibilnost odnosa diskriminacije u drugim kontekstima, akteri se promatraju kao univerzalni principi, a ne kao pojedinačno imenovane društvene (nacionalne) skupine. I ovo poglavlje obiluje dragocjenim primjerima iz etnografske prakse, citatima iskaza svjedoka na kojima se i posve akademski zainteresiran čitatelj mora zaustaviti, usporiti čitanje i otvoriti prostor za afektivni doživljaj i za empatiju.

Četvrto poglavlje prve cjeline povezuje performativnu i akademsku etnografiju. Od 1993. do 1997. autorica je sudjelovala u performansu *Proba orkestra* Dramske radionice INAT u Puli koji se bavio primarno tjelesnim, gestualnim prikazom tjeskobe koju stvara život u ratnim okolnostima. Suprotstavljanje dominantnim diskursima o nužnosti rata i herojstva te prikaz razornog djelovanja rata na psihu doveli su u vrijeme izvođenja performansa do javnih kritika zbog njegova navodno apstraktnog pacifizma. To mladenačko iskustvo autorica stavlja u vezu sa spomenutom ratnom etnografijom koju su u isto vrijeme razvijale istraživačice na Institutu za etnologiju i folkloristiku u Zagrebu baveći se narativnošću svjedočenja o prognaništvu, njihovom vezom s javnim diskursima o ratu, približavanjem antropologije literaturi odnosno njezinim udaljavanjem od tradicionalnog znanstvenog diskursa. I te su istraživačice, približno u isto ratno i poratno vrijeme, bile izložene kritikama zbog neuklopljenosti u kodificirani ratni diskurs. Oba primjera podrazumijevaju sumnju u apsolutnu učinkovitost verbalnog komuniciranja vlastite i kolektivne nelagode. Autorica ide i dalje, u potragu za novom znanstvenom metodologijom koja bi rezultate etnografskog istraživanja predstavljala neverbalnim sredstvima, pokretom, izvedbom, i time postala uspješnija u razumijevanju afekata i emocija. Riječ je o performativnoj etnografiji kojom se bave i istraživači dramske umjetnosti, pri čemu je glavna autoričina referenca rad Dwighta Conquergooda. Tu se otkriva kako autoričin odabir da ne izgovara imena grupnih identiteta služi i tome da izvede metodološki eksperiment oslobađanja od verbalizacije i zadiranja u sferu emocija kroz neku vrstu performativnog postupka, bliskog izvedbi neizrecivih afekata.

Važno mjesto ove knjige upravo je rasprava o kodovima akademskog pisma i o njihovom intencionalnom kršenju. Postoje poželjne i manje poželjne teme akademskog istraživanja. Sam akademski diskurs ima svoje zone šutnje, a šira je zajednica, čini se, toga dobro svjesna. Jedan od sugovornika autorici je savjetovao da ne iznosi „u Zagrebu" sve što je čula na terenu, jer bi ju netko mogao „potegnuti za rep i skrenuti na drugu temu".

Već je ovdje spomenuto da se autorica ograđuje od toga da se njezin zagovor manjinskog iskustva shvati u političkom smislu. Jedna od strategija u tom pravcu je i njezin odabir da ni na jednom mjestu u knjizi ne napiše ime manjinske zajednice kojom se bavi (pa, poštujući taj odabir, to ne činimo ni u ovom prikazu). To je *njezina* šutnja, ono o čemu ova knjiga ne govori, i to zato da bi se učinkovitije posvetila etnografskom istraživanju međuljudskih odnosa u suočavanju sa strahom. Odnose obilježene ratom,

prošlošću i politikom, ona želi opisati tako da se ne zaplete u tumačenje političkih ili međunacionalnih čimbenika, nego da ih osvijetli analizom onoga što se događa u susretu etnologa i kazivača koji je pretrpio ili još uvijek trpi strah. Svoj odabir autorica uvjerljivo argumentira na više mjesta tijekom knjige, podastirući za njega teorijske i iskustvene razloge. Čvrst argument u prilog takvog odabira je izbjegavanje nasilnog upisivanja politički diktiranog identiteta u svakodnevnu praksu koja je najčešće složena, pojedincu nebitna ili fluidna, transformirana migracijama i povratcima, premrežena širokim afektivnim spektrom, odnosno mnogo složenija no što bi to etnonim (u našoj svakodnevici binarno postavljen kroz opreku mi/oni) ikad mogao obuhvatiti. Autorica navodi teoretičara Stefana Hirschauera koji u pitanjima neizrecivog od etnografske deskripcije traži da izostavi „taman dovoljno da se ostavi prostora za imaginaciju" (str. 52), i to je upravo ono što ova knjiga traži od čitatelja: da se zapita o ljudskim, afektivnim i etičkim obrascima nasilnih odnosa, a ne da se ograniči na njihove povijesne i političke koordinate. Usto, jedna od jednostavnijih, ali i uvjerljivijih potkrijepa za odluku da prešuti etnonime, autoričina je referenca na jedan publicistički tekst – kolumnu „Na vama je" Borisa Dežulovića, hrvatskog novinara i pisca (ujedno i stalnog suradnika slovenskih medija) u kojoj Dežulović opisuje strašan masakr bez navođenja etničke pripadnosti počinitelja i žrtava upravo zato da bi čitateljevo suočavanje s neljudskim događajem lišio političkih olakšica (*mi* kao žrtve ili počinitelji i *oni* kao počinitelji ili žrtve).

Druga cjelina knjige, naslovljena *Strahovi, šutnje i iskustva boli i patnje*, sadrži tri poglavlja o (ne)iskazivanju iskustva patnje i boli u vezi s bolešću, smrću te potresom na Baniji. Dakako, osobito u tom posljednjem slučaju, nemoguće je izbjeći i palimpsestno taloženje prethodnih, odnosno ratnih slojeva traume. Fizička i psihička bol istražuju se u odnosu na medicinski sustav te se pokušava iz etnografske perspektive nadograditi njezino razumijevanje na raskršću „fizičkog, mentalnog, emocionalnog, kulturološkog, povijesnog i drugog aspekta bivanja" (str. 120). Metodološki, tu se prepliću promatranje, empatija, autoetnografija, autokritika (strah od optužbe za autoetnografski narcizam, nelagoda u zauzimanju istraživačke pozicije) te temeljna epistemološka pitanja o tome što je dostojno znanstvene ekspertize, a što ne. Autorica se bavi epidemijom virusa COVID-19 i za nju vezanim strahovima. Kao u slučaju rata u devedesetim, tako su i u situaciji globalne pandemije suradnici Instituta za etnologiju i folkloristiku bili među prvima u hrvatskoj akademskoj sredini koji su nastalu izvanrednu situaciju pokušali znanstveno objasniti, pa je tako već u rujnu 2020. pri Institutu održan skup *COVID-19 u humanističkoj perspektivi: Mutacije straha i kulturne promjene*, u čijem je organizacijskom odboru bila i Jelena Marković. Poglavlje u ovoj knjizi bavi se medijski sveprisutnom krilaticom „osoba s brojnim komorbiditetima", povodom koje autorica postavlja etičko pitanje o društvenoj hijerarhiji smrti koje zavređuju manje ili više žalovanja. Ispituju se zatim oblici narativizacije post-covid simptoma kao novo i jezikom dosad nedodirnuto područje koje proizvodi narativne tvorbe bogate metaforičkim, imaginativnim, slikovitim izrazima. One se sudaraju s medicinskom klasifikacijom ili njezinim nedostatkom za slučaj nove bolesti, s manjkom medicinskog interesa za psihološki aspekt zdravlja, te posljedično i s nevjericom. U analizi tema poput bolesti i smrti autorica vodi dijalog s filozofima (Levinas, Herder, Heidegger), povjesničarima kulture (Philippe Ariès), no za

nju je temeljno da u stručnoj literaturi prepozna ono što je doživjela iskustveno, odnosno da teoriju stavi na kušnju proživljenih priča svojih sugovornika i svojih vlastitih.

Posljednja tema u drugoj cjelini je potres na Baniji, ali iz neočekivanog kuta: istraživačica analizira humor kao provodnu nit u pričama kazivača. Pokušava ga objasniti, nudeći nekoliko razloga: moguće je da svjedoci humorom osiguravaju prostor za „uzmak od vlastitog narativnog pokušaja", u slučaju da se on pokaže neuspjelim; moguće je da se njime štite od ponižavajućeg iskustva patnje; moguće je da podliježu (romantičnoj) društvenoj konvenciji prema kojoj se šutnja u boli visoko vrednuje; moguće je da njome stupaju u provokativni (ili kapitulirajući) dijalog s moći i vlašću (Linda Hutcheon, Bahtin). Čini se ipak da je tumačenje koje navodi među posljednjima najbliže onome što smo tijekom čitanja knjige doživjeli kao autoričin znanstveni i osobni habitus. U ironiji svojih sugovornika ona naime prepoznaje *njihovu* obazrivost i empatiju, njihovu (gotovo roditeljsku!) brigu za nju kao ispitivačicu, njihovu strategiju stvaranja „ljubazne zajednice" (pojam je književnog teoretičara Waynea Bootha) u kojoj se smanjuje golema udaljenost između onih koji su na Baniji ostali bez svega i onih koji su (etnografskim poslom) došli iz Zagreba da bi čuli njihove priče.

Knjiga Jelene Marković suočava se s kompleksnim pitanjima etnografskog istraživanja tako da ih zaoštrava do krajnosti i za njih predlaže provokativne odgovore: od odluke da se umjesto na narative fokusira na šutnje i da šutnju ne shvati samo kao traumatsko neizrecivo, preko izostavljanja etnonima, toponima, povijesnih i političkih referenci radi dubljeg ulaženja u prirodu odnosa koje opisuje, do toga da tihim reakcijama na govor mržnje, fragmentarnim teorijama zavjere i ironijskim samoobranama stradalnika pripisuje značenja koja im ne bismo otprve pripisali. Riječ je dakle o knjizi koja neprestano preispituje svoje alate, dovodi ih u neočekivane kombinacije znanstvenih i umjetničkih disciplina, te pronalazi manifestacije svoje teme u najživljoj suvremenosti. Djelo je primarno namijenjeno etnolozima, folkloristima i antropolozima, ali i stručnjacima srodnih društvenih i humanističkih disciplina kao što su sociologija, psihologija, književnost. Usto, aktualnost i društvena prisutnost ovdje obrađenih tema – od poslijeratnih trauma, govora mržnje i teorija zavjera, pa sve do post-covid sindroma – čini ovu knjigu primamljivom i za nestručne, neakademske čitatelje koji za suvremene pojave traže kompetentne odgovore.

Natka Badurina, Videm

STUDIA

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LOGICA
SLAVICA