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Summary

This paper focuses on discussing the time and space of winter customs practised by the people of the region known as Beskidzka Trójwieś - three villages in the Beskidy mountains, near the Polish and Slovakian border. I have decided to illustrate the subject matter in the context of cultural variables. In my paper I have noted the place and role of winter customs in the everyday lives of the local population and in festive situations. What was important for me was to observe the symbols inherent in such customs and understand their meaning, as well as to indicate the shared and separate characteristics in the area where two cultures meet. In my work I observe how the space-and-time concepts are reflected in the customs practised in winter, because the structure of such concept network in fact shapes the perception of reality. Looking at this unique space and time and focusing on its functionality and meaning helped me gain a new, broad research perspective. It is a multidimensional and multifaceted structure, and at the same time it is an interesting reflection of the Universe. Since it abounds in a variety of meanings, it is part of a specific cosmogonic universalism, but it also comes in its local dimension, thus pointing to the unique interpretations of its local variants. Research has shown that the people in this region have the knowledge of the Universe, nature, mutual relations with and between the forces of nature and elements, which proves that life is inextricably bound to the supernatural. Customs used to illustrate the way people saw and understood the world in line with their folk beliefs. These beliefs were rooted in their everyday practice and experience, though. An important part of this system was the belief that the world is logical and coherent to an extent, and observing the tradition might guarantee its stability. This vision of the world was manifested in the everyday experience, in the customs and traditions related to celebrating the changing seasons of the year.

The study of the above subject matter was conducted in 1986-2020 in the three villages in the Beskidy mountains (Istebna, Jaworzynka, Koniaków). Multiple methods were used in this research. The pilot study, in 2010-2015, was conducted in the area close to the Polish and Slovakian border, which was facilitated by a number of cross-border projects. Using this method offered an interesting and promising perspective, because it revealed a number of various meanings, which would otherwise be difficult to notice in the case of

ethnographic description. This is how I developed a broader anthropological reflection, as I observed how a human being functions in an exceptional, transition and festive period of time.

The whole subject matter is focused on a selected fragment of annual winter customs - starting with St. Andrew's Eve (30 November) and ending on the Epiphany (6 January)- and a semiotic analysis of these traditions. The analysed cycle was structured around a dichotomy of darkness and light, which corresponds to the opposition between life and death. It was understood generically, because it referred to the whole Universe¹. The cyclical time means coming back to the original mythical situation, when sacrum was actually present in the human world². Its beginning was marked by a cyclical, recurrent and symbolical exhaustion of vital forces in the nature, which resulted in a period of lifelessness (no vegetation). For people rooted in a culture based on customs, which entail a dose of magic, it was important for the whole cycle of lifelessness to be meaningful - people needed to know it does not bring human existence to a halt, as it follows the cycle of Nature (and the Universe), and is orderly rather than disorderly (immersed in Chaos). This string of elements connected with a symbolic cultural code was related to the changes observed in the nature. It is organised by three systems: agricultural calendar, customs and church holidays, which have merged together over time to form a single cycle full of diverse content.

What is important is that the cycle is still valid and significant for the people who live in the three villages and the days specified in it still define the times for celebration. Many local elements are retained in this cycle. Those that are particularly strong and present in the collective memory include e.g. images related to Christmas Eve, Santa Claus or visiting people on Stephen's Day. These are express, permanent and memorable images, full of specific identity, which highlights their ethnic uniqueness. This uniqueness was defined through a semiotic analysis of all the observed rites, customs, rituals and traditions observed in the cross-border region. I have recorded a set of relevant elements, which are part of the permanent cultural system on both sides. These elements include the symbols and meaning

¹ R. Tomicki: *Religijność ludowa*, [In:] *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej*, vol. II, eds. M. Biernacka, B. Kopczyńska-Jaworska, A. Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa, W. Paprocka, Wrocław– Warszawa– Kraków 1976, p. 30.

² M. Eliade, *Mit wiecznego powrotu*, Warszawa, 1998, p. 61.

related to water, fire and wood. An important role in this system is ascribed to apotropeions, such as e.g. bread, garlic, onion, honey, apples, mushrooms and poppy seed.

A shared element of this cross-border cultural system is the tradition of visiting people at Christmas to sing carols - the tradition is still very much alive. The tradition is unique because of the historical, archaic repertoire and the fact that people still visit each other with Christmas wishes, and sing carols. Even young girls participate in this custom, which is not very popular in folk culture in other places in Poland. When studying the local customs groups, I did not see such figures as a Jewish woman, a group of "Herody", a group of carollers with a goat, with the Turoń, or with a large star - although all of these are typical of the Polish carolling traditions.

A major surprise is the contemporary composition of carolling groups: among the carollers you will find many teenage girls, because they are often members of folk or church groups. And this is the first time girls are included in this tradition. An important aspect is the relationship between carolling and the settlement structure of a village, which highlights the importance of the border between individual manors, squares, settlements, and points to its strong potential for creating bonds - this is something researchers did not focus on in the past.

Among irrelevant elements in the cross-border region we could mention the customs known as *chodzenie Lucek*, which is observed in Slovakia. Generally speaking, on the Slovakian side of the border you can observe a number of verbal magic formulas related to fortune-telling. This is something I haven't noted in Poland. In the whole studied cross-border region shared magic customs related to fortune-telling have disappeared. Nowadays they are only occasionally observed in a playful form, but have lost their magical quality.

An important part of this paper is focused on carolling, whereas the time and space of this custom has been expanded. All the forms of carolling observed during the study are presented on a variety of winter shows, during meetings with the elderly, with the authorities or tourists. Their duration is extended until Shrove Tuesday. Also, the carollers are observed in various places in Poland and abroad. The clash of customs and traditions with modern reality has resulted in a number of changes in the content and form of the former, but there's one thing that remains the same - the ever-present need for celebrating. This has been duly noted in the paper.

The study has also pointed to a group of elements that have become degraded with time. This refers mainly to the magical component and the area related to beliefs - nowadays these functions have been transferred to religion. A change in this function is one of the conditions for the customs and traditions to remain alive. These customs still function in the cultural system and contribute to its modern shape. In this system we can also see new religious customs. When combined with the past traditions, they are used in the periods of transition and take the form of religious celebrations. Shifting the focus towards the religious aspect is visible - consequently, many elements of the archaic tradition are now interpreted in religious terms. As regards denominations, there is a marked common area. The differences stem from the theological interpretations of the beliefs. As regards customs, the Catholic year is syncretic and more magical, mainly because a number of apotropeions are still used, such as holy water, catkins (Palm Sunday) or herbs on Corpus Christi. These elements merge with customs, rites, traditional ceremonies. On the other hand, in the Protestant church the focus is on two different, distinctive features.

In the whole studied area many elements of traditional customs are now included in the popular and mass culture. The outcome of the study has confirmed that the expanded study area has illustrated the universal meaning of certain shared elements of culture, but it has also pointed to some ethnic differences that make both sides of the border unique - this is an important result of the research completed over the years.

Since folk customs include elements of folk theatre, they have been theatricalised in the new context of place and space. This theatricalisation exists together with the new, entertainment function and makes these customs stay alive, at the same time sets the direction and dynamics for the next changes. The contemporary folklore movement has an important role in maintaining the traditions. In an attempt to process the source material in the form of traditional customs, it consciously contributes to the specific cultural change. Transferring customs and traditions onto the stage means a lot of the content is modified, and selected elements are revived. This is how the image of the past tradition is modelled in the new theatrical form, dominated by the aesthetic, ludic and playful function.

It is impossible to skip an important aspect where the traditional local customs meet the global culture, which decidedly blurs the lines in the traditional content and crates unstable, elusive values, which are individual and creative, and may even be presented on a leaflet - without a context or reference not only to the local traditions included in the calendar,

but also to its meaning. In this process, it is important to introduce a way of secular celebration, which has not superseded the local religion dimension of festive occasions. The cultural tradition is an element with its own typological features present in various aspects of its structure. It comes complete with its internal development rules. Simply speaking, cultural tradition has its own grammar. This means the tradition is not a liquid that merges with any other tradition to form a shapeless mass. That's why the described system of cultural tradition absorbs whatever can fit inside - whatever it can accommodate. This is determined by the inherent laws of this system. Foreign elements do not transform it into a different type. Culture, tradition, language do not exist in isolation, but develop in the context of other cultures, traditions and languages, and are connected to them in a variety of ways. The study has illustrated this process.

What you can observe in this process is the individual creation and presentation of the content, which replaced the former, community way of passing thing down from generation to generation, by showing and instructing. There has also been a change in the place where this transfer occurs. Tradition is no longer shared at home. The process has shifted to cultural institutions, which organise local carolling shows and inspire local people to present former customs. A large number of such meetings and shows proves that the content is still valid, especially if it has certain cognitive, bonding, communication and artistic functions.

One can be happy to observe that this content is used as a basis for creating folk programmes, which promote and share the relevant knowledge with younger generations. The dominant ludic function makes it possible to expand the pattern with new elements, which result from the contemporary needs of both parties involved in the communication process. Former symbols, which may now be unintelligible, are subject to innovation. What is important is that for many people these symbols are still a memory of their own family home.

Since the early 20th century traditional culture and customs have been subject to steady disintegration. This is because farming has been in decline, education has developed and advanced and industrial hubs have been created, thus affecting a lifestyle change. The images retained in the memory of the informants are of sentimental value to the older generations. The inhabitants of the three villages refer to the past magic procedures, e.g. by placing cherries in the water by hand on St. Lucy's Day, by refraining from going to the forest on St. Thomas's Eve, or by leaving an empty plate on Christmas Eve. And these are just a few examples that point to the permanent nature of the symbols rooted in the people's

memory. On the other hand, we can see numerous customs enhanced with a new, syncretic content as part of the global culture. A good example will be Santa Claus visiting children - a custom in Poland and in Lapland.

An attempt to study materials collected over time was an opportunity to note those aspects of studies of the seasonal customs that were previously overseen. A reference to the past enabled an efficient monitoring of the changes. Multifaceted discovery and interpretation of the meaning underlying various cultural phenomena means we can understand their contemporary role in the social life.

While conducting the study of customs and traditions, I noted that the collected material can be verified mainly with reference to the notion of customs. The magical component and beliefs that shaped the whole world view of the local population have long disappeared.

The collected material is surprising because of the abundance of content and forms observed in the three small villages on the border of Poland and Slovakia. This is undoubtedly the first attempt at a comprehensive presentation of winter traditions in this cross-border region. This determines the need for further studies, especially focused on contemporary context in which the discussed winter customs, rituals and ceremonies function. An interesting area of study would be the traditions and customs practised all through the year - this could provide a broader outlook on the whole cross-border region.

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