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Tradition and practices of gender domination on the example of Hutsul carolling

The study of “classic” ethnographic topics, such as folklore and tradition, often involves the use of established methodological and interpretative approaches, which tend to function as an end in themselves rather than a means to achieve broader scientific objectives. As a result, the spheres under investigation are analysed using the set framework of rigid, petrified categories that cannot be expanded. This can produce particular problems in the case of geographical regions and research areas whose image has long been established and whose key elements are subject to a number of different explanations. In such cases it seems essential to apply an anthropological approach focused on so-far neglected aspects of social organisation, social practice and opinions voiced about them.

Carolling is a tradition of door-to-door visits by groups of people performing carols, song genres dealing with religious and secular subjects connected with the birth of Jesus Christ (Kopaliński, 1985, p. 499). The custom is usually approached as a manifestation of traditional culture and is broadly represented in Europe and other parts of the world (Caraman, 1933, p. v). Although the tradition of carolling is in decline rather than on the rise (as in most cases it is limited to stage performances), it is still very much alive in some regions (Cząstka-Kłapyta, 2014, p. 10).

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The Slavic Atlantis

The existing studies of winter carolling¹ devote particular attention to the south-eastern Carpathian region which ethnographers refer to as the Hutsul region, or Hutsulshchyna (“land of the Hutsuls”). For over a century, the region has drawn much interest from ethnographers, folklorists and musicologists documenting the “lasting remains of its cultural tradition” (Cząstka-Kłapyta, 2014, p. 10). The image they created in the process became part of popular imagination and includes a number of colourful appellations used in public discourse, such as “the Slavic Atlantis”, “a magical land” (Ołdakowska-Kuflowa, 2010; Skłodowski, 2015) and “the land of magic and beauty” (Lomats’kyi, 1959, quoted after “Lomats’kyi Mykhaïlo,” n.d.). Hutsulshchyna, just like the Polish region of Podhale, came to be seen as a stronghold of folklore and “archaic traits” (Makarchuk, 2004, pp. 140–141).

The rich colour and “metaphysical dimension” of Hutsul carolling² (Robotycki, 2014) made it emblematic of the region and gained it a prominent place in works devoted to its local culture. Hutsul carolling and its repertoire are described in *Ruś Karpacka* (Carpathian Rus’) by the eminent Polish ethnographer and folklorist Oskar Kolberg; they feature in a comparative study of Christmas customs and traditions among Slavs and Romanians by the Romanian scholar Petru Caraman; and are included in Volodymyr Shukhevych’s multi-volume work *Hutschulshchyna*, the most valued source for the culture of the region. Although research on Hutsul carolling has suffered from discontinuity occasioned by political developments,³ the recent period has seen a revival of interest in this subject. In 2014 Justyna Cząstka-Kłapyta published her monograph entitled *Kolędowanie na Huculszczyźnie* (Carolling in the Hutsul region), an in-depth ethno-musicological study which is among the most extensive works documenting the choreological, musical and linguistic aspect of Hutsul carolling, including also a discussion of the significance and symbolic meaning of this tradition.

Although several forms of carolling are practised in the region⁴ – which differ among them considering the age and sex of participants, the function and nature of the visit, and the time

¹ Specialists in the field distinguish also spring carolling.

² In spite of a general distinction between “carolling” (a custom) and a “carol” (a song genre), in the area of the Hutsul region where I conducted my field studies both these terms are often used with reference to the custom, e.g. *hutsulska kolida*, an entire range of carolling practices. This article uses the forms of the local Hutsul dialect (*koliduvannia*, *kolida*) rather than Ukrainian (*koliaduvannia*, *koliada*).

³ A religious custom, carolling was officially banned from after the Second World War until the 1990s and Ukrainian independence (which does not change the fact that it was practised throughout the period). This made studies on the phenomenon more difficult.

⁴ Including children’s, young people’s and women’s carolling.

of the year – all publications on this subject focus on groups of adult males (called *partii* or, less often, *hurt*) wearing ornamented Hutsul jackets (*serdaky*) and hats (*shapky rohatky*); ornamented axes (*bartky*) they hold in their hands became a symbol of Ukrainian Carpathians, used in tourist brochures and pseudo-academic literature. Thousands of tourists arrive in Kryvorivnia (Verkhovyna district), which boasts the greatest number of carolling groups in the region, to take part in carolling by the eighteenth-century church of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They also visit Kosmach (Kosiv district) to admire holy crosses and shrines carved in ice for the Feast of Jordan (Epiphany). Considered less spectacular, other types of carolling are not as popular among local residents or scholars. Children's groups (e.g. *Vertep*, *Pastushky*, *Anhelyky*, *Koroli*) perform mainly short scenes. The house-to-house tour taken on New Year's Eve (*Malanka*),⁵ in turn, is more popular in the province of Chernivtsi along the border with Romania.

Drawing on the literature of the subject and my own field experience, it is possible to conclude that the most often overlooked form is that of women's carolling (*zhinoche koliduvannia*). According to a general view shared in the region, women should not, or even cannot perform this practice. In spite of this, it happens that they take initiative and form their own groups. In most cases, however, they are not taken particularly seriously and their activity is treated as a minor episode.

In view of the situation, this article considers women's carolling, a phenomenon that so far has not drawn much attention from scholars and is perceived as non-traditional and relatively new. Secondly, it offers an analysis of discourse and social practices involved in Hutsul carolling, including gender relations in which this tradition is entangled. Finally, it is an attempt at the deconstruction of carolling as such, and tries to point out that this tradition can be approached not only from the perspective of ritual action, but also with the focus on social significance of practices it involves and on the analysis of domination they manifest.

Tradition and symbolic violence

Before proceeding to the analytical part of this article, it is worth outlining its major theoretical premises, with a particular focus on the concepts of tradition and symbolic violence.

⁵ In the Hutsul dialect of Ukrainian, the custom is also known as *Melankie*, which derives from the name of St Melanie, whose feast day falls on 13 January. According to folk tradition, she was the first lady of the house; Vasyl (Basil), the first man of the house, is celebrated on 14 January, the New Year in the Old Style (Julian) calendar.

Tradition is one of the most frequently applied concepts in social and cultural studies. Defined as “transfer from generation to generation of customs, convictions, principles, beliefs, approaches, ways of perception, conduct, (unprovable) past events perceived as history, artistic and artisan skills” (Kopaliński, 1985, p. 1196), it came to be widely recognised by scholars as a factor of continuity and preservation of social practices. This classical approach perceives tradition as an antonym of change and is focused on such aspects as durability, recurrence and distant historical origin of the contents of culture, whose transformation is either impossible or brings negative results (Dobrowolski, 1966, p. 76; Tomicki, 1973, pp. 47–51). By contrast, new approaches stress the processual nature of tradition and note that the elements involved never remain intact in the course of inter-generational transfer (Ingold & Kurttila, 2000, pp. 192–193). A fundamental redefinition came with Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s *Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), where they proposed the concept of “invented tradition”, one entangled in power relations and determined not only by historical, but also (perhaps even more importantly) present-day factors.

A discussion of gender relations in the context of Hutsul carolling requires the deconstruction of the concept of tradition. The fact of long-lasting involvement of scholars with the region has had a profound impact on the current image of this local tradition. As a result, it is generally perceived as a religious rite “repeating the world cycle anew” (Sulima, 2001, p. 15) superimposed on pragmatic attitude to the custom referred to by ethnographers as “casting a spell on reality” (Pol. *zaklinanie rzeczywistości*) with a view to adjusting its state as desired (Domańska-Kubiak, 1979, p. 17). In addition, we can talk about, as it were, three parallel Hutsul regions existing side by side, with carolling assuming a different position in each of them. Firstly, the everyday reality of informants’ ordinary life; secondly, the region invented by the intelligentsia; and finally, the world created from outside by the media, tourist industry and advertising. These different categories interpenetrate and the lines of division between them are by no means fixed. Since each of them is represented with different intensity in different locations, the ensuing result is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional nature of the region. This has convinced me to focus on the social dimension of performing carolling practices, rather than multiply petrified and limiting patterns of thought, according to which they are confined to repeating a fixed pattern year by year without creating anything new in the process.

This makes it possible to focus on the gender aspect of tradition and of approach to tradition. What seems important in this context is Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus

(often used in conjunction with that of discourse) within which an individual acts (and forms interpretations) according to his or her mental dispositions stemming from internalised schemes of perception and thought (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86). This approach allows to analyse not only what and how something is said, but also how this is determined by unconsciously followed mechanisms. Importantly, habitus is subject to the process of internalisation taking its course in a number of areas. In view of the fact that the practices discussed below are often categorised as ritual, another important aspect is that of embodiment (Choińska, 2012, p. 29). Bourdieu's theory of ritual includes the concept of bodily habitus, or *hexis*, which enables the body to act, reconstruct social relations, reproduce patterns and situate the individual within them: "A rite, a performative practice that strives to bring about what it acts or says, is often simply a practical mimesis of the natural process that is to be facilitated" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 92).

The bodily aspect of cultural practices turns out to be particularly important in the case of gender analysis of tradition. The above mentioned concepts are linked with another category advocated by Bourdieu and significant in the analysis of gender aspects offered below: symbolic violence. These mechanisms of exclusion entrenched in social order as unconscious schemes of perception embedded in cognitive structures are most notably manifested in relation between masculinity and femininity. Analysing domination in the context of gender, Bourdieu concludes that the difference between them is inscribed in the self-perpetuating social order. This article aims to discuss the case of Hutsul carolling in the context of masculine domination in the sphere of tradition.

Bourdieu's theory is closely associated with his critique of language, which he perceives as a field of relations between speakers and hearers rather than an abstract code. To an extent, they also involve power relations that can be discovered by demystifying the meaning behind actual statements, a practice followed by Bourdieu himself. In order to achieve this, the anthropology of oppressed, overlooked and marginalised groups, including gender and feminist studies (Grabowska & Kościańska, 2015, p. 277), as well as other critical theories, use tools offered by the hermeneutics of suspicion. The concept, which was first introduced by Paul Ricoeur with a view to describing the positions of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, involves a strategy of interpretation based on distrust in the overt meaning, traced to "an unconscious will to power" (Grondin, 1994). The hermeneutics of suspicion, as opposed to the hermeneutics of faith, aims to unveil meanings that are disguised – it is "a tearing off of masks, an interpretation that reduces disguises" imposed, as it were, by relations of power

(Ricoeur, 1970, p. 30). In other words, the unconsciously “encoded” meaning should be “decoded”, which involves the unveiling of how particular statements guided by particular discourses are sometimes politically convenient. However, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick observes that the hermeneutics of suspicion was conceived as a descriptive and taxonomic category and its use is not to be treated as imperative. Treating it in terms of “a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities” leads to “paranoid reading” (Kosovsky Sedgwick, 2003, pp. 124–125). Consequently, I treat this approach only as an inspiration which joins the interpretative paths mentioned above.

“Carolling is a man’s job...”

...and women have nothing to do here”⁶ Statements of this kind featured in most interviews conducted in the course of my field studies.⁷ As can be seen, carolling performed by male groups is considered the “proper” practice of this custom and follows a number of rules. Firstly, a strictly set timeframe: from Christmas (*Rizdvo*) (7 January) to the Feast of Jordan (Epiphany),⁸ celebrating the baptism of Jesus (19 January).⁹ Secondly, with some exceptions,¹⁰ the groups are composed only of adult males who are assigned particular functions.¹¹ As they tour their allocated area (*revir*), they collect donations that are later transferred to the local church. Each visit to a household follows a set pattern of performance and repertoire of carols, which makes it

⁶ Male, born in 1949, Verkhovyna; Ukr. *Kolidnyky tse ie cholovicha robota, siuda zhinky ne maiut' khodyty*.

⁷ The field studies were conducted within the framework of ethnography workshop organised as part of a research project entitled *Huculszczyzna – antropologiczne obszary pamięci* (The Hutsul region: Anthropological dimensions of memory), led by Professor Lech Mróz (Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw). In 2014–2016 I went on six field trips lasting between one and two week each. The study was conducted using an ethnographic method based on questionnaire and in-depth interviews conducted in Ukrainian, and participant observation of the tours of three carolling groups, involving also audio-visual recording; I also acquired historical materials from some informants. Geographical location: fifteen villages in three districts of Ivano-Frankivsk province in Ukraine (Kosiv, Nadvirna, Verkhovyna): Babyn, Berezhnytsia, Biloberezka, Bukovets, Bystrets, Chorni Oslavy, Holovy, Iltsi, Javoriv, Kosmach, Krasnoillia, Kryvorivnia, Verkhniilaseniv, Verkhovyna, Zamahora. In the periods between the visits, I followed information on the subject on the Internet.

⁸ In the Hutsul region, the Feast of Jordan (Epiphany) is also known as *Vodokhreshchia*, *Vodorshchi* and *Vodosviat'tia*; sometimes it is also called “the second Christmas Eve” (*Druhyi Sviatyi Vechir*).

⁹ In the area, religious festivals are celebrated according to the Old Style (Julian) calendar followed in Eastern Christianity.

¹⁰ Sometimes it happens that among those invited to join the group are also boys who are carollers’ next of kin (most often the sons and grandsons of the group leader). In some villages, however, membership in carolling groups is strictly limited to married males, often referred to as *gazda*. In some cases, unmarried young adult males (formerly known as *bakhury*) form their own groups called *horikhovi* (as in the village of Babyn in the Kosiv district).

¹¹ Carolling groups are composed of a leader (*bereza*), who knows all the carols and is in charge of the performance, a “picker” (*vybirtsa*), who chooses those who can join in and keeps the record of donations, a fiddler and rank-and-file carollers, who might be equipped with bells, horns and trembitas (long wooden horns similar to the alphorn). The functions vary across different groups, villages and hamlets.

“a complex action endowed with symbolic meaning” (Cząstka-Kłapyta, 2014, p. 162). The wishes included in the lyrics are believed to ensure prosperity. Interpreted as a lucky sign for the following year, visits by carollers are supposed to bring desolate households back to life.

In the course of such a visit, particular carols are devoted to particular members of the household and performed in a set order: the host, the hostess, the young male(s) (*parubok*), the young female(s) and the dead. An examination of their contents makes it possible to notice priority features ascribed to each gender and age. Carols for the host most often stress his positive qualities and his wealth, using such forms of address as *brat* (brother), *pan* (sir, mister), *hospodar* (host, the man of the house), e.g. “Oh our great and proud host”.¹² Those addressed to young males often revolve around the motif of a journey, looking for a girl, or military motifs; scholars also distinguish carols for young males living in a foreign land away from home (Caraman, 1933). Carols for women mostly focus on housework and serving the guests; those for unmarried young adult females also include the motif of looking for a partner (at this time of the year they perform fortune-telling practices which are supposed to reveal the identity of their future husbands).

Distinction between male and female social roles is also visible in festive practices, which points at the importance of their bodily aspect. The group is welcome by the host, who is the first to kiss a hand cross carried by the guests; he then gives it to other members of the household to do the same. In the course of a visit I observed in the village of Bukovets (Verkhovyna district) in 2015, it was mainly the host who stayed in the room where the feast for the carollers was held; he also initiated singing *spivanky*¹³ and dancing. On the other hand, the hostess was mainly busy laying the table, preparing the dishes and serving the guests; towards the end of the visit, she gave the group leader (*bereza*) a *kalach*, braided, ring-shaped bread typically served at funerals and Christmas celebrations as a reminder of the dead. What needs to be noted, however, is that in this particular case the host was a member of the carolling group, which most likely had an impact on the course of the visit. As opposed to male carollers, women tended to remain in the background of the entire event and certainly were not in the focus of attention.¹⁴ The above examples indicate how

¹² Ukr. *Oj, hordo-pyshnyj nash hospodariu*.

¹³ Ukr. *Spivanky* – musical genres performed alongside carols by carolling parties visiting households. They often involve humorous subjects (*spivanky soromnitski*) and are sung to a typical tune of Hutsul *spivanky*, performed also at other times of the year.

¹⁴ It is not my intention to provide a typically conventional picture of a visit by a carolling group. I only focus on my experience of such a visit in the Hutsul region during the Christmas period in 2015. In view of the diversity of this tradition across the region it would not be justified to extend it to other locations.

certain social patterns become embodied and come to be manifested not only by means of verbal expression, but also particular gestures and actions. Following Bourdieu, this can be referred to as a case of internalised habitus.

A subtle (non)presence

In general, when asked to talk about carolling practices, the informants only focused on describing the course of action taken by carollers and did not mention the role of women in the course of their visits. Paradoxically, it was the first interview that turned my attention to the “backstage” of carolling tours and the women’s side of the custom. Oksana, the wife of a local priest, described women’s involvement as an essential guarantee of success rather than help and assistance:

And the men, they go carolling so they can’t chop the wood, light the fire or milk the cows. It’s the women who have to do all the jobs then; they’re the ones who stay at home. And that’s what they do: it’s cold, farm animals might need water, so they do it, but there’s no one to praise them for letting their men go. And if their men’s shirts get dirty, they have to wash them so that there’s not a spot left, absolutely nothing at all; they go around wearing spotless white shirts, like artists (*laughter*). And they dry their shoes so that they don’t catch a cold, make woollen pullovers to keep them warm, and all that. It’s not easy to stay at home without a husband for these two weeks and do all the housework and work around the farm. These women whose husbands go carolling, they are tough.¹⁵ (Female, born in 1975, Kryvorivnia)

Although women’s involvement is an essential element of carolling practices, it is entirely absent in the discourse, which makes it a case of masculine domination inscribed in the social division of labour and in private rituals (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 24). It is a classic situation in which female space is confined to the private sphere, as opposed to the male space of public life. As a result, women become invisible or secondary in the context of significant activities, including religious practices. This also draws attention to classical oppositions between the sublime, spiritual and official on the one hand, and the modest,

¹⁵ Ukr. *A choloviky idut’ koliduvaty i vony nehodni vzhe tudi ni drovu rubaty, vatru klasty ni korovok doity – musiat’ vse zhinky na toi chas, tym khto v doma lyshyvsia. A ce zaimatysia: kholodno, mozhe vody treba vnesty hudobi, to zhinky tozhe, lysh im nikhto chesti takoi ne skladaie, shcho vony pustyly swoikh cholovikiv. I jakshcho ikhnia sorochka pomastylasia, vony im musiat’ vsio vyshtrymuvaty, by ne bulo ni plamki, ni nichoho, vony take khodiat’ bilesyn’ki iak artysty. (laughter) Nu, choboty vysushyty, by ne zmerzly, perestudylysia, puluverok zrobyty takyi z vovny, aby ne zmerzly, vsio. Sami lyshytysia doma na ci dva tyzhni i vsio sami doma provadyty bez cholovika to ne ie lehko. Ci zhinky koliadnytski tozhe taki povazhni.*

material and unofficial on the other (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 468). Anything that takes place beyond the spectacular visit proper is mostly connected with female roles and does not belong to what Suzanne S. Brenner calls “the realm of prestige” (Brenner, 1995, pp. 25–26). In other words, it is an “informal” sphere of tradition. For this reason, even if men do not depreciate women’s contribution to the event and to the entire tour, they do not point it out as a significant or key element in a broad picture. Apart from activities mentioned by the informant quoted above, women might also be charged with keeping the record of lyrics in notebooks carried around by group leaders (Cząstka-Kłapyta, 2014, p. 231).

In order to gain an insight into issues of gender in Hutsul carolling, I enquired members of carolling groups about a ban on women’s participation in their activity (which I mentioned above). Initially, such replies as “it goes back a long way” and “carolling is a men-only tradition” did not explain too much, but in the course of time it became apparent that this state of affairs is explained by the fundamental social order stemming from a particular “social mythology” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 469). The following fragment of a media interview with the leader of a carolling group from Verkhovyna, which was quoted by one of my informants, is an example worth noting:

“And the women, do they go carolling?”

“No, they don’t.”

“And do you take them to go carolling with you?”

“No, we don’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because we don’t.”¹⁶

(Male, born about 1975, Verkhonii laseniv)

It clearly demonstrates that “male order is so deeply grounded as to need no justification: it imposes itself as self-evident, universal” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 171). Still, I had an opportunity to hear arguments in support of this traditional standpoint a number of times. Elderly carollers pointed out a principle regulating group practices while on tour: since for those walking around the carolling period involved a certain suspension of the everyday order,¹⁷ they had to abstain from sexual contacts. One of group leaders admit-

¹⁶ Ukr. –*A zhinky khodjat’? /–Ni, ne khodjat’.* /–*A vy zhinok ne berete? /–Ni, ne beremo.* /–*A chomu vy ne berete? /–Bo ne beremo.*

¹⁷ Historically, carollers returned home only when they had completed the tour of their allocated area, which could take even two weeks. Although this is rarely the case today, their experience still involves a certain degree of liminality. Justyna Cząstka-Kłapyta writes about becoming a caroller as a certain rite of passage (Cząstka-Kłapyta, 2014, p. 162).

ted that the presence of women in a group might provoke temptation, which is why they were not welcome as members. On the other hand, it is interesting to notice that today's carolling practices include erotic undertones, mentions of infidelity and encouragement of young males to promiscuity before settling down. Explaining the men-only practice of the custom, the informants often referred to a rule of the Church that bans women from carrying the holy cross (a mandatory element of the paraphernalia), which automatically excludes them from group leadership:

It's been like that from the old days, so it's a tradition that it isn't allowed. I don't know, maybe they let women do it [carry the cross] in some places, but not around here. This thing that women are kind of less important than men, like, it all comes from religion, from the old times.¹⁸ (Female, born in 1958, Verkhniy Iaseniv)

This comment comes as another example of combining bodily practices and cultural principles creating long-lasting local proscriptive and prescriptive norms.

The most frequent argument raised by the informants was, however, the physical hardship of carolling. Allegedly, women would not be able to reach cottages high-up in the mountains or sing and play in heavy frost. The section below presents the examples of three Hutsul villages where women formed their own carolling groups, which involved acting against the convictions mentioned above.

“Not everyone would let the woman out of the house”¹⁹

The book entitled “Christmas carolling in the village of Kryvorivnia” (*Rizdv'iena Kolida u seli Kryvorivnia*), a volume of memoirs by Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit published in 2014, brings information concerning carolling in the period between 1937 and 1939. An iconic figure of the village,²⁰ the author describes the entire process (in the Hutsul dialect) and includes a record of carols performed in particular seasons and the names of villagers involved.

¹⁸ Ukr. *Tse tak z davna zavedeno, tse tak vzhe po tradyicii ide, shcho ne mozhna. Mozhe des' daiut', ia ne znaiu, ale u nas to ne mozhna. Tak, shcho zhinka niby mensha, cholovik starshyi, tse z relihii, z davna pishlo.*

¹⁹ Female, born in 1969, Berezhnytsia; Ukr. *Ne kozhen zhinku pusty z khaty.*

²⁰ Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit (1927–1998); at the age of seventeen, she was deported to a Soviet labour camp on charges of help and assistance to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). On return to her home village, she became a social activist engaged in photography, painting and writing (under the pseudonym of Horytsvit). Today, her memory is preserved by local activists, who publish her works, organise exhibitions of her photography and paintings, and promote her on the Internet. Her life and work was the subject of a BA thesis written at Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw in 2016 (see: Dębowski, 2016).

The book also contains reproductions of her paintings with captions featuring rhymed sayings; the works form a series called "A Hutsul girl's lot" (the author's own title), portraying the life of local women. In the context of interviews conducted with local residents in the area, this female voice on the iconic Hutsul tradition is an unusual occurrence. Indeed, this herstory is no less exceptional than the author's own biography. It is focused not only on practices performed by male groups, but also on carolling among the neighbours, which involves entire families and is more spontaneous.²¹ Apart from children's carolling, it is the only form of the custom where female participation is traditionally allowed. In the 1960s Plytka-Horytsvit organised a local girls' carolling group. I managed to find one of its members who started a group of women carollers in the neighbouring village of Berezhnytsia about fifty years later.

Vasylina, the organiser, decided to set up the group when the local male carollers did not get together a few years ago. As the village was building a church at the time, the residents tried to find ways to raise donations for the purpose. A similar situation occurred in the nearby villages of Krasnoillia (2012) and Verkhniï laseniv, which also found themselves without their carolling groups. Talking about these events, the women often said that they had been uncertain about their decision and had their apprehensions:

'I don't know how they are going to receive us. Let's go to the house where we first meet; there might be people who will invite us later.' The women said: 'Come what may, it's not like we're going to get a beating'.²² (Female, born in 1949, Berezhnytsia)

Although female groups adopted most rules of their male counterparts, the period of their door-to-door visits in the area was shorter than the standard two weeks and did not exceed a few days, in the course of which they tried to call on as many households as they could. The groups were mostly composed of work colleagues, neighbours or fellow members of a local choir, and their repertoire included mainly church carols. In one case, a female caroller from Berezhnytsia invented a *spivanka* with verses devoted to each member of the group, quoting their names and describing the events of the tour. In all cases, the groups decided to wear the same clothes: kerchiefs, skirts and Hutsul jackets (*serdaky*). Although their visits were much shorter than those by male groups, the donations they raised were generally higher. *Zhinochi*

²¹ Carolling visits among the neighbours usually take place on the first day of Christmas.

²² Ukr. *la znaiu, jak to nas budut' spryimaty? A my idim z pochatku do cikh, u kotrykh my zberemos', a tam uzhe liudy mozhe nas zaklychut'. Kazhut' zhinky: Idemo. Shcho bude tai bude. Ta byty nas ne budut'.*

partii, women's carolling groups, had an air of novelty which local residents found attractive. Those impressed by their performance invited them also to other areas in the region, where they presented their vocal and musical skills, including even playing the horn. The attraction factor was particularly apparent in Krasnoillia, where the head of the group happened to be the local mayor. In her interview, she told me that their hosts had been greatly moved, because there had not been any carolling visits in their hamlet for the previous ten years.

On the other hand, female carollers also received abuse from their fierce critics:

The men took offence: 'And what's that supposed to be?!' they said. There was this man in the village who was really against it. He said it all comes down from the ancestors, I mean that it's men that go carolling; that's why he said that the women shouldn't do it. (...) He was really against it, and he said it all comes down from the ancestors, from times immemorial, that it goes back a long way. He said that we disgraced their ancestors, and ours, and other people's ancestors as well, because women went carolling. He was really against it. (...) 'Shame on you', he said, 'why did you go carolling?'²³ (Female, born in 1958, Verkhniï laseniv)

It could be assumed that the initiative of women carollers raised scepticism as a new or unusual venture. Most importantly, however, it disturbed social structure, which is why it was negatively valued. As an element of folklore, where the collective dimension prevails over the individual, their attempt did not survive in the process of transmission since it was not accepted by the entire community (Napiórkowski, 2014, p. 135). Apart from Krasnoillia, where the women's group was headed by the local mayor, in all other cases the groups continued only for a few consecutive years at the most. These initiatives also raised concern of some clerics. Although they allowed women to carry the holy cross,²⁴ at the same time they urged local men to revive their groups. Following their eventual re-establishment, women gave up their carolling activity, even though they often stressed it as their achievement and a source of great pride. As they recall, their sense of satisfaction was particularly strong whenever they met their husbands while on tour, when they were praised by male carollers or when tourists asked them for a performance.

²³ Ukr. *Choloviky pochely obizhatysia: „loi, a shcho to”. Cholovik takyi u seli to duzhe vystupav, shcho tse z predkiv vede, shcho choloviki maiut' ity i za to zachov, shchoby zhinky ne ishly. (...) Duzhe vystupav i skazav, shcho tse wid predkiv ie, z pokon viku, z davnoho, shcho my ponyzly ich predkiv, shcho vobshchem i svoich, i ikhnikh, shcho zhinky pishly koliduvaty. Vin duzhe proty buv. (...) Skazav, shcho: Vstydalybysia vy! Choho vy khodyly koliduvaty?*

²⁴ In view of the traditional ban on women carrying the holy cross, in the village of Verkhniï laseniv it was the son of the local priest who was assigned to perform this task for the local group of female carollers.

The question which begs an answer is why the revival of the local male carolling groups meant the end of activity of their female counterparts. Surprisingly, all women informants involved provide the same explanation: their groups were no longer needed:

They simply got together and it's a kind of man's duty. God created a man and then a woman, and she is man's helpmate. That's what it was, we were helpmates; we went carolling when the men didn't. We helped, we showed them that it's something that needs to be done. And we made it: they got together and they go carolling. We don't go around carolling these days anymore; the men do it.²⁵ (Female, born in 1969, Berezhnysia)

Although women carollers achieved great success – construction works on the church in Berezhnysia were completed, the new custom survived in Krasnoillia, donations for the church in Verkhniï laseniv doubled – the accounts of local residents tend to diminish their role. They often refer to their activity in terms of “taking the men down a peg or two” (*uterty nosa*) or interpret it as an attempt to ridicule their indolence (*pozbytkuvatysia*). Moreover, the above quotation indicates that it is also the women themselves that depreciate their own practices, even though they made them proud.

“Adjusted tradition”

In fact, the three villages presented above are not an exceptional case in the region, as the practice of female carolling is known to have been followed also in other locations where male groups did not assemble. Interestingly, the phenomenon is not the question of the last decade, but goes back to the Soviet period. Women carollers from Krasnoillia recall their predecessors from the 1950s, whom they consulted on some particulars (organising visits, repertoire, dress) when they formed their own group in recent years. Moreover, informants in Chorni Oslavy (Nadvirna district) recall even earlier such cases from the days when the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) was active in the area. At the time, carolling became mainly a female domain, since local men left the village to fight. As explained, women went carolling “so that the tradition wouldn't get lost”²⁶ (Female, born in 1967, Chorni Oslavy).

²⁵ Ukr. *Prosto vony vzhe zibralsia i iakby tse muzhykiv oboviazok. Stvoryv Boh cholovika, potim zhinku i vona ie povnota cholovika. O tak samo my byly povnota koliady tsei, iaku choloviky ne koliduvaly, a my dopovniuvaly i pokazuvaly im, shcho vsiozh take tse treba. I my dobylysia toho, shcho vony take pishly i koliduiut'. I na danyi moment my vzhe ne khodymo, khodjat' kolidnyky-muzhyky.*

²⁶ Ukr. *Aby tradytsia ne propala.*

Interview materials point to the fact that the attitude to this “transfer” of traditional duties was ambivalent already at the time. On the one hand, it was positive, as the custom could be preserved. On the other, there was a conviction that “proper” carolling was that performed by men (and for men, since visits to households where there were no men were considered “imperfect”), which is why the idea of female carollers was often sceptically received. This and other examples indicate a relation between gender and different types of crises, when it is the women who take over initiative. Just like the “backstage” of carolling visits and tours mentioned above, they belong to the sphere which is unofficial, hence unimportant and depreciated, or even supposed to be kept quiet about in order not to diminish the position of men in the community. The empirical evidence presented above manifests the underlying patterns of symbolic violence:

In effect, the dominated, that is, women, apply to every object of the (natural and social) world and in particular to the relation of domination in which they are ensnared, as well as to the persons through which this relation realizes itself, unthought schemata of thought which are the product of the embodiment of this relation of power (...). (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 171)

What is more, this also applies to men, who experience “the domination of the dominant by his domination”, whereby they have to live up to the image of their masculinity not only by means of practice, but also discourse (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 173), which is apparent in their comments dismissing the role of women in carolling.

In view of the above discussion, it seems necessary to stress the factors which have a considerable impact on the image of the role of women in Ukraine. Constructed as “history”, description of history is a “grand narrative” of wars and uprisings.²⁷ This preoccupation with the military sphere reduces the role of women to such domains as reproduction, household or care (Martsenyuk, 2015, pp. 75, 81). At the same time, the image of Ukrainian women is a combined effect of a number of gender models developed over the years, with the model derived from Slavic mythology and reconstructed after the fall of the Soviet Union on the one hand, and that stemming from commercialisation, exploitation of women’s bodies

²⁷ Hutsuls often stress a connection between carolling motifs and stories of local highwaymen, associated with the legendary figure of Dovbush. This is most apparent in the *plies*, a genre of carol performed to the rhythmical movement of the entire group repeatedly throwing up their ornamented axes. The practice has been suggested to have military connotations (Harasymczuk, 1939, quoted after: Cząstka-Kłapyta, 2014, p. 33). In the course of my field studies I often came across similar associations, e.g.: the carolling group as an army, carollers as soldiers, the leader of the group (*bereza*) as *ataman* (a military leader), the *plies* as a war dance.

and sexuality on the other (Zlobina, 2015, p. 67). The case of the region in question, however, requires an approach focused on the configuration of gender roles in post-socialist rural areas. Frances Pine observes that the socialist state had power over the public display of ritual and at the same time had a great impact on female and male active agency demonstrated mostly through work (Pine, 2000, p. 89). In the Hutsul region, just like in the Polish region of Podhale she describes, social identity was based on kinship, tradition and local identity focused on the domestic sphere (cf. Zlobina, 2015, p. 67). This is apparent in the case of carolling, which continued to be performed in spite of an official ban imposed in the Soviet period. Standards created by the state interpenetrated those strictly local ones observed in the family, creating a multidimensional perception of gender in the process.

The examples discussed in this article indicate that the ritual “repetition of the time of the beginning” (Zadrożyńska, 1985) in carolling practices first and foremost involves confirmation and perpetuation of social structure, which makes it hardly possible to negotiate “the femininity hidden underneath the symbolic patriarchal order” (Zlobina, 2015, p. 69). In terms of discourse, the role of women in Hutsul carolling is marginalised or overlooked, although on closer examination it proves crucial. In spite of the fact that changing the set order was difficult, women’s carolling groups in the Hutsul region became a fact. These initiatives did not entirely negate the established social hierarchy – those involved did not praise their achievement over that of the male groups, and neither did they aim to negotiate a new social arrangement. Rather, their comments on this issue display a willingness to compete with their male counterparts, to prove themselves, and to break up with the stereotype of the “weaker sex”.

Using the term proposed by Tamara Zlobina, I would identify the *zhinochi partii*, women’s carolling groups, as a case of “grey emancipation”. The grey emancipation does not directly negate the established order, but offers a means of escape from repression. Zlobina defines the “grey emancipation zone” as “a number of tactics invented by women in patriarchal societies in order to escape patriarchal pressures”. As such, it “denote[s] something between patriarchy and feminism” (Zlobina, 2015, p. 65). Although female carolling in the Hutsul region does not entirely negate social gender roles, it does put them in question and provides an opportunity to express a certain autonomy revealing the hidden agency of women in the process (cf. Zlobina, 2015, p. 66).

I believe that the activity of women carollers can be referred to not so much as an “invented tradition” (Cząstka-Kłapyta, 2014, p. 256) – since it would suggest seeking legiti-

macy by demonstrating its origins in the past (Klekot, 2014, p. 499)²⁸ – but as an “adjusted tradition”, one that is adapted in response to the needs of the community. The case of Hutsul carolling seems to lend itself as a good example for considering relations between femininity and masculinity in the framework of a custom which is a medium of their transfer. Indeed, the festive, mystical time stresses the image of gender roles in everyday life, confirming and questioning them at the same time.

Translated by Piotr Styk

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²⁸ The question remains whether reminiscing women carollers of the past can be treated as seeking such legitimacy. Still, importantly, most of these groups no longer continue their activity.

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Tradition and practices of gender domination on the example of Hutsul carolling

The Christmas custom of carolling has a very special place in the life of the people of the Hutsul region. Referred to as a religious rite, this tradition has long been an object of numerous studies that shaped ideas about it. Although several forms of carolling are practised in the region, both researchers and the local people of the Ukrainian Carpathians recognise carolling by groups of adult males, which marginalises the role of women, as the most important. However, on closer examination it turns out that women also have an exceptional impact on the course of tradition and often take over initiative. The article focuses on gender relations in Hutsul carolling, a subject that so far has been neglected in literature. It also analyses the connection between discourse and social practices manifested in male and female forms of carolling. A closer look at the official and unofficial character of tradition, as well as relations between genders and different types of crises, reveals the patterns of domination and symbolic power in the domain of gender.

Keywords:

Hutsul region, Ukraine, carolling, tradition, gender, domination

Tradycja a praktyki dominacji w obrębie płci na przykładzie huculskiego kołędowania

Bożonarodzeniowy zwyczaj kołędowania zajmuje szczególne miejsce w życiu mieszkańców Huculszczyzny. Określane jako rytuał religijny huculskie kołędowanie od dawna stanowi obiekt wielu prac naukowych, które kształtują wyobrażenia na jego temat. Na tych terenach funkcjonuje wiele form kołędowania. Za najistotniejsze, zarówno badacze, jak i mieszkańcy Karpat ukraińskich, uznają kołędowanie mężczyzn, w którym marginalizowana jest rola kobiet. Przy bliższym przyjrzeniu okazuje się jednak, że również i one mają szczególny wpływ na przebieg tradycji, niejednokrotnie przejmując kołędniczą inicjatywę. Artykuł skupia się na nieuwzględnianych dotąd w literaturze przedmiotu relacjach płci w obrębie huculskiego kołędowania. Analizuje również związek dyskursu i praktyk społecznych przejawiających się w kołędzie kobiecej i męskiej. Przyjrzenie się kwestiom oficjalności i nieoficjalności oraz relacjom między płcią a wszelkiego rodzaju kryzysami pozwala zwrócić uwagę na uwidaczniającą się dominację oraz przemoc symboliczną w obrębie płci.

Słowa kluczowe:

Huculszczyzna, Ukraina, kołędowanie, tradycja, gender, dominacja

Note:

This is the translation of the original article entitled "Tradycja a praktyki dominacji w obrębie płci na przykładzie huculskiego kołędowania", which was published in *Adeptus*, issue 9, 2017.

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