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WOMEN'S ROLES FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Ilona Pasqualetti

Interview Analysis Along the Dimensions of Value Sociology

My PhD research thesis, a project currently in the planning and data collection process, focuses primarily on Hungarian women above the age of fifty and their prospects on the graduate labour market. A successful analysis of such phenomenon requires the collection of interview data that will later constitute the basis of qualitative research. The following paper, therefore, analyses a single life course interview given by an informant; a first-generation female intellectual, shaped by her surrounding society and the values of the Kádár regime. This provides the basis of a value analysis conducted by dissecting the interviewee's core value system, her value conflicts and changes with special attention to Hungary's socio-economic shift from socialism to global capitalism.

In addition to György Csepeli's value sociology lecture series, my research relies heavily on Elemér Hankiss's 1974 sociological study, a project dedicated to uncovering the ways in which people viewed themselves and their fellow human beings.

The formal framework of this paper only allows space for the description of a single case study. Thus, the outcome of my research is based on the analysis of the underlying value systems of a single individual.

Research methodology: I have attempted to raise open and flexible interview questions in order to collect as much primary material about the value system of a selected interviewee as possible. The aim was for a given case study to reveal its underlying variables, correlations and core systems which were then to be examined during the content analysis process. Accordingly, I have conducted a three-hour long life course interview with attention to lifestyle, work, income, leisure, family, childhood, religious identity, social issues, relationships, etc. As I have known my interview subject for years, I had the opportunity to observe her actual style of living, her social attributes, her behaviour, and most importantly, her system of values.

Primary Sources

In order to gain a thorough insight into the system of values and identification points of my interviewee, Ágnes F., I organised the various elements of her self-assessment into value categories outlined by the life course interview. These interview fragments thus form the primary source base for the qualitative analysis of values.¹ All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated

Pragmatic qualities: *I'm fast, my brain works fast and I'm not lazy. I'm perfect. I had a great career I was going up like a rocket. I had a great salary. I had to make responsible decisions. I have expectations. I'm a goal-oriented, motivated, strong personality, a perfectionist, always aiming for perfection. Trying my luck. I'm rich in experiences. I wouldn't do anything all over again.*

Intellectual qualities: *When I got into 'Közgáz'², that's where everything opened up for me. Since then, I've been interested in politics, economics, and the arts. In music, the theatre, the visual arts. The internet is important, I gain information, this complete independence, this great freedom that I don't have to adapt. I'm very happy on my own too. Alone. I read a lot. I've got a network, acquaintanceship. I still keep in touch with my university course mates. I maintain these connections, you have to, without these, you grow lonely. Travelling! Thank God I earn enough money that I can fulfil my passion for travelling. And that's it. I'm not waiting for great things to happen.*

Personal qualities: *I value myself highly, appreciation is important. I do soul-searching. Be honest with yourself, that's how you maintain the order, and that's how you keep your inner structures intact. I realise certain things immediately.*

¹ This and all forthcoming translations, both from primary and secondary sources are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

² Hungarian abbreviation of the word '*közgazdaság*' meaning 'economic sciences' or 'economics'. In this context the word refers to the Karl Marx University of Economic Sciences (1953), today known as Corvinus University of Budapest.

Moral qualities: *I'm able to finance my life back home, I sleep sound, I pay my taxes over there in April, everything's paid, pension, health insurance, everything. 'Blackwork'³, that's the biggest misstep. I live up to my own expectations. My own. I don't even know, why am I still voicing my opinions? Improve yourself. In-depth soul-searching, facing one's own self, and all these reflections... holding your head high. I constantly control myself. Yes, I want to do everything perfectly, always. That's my gage, you need to have a gage. Cause I do learn from my own mistakes. I have to account for myself, not for other people. I have to prove myself for myself, I tackle my own self every single day. For the longest, I couldn't care less what other people say. They have no influence over what I do.*

Sociable qualities: *I aid my children. Is there a more noble act than to help your fellow men? I have a broad network, I am welcoming. In romantic relationships it's important that the other one knows one more thing than I do. Cause that's what I can look up to, that's someone I can learn from.*

Familial qualities: *My mother, she was incredibly smart. I was five years old when she told me that a child has to do three different things besides going to school. Firstly, to learn an instrument, secondly, to do sports and thirdly, to study a language. Getting a bad grade was simply not an option! There were expectations. No academic report card under a 4,8 average.⁴ Study! It can be done, you just have to study, my mother said. It's easy as that, you need to study! Activity and engagement, those are vital. I clean the house, cook, buy groceries, I would go mad without doing anything, without activity.*

Work attitude: *And then I said to myself; both my hands work, and my brain, I'll go and earn some money. No matter what field I'm in, I need to be the best. And I'll have to make the most of that situation. When I left for Austria, I didn't make that choice gladly, only to have*

³ From the Hungarian '*feketézni*' or '*fekete munka*' meaning illicit, undeclared work. Loan translation from the German '*Schwarzarbeit*'. According to German etymology, the adjective 'black' [*schwarz*] suggests a type of illegitimate employment that had to be carried out during the night, in the dark or in 'blackness' (Kluge, 2015: 659).

⁴ Academic grading in Hungary measures performance according to a 5-point system, which ranges from grade 1 ('*elégtelen*' or 'insufficient') to grade 5 ('*kiváló*' or 'excellent'). A report card over a 4,8 average grade suggests a consistently high-achieving academic performance.

any employment at all! Something I have money from. With time I learnt that this can be done smartly and that you can technically earn good money from this. If you speak German, if you're smart. Nothing is failure, it's only an experience. I always do a hundred percent, 24/7, I leave no chance for failure.

Societal perspective: *Everything became so ill in Hungary, and nothing is normal. Rotten selfishness in everybody. There used to be some sort of unity. I don't like it here anymore. I'm not needed here. It'd have to be some great opportunity for me to say I'm moving back for good. If I could do something that I truly love. Cause of the injustice, that was done to me, I turned away from this country. I'm not religious, I don't like extremes in anything. I know that my father's family was protestant and that my maternal grandmother would take me to the Cistercians for the Christmas Mass. if I could choose, I'd be a Buddhist, that's so peaceful. I believe in myself. Everybody should believe in what they want. I've got no problem with that.*

Prejudice: *It's really not easy to stomach the Austrians. You reach this point that you hate your compatriots for how they've changed, for what they have become. And then you start working in Austria and after a time you realise that it's refreshing to come home! So when you'd assume there's no lower than that! There is! There is! And that's the Austrian! The Austrian, that typical 'kleinkariert'⁵. A little nationalist, chauvinist, a little fascist, terribly narrow-minded, yet so proud and dedicated to keep it that way. This tiny little country, the same size as Hungary is divided into nine, smaller, little countries, nine little 'Lands'⁶. Each one has its own dialect, its vernacular, accent, the Tyrolean, the Styrian, the 'Oberösterreich', and the 'Niederösterreich'.⁷ And that's what they are wanking over? That their food is different from what you can get 200 km away from there! They can go fuck themselves! Disgusting!*

⁵ German adjective, used when describing someone who is petty, small and narrow-minded. Traditionally associated with the attitude of citizens from a '*kleinbürgerliches Milleu*' meaning a 'petty bourgeois' or lower middle-class standing.

⁶ The Republic of Austria is made up of nine '*Bundesländer*', literally 'meaning federal states'.

⁷ Four of the Austrian federal states: Tyrol, Styria, Upper-, and Lower Austria.

Aesthetics: *My own health, my own condition, that's very important. I exercise every day. How I feel is much more important than how I look. I distance myself from this image dictated by consumerist society, that you have to look a certain way. Cosmetic surgery, that's nice sometimes. Cause it somehow brings back something that's somehow began to fade. After all, it doesn't concern me 'cause I know that's the order of things. But at first, when I decide, alright, I'll have something done... But it's not a habit. I get something done but then I don't think about it for two-three years. I don't know, I'm just happy for each passing year.*

Future orientation: *And what about next year? And what about five years from now on? We don't think about that, we live for today. I've never been like this, never. It's a necessity to make use of the years that are given for active employment, so during these years one can gather that financial reserve of which you can say, whatever happens, it's there besides your low pension and God forbid you supplement it with some other work. So I wouldn't give up this living standard, which, by the way is not too extra. But it has to cover certain things!*

Opportunistic qualities: *I work on the tills. The tills! That's it. Below a day-rate of 85 Euros I won't leave the house. I won't pull myself together for that little. Cause at that point, I'm like, if am already going, then I'll be working the tills anyways. And if it's more difficult, then that's what we are doing. It totally doesn't matter, cause only money is decisive here, cause I sacrifice the same time even if I get 50 Euros and even if I get 85. So why not choose 85? But for that you have to know German, for that you have to have a brain, you have to see it through. You wouldn't be able to get off the streets because of your age. You have to be smart about it and with that you can practically make good money. So this also came with sacrifice. It takes imagination.*

Analysis of Values and Attributes

The attempt of self-realisation and the successful development of inner skills and abilities play a crucial part in Ágnes F.'s personal goals, objectives. When classified within the Weberian typology of *Idealtypen* (Ideal Types) Ágnes' behavioural patterns align with the category of *Zwekrationalität* (goal-rationality). Weber understands *Zwekrationalität* as the rationally purposeful social action, which entails the complicated plurality of means and ends. Goal-rational action then is conducted merely in accordance with ends and purposeful outcomes through the rational collation of means and goals (Weber 1978: 24).

When facing the true hardship and ‘reality’ of existence, she is capable of actualising herself as a ‘fighter’. Work and productivity are the core virtues in Ágnes’ personal value system. She is a strong personality, able to land on her feet even amidst adverse circumstances, turning disadvantages into assets. In a fast-changing, contradictory world, wherever life takes her, she preserves the core values of her existence, such as: pragmatic quality, honest work ethic, freedom, independence, self-discipline, the need for social equity, health, financial stability, family, humour, sanguinity, and leisure.

Childhood plays one of the most influential roles in shaping a person’s value system. The chances of one’s self-realization thus depend more on where and what family they are born into – what kind of resource portfolio they ‘inherit’ – than on strong willpower and the ability to perform (Éber 2020: 217-221). During the life-course interview my interviewee spoke of a positive childhood experience. The greatest parental value of her orderly family life is the child itself, whose well-being, education and upbringing are given top priority. Furthermore, the pillar of her parents’ value strategy is an honest work ethic, consequent financial security, and relative prosperity. Religion, as a defining aspect of culture, does not play a significant role. This pattern of values is then inherited and consistently followed by Ágnes throughout her life, who, as a single child, receives maximal attention. In terms of the parents’ education, the father is a skilled labourer, the mother is employed as a laboratory assistant in a basic intellectual quality. The family life centres around Ágnes’ ability to obtain a university education and degree. ‘The difficulty and indispensability of physical work is one of the main foundations of working-class consciousness, yet intellectual work – the means of greater financial security and better social opportunities – is set as the primary goal for the children of the working class’ (Hankiss 1977: 368).

Positive values prevail in the first major stage of Ágnes’ young adult life. She holds prestigious, high paying positions within the social hierarchy and division of labour. Compared to her father’s, Ágnes’ financial and intellectual prosperity signal a great rise in social status. Naturally, this rise then defines her value consciousness, as well as the held significance of achieved social status. By the time of the Regime Change, Ágnes becomes the mother of two children, though she separates early from her husband. As a single parent she provides her children with everything she is able to. They are never short of material goods, live in a stable, prestigious home and keep a high-end car. Her sons,

however, never graduate university and are employed in atypical work. Ágnes is unsuccessful at passing onto her children the parenting patterns she inherited and continuously pursued.

In the second half of her adult life, long after the Regime Change, a series of negative experiences follow: career loss, grievances, conflicts. At the age of fifty, Ágnes loses her high-prestige job and with that her upward career trajectory. Despite her many attempts, she is incapable of finding secure employment that matches her abilities, qualifications, education, and professional knowledge. As a result of the value dilemma her situation brings about, Ágnes is forced to leave the country. Her outward mobility is motivated by feelings of injustice and lack of social respectability. Status inconsistency occurs, a situation in which highly educated individuals experience frustration due to lack of success, eventually choosing to blame the socio-political system they are subject to (Treiman 1970: 104).

Ágnes decides to open a restaurant in Mexico then moves to Austria a few years later to take a job as an elderly caregiver. Though her current employment does not align with her personal calling, she makes a comfortable living. Ambitions towards a prestigious, professional career are overcome by the efforts of money-making, saving, and financial rationality. She travels between Budapest and Austria in three-week shifts, so she is able to maintain the living standards of her former senior management income. Financial stability and the deriving monetary independence both strengthen her sense of freedom. When asked about her current situation, she either speaks appreciatively or chooses not to go into details. In his 2019 lecture series, *The Sociology of Values*, György Csepeli situated the concept of hypocrisy among other difficulties of assessing value in society: ‘People often put themselves in a better light than how they really are: their words do not match their actions.’ Yet in the case of Ágnes, this behaviour is easy to understand and explain..

She saves up most of her income, spending most of her free time on travelling, culture, home refurbishment, fashion, cosmetic treatments. Instead of a professional career, this is currently a very important part of her self-realization and personality development. ‘The “life-fulfilling”, “personality-fulfilling” momentum is most characteristic of the value system of the intellectual strata. (Hankiss 1982: 25). The habit that Hankiss classified as ‘life-fulfilling’ might not only be an educational indicator, but a consequence of Ágnes’ current socio-economic circumstances. As shown in the interview,

her relationship to cosmetic enhancements, weight, and appearance is consciously detached from consumer society-driven beauty standards, yet at the same time she likes to '*get something done*' every two to three years. This aspect of Ágnes's value system, according to her own account, does not stem from a convulsive compliance with the rapidly evolving beauty ideals of global capitalism (slenderness, feminine figure, trend-following appearance), but from a sort of self-improving, self-care focused attitude. However, this phenomenon might also be identified as a symptom of 'self-care' culture that has gained traction since the 2010s. While turn-of-the-century marketing strategies sought to determine the individual's beauty and self-image in a normative manner (Burton and Netemeyer 1995: 60-75), today's beauty industry promotes 'feminine confidence' and 'unconditional self-love'. Within this new system of values, all cosmetic enhancements (breast augmentation, derma fillers) are then viewed merely as self-fulfilling consumer activities. So for the consumer attitude followed by Ágnes, '*how I feel is much more important than how I look*'.

Already during the interview, then later in the text analysis, it became clear to me that my interviewee's thinking and way of life are mostly characterized by pragmatic qualities. Her relationship with work and a strong purpose of money-making motivates her on every step. High levels of **pragmatism** and **intellectualism** might be classified as the defining components of Ágnes' value system. She is a strong, independent, purposeful, self-assured personality with an overall positive self-image. This also entails her attitude towards work: wherever life takes her, she stands her ground and makes herself useful. '*And then I said to myself; both my hands work, and my brain, I'll go and earn some money.*' The notion of selection hides within the depths of human existence: our hierarchy of values is associated with our instinct of survival. Value then consistently maintains the space that orients (Csepeli 2019). Ágnes' interview reveals that in her situation, the target value is financial gain which is then achieved through the asset value of working. She strives for a good life quality and therefore she is willing to take on any well-paying employment regardless of the location. The ability to progress with change requires a serious process of adaptation, making it the very means of survival. This constant change of circumstances and its related need for adaptation constitute the notion of natural selection. Opportunity is always given to those who are capable of successfully adapting to the changes of a given environment (Csepeli 2019). Considering her education and

previous managerial position, Ágnes does a simple but difficult job, as it is momentarily the most profitable. Social, economic and political changes force her to make important decisions, therefore her judgement is not motivated by career ambitions. She measures her success in material gain, in generating profit. 'Money-making [...] in the modern economic order is the reward and manifestation of good work' (Weber 1995: 43).

For Ágnes, the success of adapting to the changes of the labour market is defined by her ability to generate profit. This financially motivated value system might be explained, among other things, by the mentality of her parents, whose values have not only determined Ágnes' previous career choices, but also the later development of her life. Her parents prioritise extracurricular activities (violin, German language lessons, ballet) and later persuade her to obtain a degree from a prestigious university. A series of thoughtful, rational decisions offers a reliable career path for the future. This momentum of her childhood testifies to a neoliberal upbringing, a transgression of the Kádár era, according to which '*nothing is failure, it's only an experience. I always do a hundred percent, 24/7, I leave no chance for failure.*' Ágnes' work culture adapts to the changing economic system its object to. In the Hungary of her childhood, a good degree, education and intellectual career planning proved to be profitable, therefore, similarly to her parents, she prioritizes these cultural values. In her current life situation, however, her survival is tied solely to money-making, so she prioritises generating profit, just like the economic structure she is the subject of. Ágnes is diligent with an honest work ethic, she tracks her expenses, income and investments, manages her time, avoids debt, plans and calculates in advance. '*It totally doesn't matter, cause only money is decisive here, cause I sacrifice the same time even if I get 50 Euros and even if I get 85. So why not choose 85?*'

Her **personal qualities** are only voiced in a positive tone. She is self-assured and confident in her ability to do the best. When she is wrong, she is capable of realizing and resolving her conflicts without needing the input of others. She often says of herself that she is 'perfect', as she dedicates time for self-examination and soul-searching, as well as exercises radical honesty with herself. Ágnes tries to maintain an order inside and out. She avoids all negative value judgments against herself. Her system of values stems from her very self and is only determined by the positive values she chooses to focus on, continuously rejecting negativity and judgement from the outside. She fulfils her social obligation, follows norms, pays her taxes, refuses undeclared, undocumented work. She is often critical towards others as she does not like to be contradicted.

Ágnes' **family life** and **childhood** are spent in relative happiness, she talks about her parents with great respect. She takes care of her own children, aiding and financing her own sons. She treats housework as a hobby, cooks with pleasure and – similarly to all other aspects of her life – she strives for perfection. She enjoys welcoming guests and hosting dinners. Common interests, cohesion, reciprocity within the family, and her small circle of close friends prevail. Despite this environment, Ágnes is unable to pass on to her children the value system she was brought up with. For this however, her parenting patterns and practices do not bear sole responsibility. The transfer of values between generations is object to new-found challenges. Value disruption occurs when the real, actionable content and normative power of a value system is obscured, or when existing values do not provide an acceptable orientation and new value alternatives are not foreseeable (Váriné 1987: 242). Ágnes's sons are not socialised in a labor-value-centered state socialism and are unwilling to enter the Hungarian labour market for low pay. They do not obtain a higher education or university degree. Travelling in and out of Hungary, they spend months and years abroad with temporary work or studying. 'Young people from former socialist countries entered adulthood during the period of post-regime change uncertainty of emerging capitalism (ELTE Tátk 2014).

Ágnes' previous image of society changes after she fails to get a job corresponding to her education and professional abilities. She does not feel societal respectability in Hungary, her general trust in the state and its people is broken, eventually motivating her to leave the country. Her value system undergoes a serious crisis. "The consciousness of national belonging means the natural rejection and conscious adoption of certain values" (Csepeli 1987: 107). The awareness of this 'belonging' plays a key part in Ágnes' ways of identification. The ways in which she discusses Hungary's current socio-political situation testify to this: '*I don't like it here anymore. I'm not needed here. [...] Cause of the injustice, that was done to me, I turned away from this country.*' This negative sentiment might be explained by Ágnes' involvement in a serious labor dispute with her last Hungarian employer, a lawsuit she believes she loses due to injustice and corruption. 'Crisis phenomena are characterized by a lack of morality, which is to be attributed to rapid structural change' (Bauer 2004: 34). The above explained injustices together persuade Ágnes to leave the country. Value crises arise in the most diverse spaces and permeate both private and public life (Váriné 1987: 17). Ágnes understands her personal crisis of values as a result of societal unfairness and lack of social solidarity. She is very critical of

Hungarian socio-political conditions. At the same time, she plans her future with a self-fulfilling, definite ambition. Ágnes attaches value to the notion of future, she is happy to restructure her personal ambitions, to set new goals for herself.

Her opinions and experiences of other nations, social groups are often critical and arguably prejudiced. 'There is not a society without a prejudiced person, and there is no person in whom there are no prejudices' (Csepeli 1987: 107). Ágnes' view about Austrian people and their culture testify to this. Though not articulating it in an open manner, her prejudices are simultaneously motivated by a sense of superiority in relation to others who are less qualified or hold a different mindset. From this viewpoint, the nationality or ethnic identity of a given person is irrelevant.

Overall, 'social inequalities determined by birth are very difficult to overcome in relation to housing, material and financial resources, while schooling offers mobility channels that open up the possibility of excellence and upward mobility for the disadvantaged through the increase of cultural capital" (Székelyi, Örkény, et al., 2005: 99). Ágnes's parents have to sacrifice a lot for her successful upbringing and schooling. Educational mobility, one of the most prominent indicators of social mobility, is clearly visible in her case: Ágnes' university degree far exceeds her father's education as a skilled labourer. During the years of state socialism, the father is able to hold a leadership position. Similarly, Ágnes is also employed in a senior management status until the age of fifty. Another important factor of social mobility is settlement structure. Accordingly, the father's social mobility might be approached not only through occupational structures, but also by spatial mobility: Ágnes spends parts of her childhood in Budapest, Pécs, Hódmezővásárhely and the GDR. She holds advanced language skills in three different European languages: German, English and even Spanish. Her diligence and compatible character facilitate a highly successful career start. Already as a young adult she is the owner of a private flat and a car, later she inherits her parents' property.

The second half of her life, however, comes with drastic changes, most importantly the loss of employment and the inability to secure a new position. She is forced to look for opportunities abroad.

In his 2019 lecture series, Csepeli speaks of the structural disintegration of a given, reliable order. Though the framework of Ágnes's life is disintegrating, she is capable of rapid and efficient adaptation, of finding radically new answers in her new situation, as

well as successfully resolving conflicts on her own. Undoubtedly, she chooses one of the most successful solutions for the above-mentioned conflict situation. In *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* Durkheim (2003: 265-274) writes that societal disturbances, rapid change, sudden increase in economic or political power all tend to trigger prominent waves of declassification within society. Certain individuals might find themselves in a lower social status than before and are forced to limit their needs: their moral values and ethical education need reconfiguration. Crises, that is, 'disturbances of the collective order', lead to a general imbalance. High emigration rates might function as a safety valve for severe poverty, which then plays a crucial role in preventing suicide.

'It is clear that all research on values leads to a density of social problems' (Hoppál 1987: 19). With rapid societal change, the circumstances and social importance of middle-aged women are devalued. In order to make and sustain a comfortable living, these highly educated but insufficiently rewarded women look for new opportunities abroad. The aging tendency of Western societies has created a vacuum of values. As the need for women over the age of fifty depreciates in the East, it simultaneously gains significance within the social division of labour of the economic West. Adept and energetic middle-aged east-central European women with a university education and advanced language skills often find employment in elderly residential care. Leaving their family, friendships, relationships, and homeland behind, these women adapt to new situations, into new families, and different cultures. They maintain contact with the ones they had to leave behind. Depending on the geographical distance, they commute between two countries every two to three weeks, every six months, or every year. Change also brings innovation, introduces these women to new cultures, lifestyles, habits, and establishes new relationships. 'Real heroes and strong people are those, who, torn out of their usual environments, ways and order of life, are capable of maintaining a system, as well as finding new, alternative patterns of life. They refrain from becoming temporarily, or even permanently indifferent (Hankiss 1987: 62).'

These middle-aged, active women do their best to thrive, above all, in Hungary. Their decision to migrate is predominantly driven by structural constraints such as unemployment, the scarcity of employment or other means of livelihood, the housing crisis, and most importantly, the threat of pauperisation. Those who choose to move abroad aim to liberate themselves from such constraints, hoping to improve their financial circumstances, to find a higher income abroad and with that, existential security.

Resolute and persistent work ethic is what characterises these women. Contrasted with their former Hungarian conditions, they earn well and are capable of saving large portions of their income in order to provide some support for their adult children who often stay home. They make a comfortable living and consciously choose not to identify with the type of expulsion which primarily forced them to leave their home country.

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Blanka Szilasi

“Let Us Raise Your Daughter As We Want!” | The Relationship Between the Mothers-in-Law and Daughters-in-Law in the Roma Community of Dány from a Cultural Anthropological Aspect

Introduction

The topic of this paper is the relationship between the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in the Dány Roma community. The research focuses on how the relationship of the mother-in-law and the young daughter-in-law works and what makes it so important in the community. Through this issue, the relations of these women in Dány, why these relations are so important and how this changed in the past few years, are presented.

I first met the topic of Roma marriage when I volunteered at the BAGázs Public Benefit Association. By early 2018, I was volunteering at Dány in a girls club. During these sessions, I realised how strict the rules are that govern the life of these girls. After I gathered more information about marriage traditions, gradually it became clear to me that I want to research this topic.

The Roma community of Dány, being a reserved community, preserves its language, its social structure and traditions. It is important to research a community like this from a cultural anthropological point of view, to gain knowledge of Roma communities in Hungary and to understand the relations between non-Roma and Roma communities in the past and the present. The examination of the traditions of the Roma community of Dány and the constant change of these traditions as a reaction to the interaction within and outside the community and between individuals contributes to the knowledge of the customs and the functioning of the community, which will help the understanding and the acceptance from the non-Roma communities. However, it is important to note that by looking at one particular group at one particular time, it only gives us a snapshot of the traditions of the community. In the Hungarian society of today, an overview of this kind is important, since the two groups often only know each other

superficially, at a stereotypical level, which gives birth to contradictions between the Roma and the non-Roma. However, it is important to highlight that Roma are not a homogeneous group and neither are Non-Roma. There are groups and subgroups within the Hungarian Roma society and all these groups are made out of individuals who form, react and therefore maintain or change the traditions of their close environment and community.

The paper consists of three parts. In the introduction the topic of the research is determined, the most important definitions are described and an overview of the anthropological research literature written about this topic is given. This part also includes the introduction of the research question and the presentation of the method of cultural anthropological research. In the methodological part of the Dány Roma community, my relation with the field and my methods of research and analysis are presented.

In the second part of the paper, the recorded interviews are analysed. The analysis is divided into two parts. In the first part, the relationship of the mother- and daughter-in-law is dealt with. Here, it is written why this relationship is important in Dány and what the expectations are of the community towards the mothers- and daughters-in-law. In the second part of the analysis, the change of the importance of this relationship is shown. The possible reasons for this change are also collected.

In the end, my experiences are summarized and a conclusion – which comes from the analysis – is drawn. Finally, possible future research topics are suggested.

Literary overview

In the following part, necessary concepts are defined and an overview of Roma marriage and the cultural anthropological literature considering the relationship between mother and wife is given.

Cultural anthropology often deals with Roma society and culture. When researching a Roma community, the researcher needs to be aware of three facts about Roma. These facts are noted by Csaba Prónai in *The Anthropology of Gypsy Cultures*.

“1. The Gypsies cannot be linked to any country, that is why we call them “transnational”, that is “belonging to several nations at once.”

"2. The term "Gypsies" does not only include one ethnicity but includes more groups belonging to different cultures. In fact, they are "multiethnic" or "pluriethnical" (several ethnicities different from each other) people."

"3. The Gypsies always live in at least "two worlds": on the one hand in their community, on the other hand in the surrounding non-Gypsy world. This is expressed through the "transcultural" term which means the betweenness amidst different cultures" (Prónai 2007:206, translated by the author).

Since Romas are transnational and multiethnic, Roma communities are diverse, and different from each other. Therefore, even the cultural anthropological literature does not deal with the homogeneous culture of this ethnicity. In addition, since Romani people live in two worlds, they adapt to the surrounding majority society. This also shows, as it can be found in the anthropological literature that deals with Romani cultures, that the aim of these works is not the description of Roma society, but always to depict the present circumstances of the given small community.

The following collected publications are connected in some way to the topic of Romani marriage upon the facts Prónai listed (2007:206). These publications are shortly introduced so the reader can get a general picture of the relational systems, rules and norms that surround marriage in a Romani community.

It is important to clarify what the literature states as marriage and Roma marriage. In his book, *Small Places, Large Issues*, Thomas Eriksen (2006) writes the following about marriage: "one of the most important aspects of the study of marriage practice and the relevant rules is related to politics, alliances, and stability. As every group is exogamous at some level, marriage necessarily brings alliances outside the nuclear family, the branch or the clan" (p. 149, translated by the author). So, marriage is an alliance that not only binds two people, but also their families. This is also supported by Patrick Williams (2005), in his book titled *Gypsy Marriage*, when he states that the Roma society is built on political relations. If we say that only the modalities governing marriages determine, on the one hand, the place where the individuals stand relative to each other in the Rom [Roma] society, and on the other hand the division of them into different groups; this means, that their situations and their division are based on political factors (Williams 2005:338).

According to cultural anthropological literature, it is true for several different Roma communities that Roma girls are placed in line for marriage at a relatively young

age. "At around 14 years of age, the girls who are the more developed, well-spoken and who are close to the *romnji* [Roma woman] ideal get married. (...) The girl who gets married at around 16-17 years of age does not count as old either", writes Boglárka Bakó (2006:188, translated by the author), who examined a southern Transylvanian Roma community in 2003. By developed one should think both about physical development, such as having a period and mental development such as being able and interested to participate in adult conversations. According to Michael Stewart (1993:41) in his book titled *Brothers in Song*, Roma marriages are often not registered and are not considered official by the majority of society. He writes: They were married long before in "Gypsy style" (Romani) before they went to the registrar to get the necessary papers for a bank loan for "newlywed" couples (Stewart 1993:41).

Marriage in Roma communities brings serious consequences, even if it is not legal on paper. As it is found in cultural anthropological research of different Roma communities, the young wife gains a new role and task through marriage. The change of status means that she will play a bigger part in social life from then on (Williams 2005:344). In most of the examined communities, the role and the status of the young husband also changes when he gets married: they will have other rights and obligations. He will become a Rom [adult Roma man], equal to any other Rom (Williams 2005:351). This statement is also verified by Cecília Kovai (2006:200), when she writes in her research about the Gömbalja Roma community that, "We can direct our questions toward the relationship in which man and woman find themselves in one another while keeping other boundaries in motion like kinship, change of positions of power, the ownership of the body. This relationship in my field is called "marriage". In this relationship, the boundaries are not between man and woman but are made through their relations" (Kovai 2006:200, translated by the author). As Kovai also writes, through marriage the life of the young married couple is framed with new rules, especially the life of the wife. To understand the system of the family's roles, we need to clarify what position women have in society. As Eriksen (2006:167) writes, women have more work than men, they cannot use public places as freely as men and "their responsibility is to lead the household. Whereas men deal with the external relations of the family" (*ibid*, translated by the author). According to Stewart (1993: 208) the inequality between the Roma women and men of Harangos already shows up from childhood. The subordination of Roma women to men is not only limited to the moments of social life. He argues that the girl's social

status – unlike the boy's – from birth makes it impossible for her to be a complete and unquestionable member of Roma social life. The inferiority of women also shows in further education and work. "The most threatening danger for a young Roma woman is if she stays without supervision and gets under external, bad influence", states Bakó (2006:189, translated by the author) when writing about urban studying and work. According to Bakó (*ibid*), Roma girls do not study further in high school, as their non-Roma companions, and go to work only if it is necessary to support the family. However, this might have been the case at the time and in the particular place where Bakó did her research, it is clearly not the case everywhere. There is little data about Roma youth and their dropout rate in Hungary, since ethnicity is a sensitive data. Moreover, because it is compulsory for everybody to attend school until the age of 16, it is very much likely that children at least start secondary education. Furthermore, in Dány, there is a visible tendency that Roma girls attend and finish secondary education.

Men and women have different obligations in marriage. As I have written, the men "deal with the external relations of the household", while the women "are responsible for the housework" (Eriksen 2006:167, translated by the author). In several communities, Roma men will become full members of the society of adult men when they marry. It takes time for the young husband to become independent from his father, but after his marriage, he does have more rights than before. He takes equal responsibility in work and social life (Williams 2005:351-352). Contrary to this, the tasks of the women take place in private spaces. As Stewart (1993) also writes about the women of Harangos "almost all the housework, from childcare, through cooking and washing to the annual painting of the house are the tasks of the women" (p. 50, translated by the author). This does not mean that women do not have power in Roma society. It is true that "in the Roma world the romnji are "subordinated" to the male world" (Bakó 2006:192, translated by the author), though women are responsible for managing some of the important areas of life. According to Bakó (2006) the power of women "cover areas of women's life like childbirth, parenting, the managing and "maintaining" the household. The latter is an important task for women because this includes the budgeting of the salary, cost management and the repayment of debts in order of importance" (p. 192, translated by the author). Lydaki (2006) sees the influence of women differently in private spaces. In the study entitled *Gypsy Women*, she states that the roles of women secure the survival of norms in the greek Roma society. As she says, "the power of women in the family and

individual spheres, and the responsibilities in parenting secure the preservation of values and gives them the possibility to pass on the traditional behavioural patterns" (p. 211, translated by the author).

The residence of the newlyweds is also an important element of the marriages. In the ideal case, the married couple moves to the boy's family. Williams (2005) describes marriage which is considered ideal in the following way: It is a part of the Rom Gypsies ideology (...), that the men enjoy precedence over women. So (...) the young couple moves to the parents of the boy (p. 335). In the moment of the marriage, or even more, with the couple moving in together, starts the relationship of the bride and the mother-in-law. The mother-in-law is usually the oldest woman in the household. She is responsible for the household, the children, the order of home life and, as it has already been mentioned, the passing on and preservation of the values. Several cultural anthropologists (Williams 2005; Stewart 1993; Bakó 2008) state that it is the task of the mother-in-law to teach the new wife the customs of the family. Although the mother of the young woman has prepared her for the bori [bride] role, the mother-in-law always finds something objectionable, so to say, she takes control over the bride (...), to make her a wife, daughter-in-law, housewife as she should be. – writes Williams (Williams 2005:346). The mother-in-law does not spare the wife, often she gives her the most and hardest jobs. "If the girl turns into a bride, the work compulsion is even stronger in the house of the parents-in-law than at home. Sometimes she needs to wake up before the others and finish her work when her in-laws are already watching television (...) If she goes to the city with her mother-in-law, she carries the heaviest packages and she walks behind her mother-in-law, in the same way, a romnyi follows her husband" (Stewart 1993:50, translated by the author). It is not rare that the wife has had enough mistreatment from her mother-in-law or husband that she moves back to her parents' home. These travels usually do not take longer than one or two weeks, in most cases the wife, after a longer or shorter break returns to the household of the mother-in-law (Williams 2005:346-347).

The life of the bride at her mother-in-law's is not just stressful due to the physical work. The family of the husband has a lot of expectations towards the young woman in how to behave respectfully. Bakó (2008) shows the example of the bad wife through a girl called Zsuzska. "Zsuzska (...) did not "listen" to the elderly lady, argued with her, protected her independence, did not let her have a say in her private life. All this led to anger in their relationship and the old lady did everything she could to expel the young woman from the

common household." (p. 136-137, translated by the author) As we can read, the bride needs to be obedient, she cannot argue with her mother-in-law.

The young woman does not have an easy job: arriving in a new family – at least she feels as if – she needs to live in a reversed world: she has to get used people speaking contemptuously about those who she admires (her own family) and praise those whom at home they despised (the others, the family of her husband amongst them), she needs to consider her own family as strangers, but at the same time she is looked upon as a stranger by her new parents (Williams 2005:348).

The topic of Roma marriage is broad, the customs vary from community to community. It is important to bear in mind that the above described publications do not describe Roma community as a homogeneous group, but draw a picture on the particular communities. By doing so they are able to describe what are some similarities and differences in Roma communities and therefore look critically on the generalization and stereotypical labeling of Roma in Hungary. This paper also concentrates on one particular community, the Roma of Dány. By examining the relation between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws of Roma of Dány, I try to explain and provide a deep insight of the statuses in Vlach Roma families in Hungary and how these statuses change by time. In the following part of my paper, the research question is outlined.

Research question

The research question concerns the Dány Roma community, and the relationship between the wife and the mother-in-law, I examine several aspects of their relation. I have four main research questions. What are the roles of mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws in the families of Dány Vlach Roma community? What are the important elements of this relationship? How did the relationship of mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws change? And how does Non-Roma majority influences this relationship and customs of the Dány Roma community?

I try to understand the power dynamics between women in families after weddings and how these power dynamics are translated into cooperation or conflict between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws. Moreover, I look at the change in power dynamics in the last decades. This research looks for the answer to the importance of the relationship between the mother-in-law and the bride in the Dány Roma community today. If we examine the relationship of mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws we are able

to understand how Vlach Roma communities change in Hungary. Since the mother-in-law passes her knowledge about Vlach Roma life to her daughter-in-law, one can capture the continuity of customs in this relationship. As it has been written, at the beginning of the common life of the married couple, the mother of the husband has a significant say in their life and especially in the life of the young woman. The mother-in-law teaches the bride how to be a "*good wife*" and "tries to get the bride used to the important house rules in a short period of time" (Bakó 2008:138, translated by the author). The research also tries to find the answer to what extent the ideas of the bride and the mother-in-law clash about house rules and the norms of the community. In Hungary there is historical tendency, that only Roma who assimilate and give up their Roma identity are able to become accepted by the non-Roma majority (Szelény, Ladányi 2006:19-20). I argue, that the brides in the Dány Roma community tend to leave certain habits to be able to be accepted as a member of Hungarian society by Non-Roma.

In the next subdivision of the work the methodology with which the research is presented. The segregation in Dány is presented, my relationship with the research field is outlined, and the surroundings of the collection and recording of my interviews and the method of their analysis is written about.

Method

Firstly, it is important to present the Roma community in Dány. The Roma people in Dány consider themselves Olah Romas, who speak a dialect of the Romani between themselves. The community lives isolated from non-Romas. This can also be seen through their place of residence in one spot, at the edge of the village and that they did not completely take up the Hungarian language. Due to its closeness, the community today has the possibility to live according to their Roma traditions. The families living here are large, usually with three children and the different generations of the family live in one household. The women of this area wear skirts till this day, in accordance with the purity expectations.

From several points of view, the territory shows a picture of poverty. Several houses use the electricity illegally and are half ready or a part of them is in ruin. Some of the people living here have chronic illnesses, are in a bad health situation. Many of the inhabitants have low education and there are a lot of them who only finished elementary school or only a few grades.

Overall, the Roma settlement of Dány cannot be identified with poverty. There are a lot of nicely whitewashed houses, decorated with bright colours, we can even find storey houses in the settlement. There are stone lions or horse statues on one or two fences and expensive cars parked before them. Some teenagers go around with new smartphones and earphones. In addition, a lot of children are dressed up in new, pretty clothes. The teenage girls, on some occasions, boasted to me about their gold jewellery.

It stands out from the description above that there are multiple differences between the different parts of the settlement. Nonetheless, Romani language and the hostile attitude from non-Romas created unity in the area. Therefore, traditions and adherence to ethical rules are important for the community. In the following, it is presented how I got into a weekly relation with the inhabitants of the Dány Roma settlement, and how I decided to research this community for my paper.

I first visited Dány in October of 2017 and the past few years I formed several personal connections with the girls and women of this area. The fact that the women there already knew me benefitted me in my research. My interviewees were very welcoming, either because they knew me or because the family had a good opinion of the Association where I worked as a volunteer. Though my connection to the Association did cause difficulty during my research. Since most of my interviewees knew me before, it is possible that they were not completely honest with me. They knew that due to my volunteering I will stay near them and this could have affected them in what they said to me. In addition, I, as a non-Roma volunteer, represent the opposite pole for them. As Kata Horváth (2004) writes “the Roma world in the Romas mind can only be built up as the non-Roma world’s counterpart. This approach distinguishes the different Roma groups from the non-Romas” (p. 42, translated by the author). So, the inhabitants of the community behave differently before me, a non-Roma researcher, than amongst themselves. This issue is also mentioned by Péter Nagy (2007) when he talks about the consciousness of the Bag Romas. The Romas of Dány, similarly to the ones of Bag “are always aware of what they say and to whom they say it. Constant alertness, attention, guard above what they say to whom because they have to say different things to the initiated and the outsiders” (Nagy 2007:202, translated by the author). With the knowledge of this, I started my research.

During the research semi-structured interviews were recorded with the brides and women of the settlement. The interviewees were chosen in two different ways. On the one

hand, targeted sampling was asked, that is I contacted mothers-in-law and brides relying on my intuitions of extensive and prior experiences, whom I thought can give me the deepest possible insight into the relations of the Dány women (Babbie 1996:313). On the other hand, the snowball method was used, each of the interviewees was asked if they could recommend another woman from the area who would willingly talk about the topic.

During the research, it was planned that I talk to 15 women from the Dány settlement. From this, only 13 were recorded. The arrival of the coronavirus to Hungary is the cause of the missing two interviews. It was planned to record the last three interviews one day after the closure of most institutions in Hungary. By this time the association I volunteered with, notified me that we will suspend our work at the settlement for some time. That day one interview was recorded, but the other two interviewees were not at home at the time.

The finished interviews were analysed. In every interview, the important parts were highlighted, and a code was assigned to them. After this, the codes were assigned into code groups to make them more transparent. The interviews are anonymized. When choosing the new names Roma nicknames were used that are common in the settlement. Close attention is being paid not to use any name that my interviewees are called.

Analysis

The analysis will be about the relationship between the wife and the mother-in-law. Those behavioural expectations which both the mother-in-law and the bride needs to follow to maintain a good relationship are presented. In this subchapter, it is also explained why the good relationship of the mother- and daughter-in-law is important. Finally, it is also presented that the importance of this relationship began to decline in the past years and the possible causes for this tendency are explored.

The significance of the mother-in-Law and bride relation in the Dány Roma community

The research of the relationship of the mother-in-law and the bride is in several ways subjective since every relationship is unique. Despite the mosaics of the individual stories, the positions of power and the main rules become outlined. This is also why one needs to deal with these stories with adequate sensitivity, as Péter Nagy also states, “there exists not only one truth, but countless” (Nagy 2007:213, translated by the author).

As in other research, it also happened to me that during my interview my conversation partner changed her opinion about the given subject. According to Cecília Kovai (2006), the “Gypsy speech” is situation-dependent (p. 196, translated by the author), that is, it is not indifferent to what role the narrator plays in the story. Sometimes it occurred that I could not talk with my interviewees in private. In these situations, I knew that I would hear the truth that is convenient for all those present. As Horváth (2006) says, “in the moment of utterance everything is true, and you have to reply to it accordingly” (p. 243, translated by the author). This is why the words of the women of the settlement cannot be questioned by me, even in a case where I receive other information from different sides.

The mother-in-law, as the guardian of values

As Eriksen states in his work entitled *Small Places, Large Issues*, advanced age is usually linked with extensive experience, wisdom and common sense (Eriksen 2006:175). This is also the case in the Roma community I examined. According to Bakó (2008), the Roma woman has different power statuses at different points of her lifeway. “Zsuzska is a 36-year-old Roma woman. Maybe there are a lot of years in front of her, and if she understands, she can learn a lot of things related to the coming life stages of being a Roma woman: she can get to know teenage motherhood, the problems of motherhood in the case of a son getting married, can become a “nannyó”, the oldest female member of the family who decides everything, and later a “néne” tired from work and on the periphery.” (Bakó 2008:149, translated by the author) In the Roma community in Dány the respect of the “bábe” [mother-in-law, grandmother] is similar to the respect of the “nannyó”. The bride needs to respect her mother-in-law, even if only for raising her partner and that she raised him to be honourable. This thought was explained by Rubina when she was asked if it is important that the bride and the mother-in-law have a good relationship.

“Just because the bride is with the son of the mother-in-law, that is why she should show that respect, so... They do not have to love each other, but at least they should respect each other, and give that to one another... That is the bride should give respect, because the mother-in-law is older and raised a boy for her, with whom (...) she will live her life. (...) She gets as much respect, because she raised a man, with whom she will live her entire life and is honest.” (26-year-old woman, active worker, translated by the author)

In Dány, mothers and mothers-in-law are the ones responsible for the passing on of the community's moral rules. They learn what the expected behaviour is, over years from their mothers, then from their mothers-in-law. It is the task of the mother-in-law to teach the bride the value system, world view and the right behavioural patterns. Mónika, whose parents keep animals, adapted easily to her husband's family who were farmers, because the two family's work and customs were similar.

"What kind is a good mother-in-law? (...) Primarily what a good mother-in-law is depends on what the family does for work. Because if they are not familiar with each other, then she basically will have difficulty. If she gets in there, then it will be harder for her to pick up these habits and it will be harder for her to know her job and how and what to do." (25-year-old woman, housewife, farmer, translated by the author)

Mára told me how grateful she is to her daughter-in-law because she followed the customs of her house. If the bride respects her mother-in-law, she follows her traditions. These gestures make the basis of a good relationship.

"You know honesty means very much. Very-very. I respect Kiara a lot because she was a little girl, a virgin. If someone is a virgin, they appreciate it very much. My boy was tried by somebody else, well she was not. I will raise her for myself. Well, no? She will learn that habits are different in every house. I am grateful, she helps in everything." (45-year-old woman, housewife, translated by the author)

The older women have greater power exactly because they are a less "threatening" sexual force (Eriksen 2006:175, translated by the author), their husbands are not threatened by the danger of infidelity. In a lot of cases the women of grandmother age, after leaving their husband or after his death, do not look for a new partner for themselves. Borcsa, who does not live with her husband anymore, explained this to me as well.

"I am a grandmother since I have grandchildren. This is why and not that, that I am saying this now, like this. Because I could say at any time, that I grab my child, I do not have little ones, nor big ones, only grandchildren. I get myself a partner and get with him, but no. If they would say that he is some sort of a billionaire, millionaire, no. It is not even in my mind, because it was enough for me." (48-year-old woman, active worker, translated by the author)

There are other "bábe"-s as well, who do not keep the customs. The mother-in-law of Virág quickly lost her husband. The woman, after the death of her husband, got

acquainted with several men. This was not looked upon well especially from her sons, who often acted roughly with her.

"They had sex. Ran out the father [the father of the daughter of Borcsa, that is the husband of Borcsa], and shouted, "Oh, what did I see, oh what did I see!" And I tell you, that he was 13 years old and lived in one room with them and poor thing climbed off the bed and crawled and climbed on all fours and knocked at the Combos door, to let him in. And the Combos instantly knew what was happening. And then Gyuri, the man of Csilla and my brother-in-law, Tóni grabbed her by the hair and the old lady was beaten, they wanted to hit her head with an axe. Because she became a wench." (44-year-old woman, public worker, translated by the author)

If a woman behaves "*unrespectably*", her sons try to restrain their mother. Stewart reports a similar case when an old lady moved in with her daughter due to her husband's unbearable behaviour. The action of the woman could be judged freely by her sons. They complained about the shame that their mother's act created in the family. One day her sons decided to take their mother home, but they just took her in front of the horse carriage and restrained her there (Stewart 1993:209). Similarly, to the story written by Stewart (*ibid*), the sons-in-law of Borcsa judged their mother's "free" lifestyle.

As one can see, the elderly also must keep the rules regarding women in the Dány community. By living according to the value system of the community, they not only avoid conflict with the men, but also show an example to their girls and daughters-in-law. It is important for the wife to take over the habits of her mother-in-law to maintain and to pass on the mentality, amongst other things. With the mother-in-law successfully passing on the correct behavioural norms, it also proves to the community that she and her family follow the community's ethical rules.

The daughter-in-law, as the transmitter of values

Prónai states in The Anthropology of Gypsy Cultures that the "binary oppositions", two-pole opposites can be found in every community (Prónai 2007:208-209, translated by the author). With the help of words, the people classify the things in the world, transforming and shaping reality this way (Prónai 2007:208-209). During the research, I became aware that the statement according to which the actions of the members of the community point in two directions, they are either "good" or "bad". My conversation partners, as well other

people from the settlement, often have extreme judgments. Someone is either “good” or “bad”. The bride is either the biggest confidant of the mother-in-law or the bitterness of her life. In the following analysis, it is written about what those expectations are, which the bride needs to follow in the interest of not being called “bad” by the community.

For the bride to live according to the value system of her husband’s family she needs to take up their identity. She needs to consider her mother-in-law as her mother. During the interviews, it was mentioned several times that for a good mother- and daughter-in-law relationship it is essential that the two women think of each other as each other’s biggest confidant, almost as a mother and daughter.

“My mother-in-law is like my mother. We discuss this is good for me now this hurts, oh, I am not in the mood for washing the dishes. Alright, then we will wash them later. She never even said anything about that I am in the attic until 10 am, like “how long does that woman sleep”, nothing, no.” (22-year-old woman, active worker, translated by the author)

It is clear from Kiara’s narrative that she has a good relationship with her mother-in-law. Due to the fact that she considers her mother-in-law her mother and that is why she respects and accepts her opinion and rules. The mutual respect also manifests through the fact that her mother-in-law, Mária, does not determine what she has to do and when. Mónika was asked, who is that person with whom she can share her feelings, from whom she can ask for help if something hurts her. Mónika shares one kitchen with her mother-in-law, both of them work at home, run the household and take care of the animals. Due to the close relationship, a good relationship is essential. As one can see below, the key to a good relationship is mutual trust and accepting one another as family members. Both sides need to work for a relationship like this. Since mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws often live together, the physical proximity can easily turn into conflict if members in the family does not have a good relationship with one another.

“We always say with my mother-in-law that a very great girlfriend is not good, because it never brings anything good, usually it is bad. I can only say of this that my relationship with my mother-in-law is very good and if there is anything like that, I can sit down with her and can talk about it. This is how we are together like this.” (25-year-old woman, housewife, farmer, translated by the author)

As we can see from the point of Mónika, her closest friend is her mother-in-law. By being closer to her than her girlfriends there is mutual trust between them, which strengthens their relationship.

To understand the changes described later, it is important to know what kind of expectations the daughter-in-law has to meet; what kind of tasks she has. In the book, *The Gypsy Women*, Okely writes that the Roma women have to do a lot of housework. The more children the wife brings into the world the more appreciated she is in society. Food acquisition, the cooking, and the cleaning is also her obligation (Okely, 1996). It is no different from the Roma of Dány. The daughter-in-law needs to be "good". The bride who does not do the tasks mentioned above is considered "smelly" (Stewart, 1993). Yet in the following analysis those expectations are presented which determine the mother- and daughter-in-law's relationship, above the behavioural regulations mentioned earlier. These are behavioural rules which supplement the expectations of the household and parenting. They do not answer what the bride has to do but how she needs to do them.

The first and maybe one of the most important expectations towards the wife is that she adjusts to the customs of her mother-in-law. The "*good daughter-in-law*" cooks, washes, cleans and raises the children, but is not indifferent to how she does these. The Dány bride has to listen to her mother-in-law even if she does not agree with her. The story of Léna who got into her husband's family at a young age is an example of this. As long as she did not give birth to her own children, she took care of her mother-in-law's children, while she also tried to meet the family's expectations.

"But my relationship with my mother-in-law, how should I say it... I listened to what she said to me, I did not answer back, although she looked down on me in my eyes and I did not do anything wrong. Because our neighbour was a Hungarian who said, pay attention, my daughter. Said, well my daughter, another bride would not have, she would not have even tolerated one minute, not even that much, but you, next to seven children and 14 years old. And I listened to my mother-in-law because she was older obviously, I almost could have been her daughter obviously, at 14 years old. For surely, she only wants good for me and I listened to my mother-in-law, to what she said to me and although it was bad for me, even then. I did not care for it and that's that. And I talked the same way as they said so that this would be like this, that would be like that" (52-year-old woman, unemployed, translated by the author).

The bride not only has to listen to her mother-in-law and take up her customs but also needs to take care of the older lady. In an ideal situation, the daughter- and mother-

in-law divide the work between themselves and help each other. I asked Mucus why it is important for the bride and the mother-in-law to get on with each other.

"If she can help then they should help each other. (...) Well, because, if one can not go to school, then there is help. [So, they need to...] Yes, yes they should join" (46-year-old woman, active worker, translated by the author).

The bride however needs to take care of her mother-in-law, even if she has a bad relationship. Virág lives in one place with her mother-in-law, however, their relationship is so bad that they have not spoken in years. Nevertheless, the woman, when her mother-in-law needed to be cared for, completed her obligation without question.

"I said that I will be separate. You cook for yourself, I cook for my family, and that's the end. And she had an accident. (...) On the stairs, her leg shattered. (...) And imagine I cared for her for six months. She recovered and I was the bad one." (44-year-old, public worker, translated by the author)

If the bride is unwilling to adapt to her husband's family the community strongly criticizes her. The mother-in-law complains everywhere about the shame that her son brought a "bad bride" into the family. If the bride goes out a lot, they immediately suspect infidelity. Suspicion also occurs if the bride deals too much with her appearance. Mára is a mother, mother-in-law and grandmother in one. Earlier she worked with young Roma girls from Dány, who she thought beautified themselves too much. The lady had a clear opinion that these girls were not loyal to their husbands.

"I do not like those nails, eyelashes, plenty of money. Well no? Rather they should buy something for the children, what they need. Why does she decorate herself? She is good like this for her son. No? I worked with this bride and she said, oh, I have an appointment for eyelashes, I will get hair put up for a hundred thousand. But who does she do it for? I really upset myself. „My husband.” But I say, not for your husband, you make yourself for someone else" (45-year-old woman, housewife, translated by the author).

It is even a greater shame if it turns out that the bride cheated on her husband. Léna's son and wife have a stormy relationship. The couple lived at Léna's for ten years and during this time several quarrels occurred. The wife, Rubi, cheated on her husband and since then she moved back with her parents. After it came to light that Rubi cheated on her husband, the girl did not let from her independent lifestyle, which brought shame to Léna's family.

"And she deliberately, she says, I will go there deliberately and then we said to her, you have the eye to go there?! She said, why not? And then she is not irritating? Well, we also said, we talked across from her, she sat there, we sat here, what is it for, what you are doing? Are you doing it deliberately? Do you deliberately shame us? Because this is shameful for us if she is not ashamed of herself because the people talk about us. "Oh, his wife did this and that", but who cares about them? She is that kind of a woman, that's that. That's that, that's that." (52-year-old woman, unemployed, translated by the author)

As we can see from Léna's story that the fidelity of the bride is not only important because of emotions. The actions of the bride change the opinion of the family. It is a great shame for the mother-in-law if she cannot watch out for her daughter-in-law.

As the analysis above shows, the bride needs to do everything she can to adapt, if she does not want to clash with her mother-in-law. The bride has to learn the cooking, washing, cleaning methods used in her husband's family, she needs to listen to her mother-in-law and help her. They expect the bride to be direct, become friends with her mother-in-law and her husband's family, but her biggest confidant should be her mother-in-law. In addition, she has to be "*nice*" and "*clean*", but she cannot show the appearance that she would want to please other men.

Though, based on these things my interviewees said, some kind of changes can be discovered in this strict set of rules. For the brides of today, it is less important what the community thinks of them, the good relationship with their mothers-in-law is less decisive. In the last part of the analysis, it is presented what kind of changes I found in the mentality of the young brides compared to the older generations. In addition, the possible causes of this change are also collected.

Changes in the significance of the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship

During my visits to the settlement and my conversations, I became aware that the Roma girls often contrast the old customs with emerging ones. I often heard the terms "*these wives today*", "*the elderly think otherwise*", "*it is not like this today*" and other expressions. It is difficult to determine how a community's norm system changes because they are always evolving. In the next rows, these changes are presented.

The first analysed change, which was mentioned by several women from Dány, is the loss of power of the mothers-in-law above their daughters-in-law. My conversation

partners said that the brides today do not listen to their mothers-in-law and they do not do the tasks entrusted to them.

"Well as one takes it I think. Well, most of the brides get on with their mothers-in-law, the most do not. The most I think since the world has also developed like this at the Romas. Since they like to come, go, party, like this and that, night programmes and everything. And you know most of the mothers-in-law still live in the past, (...) who still cook, wash, clean, and so on. And you know a lot (...) do not live like that anymore and do not think of it like that. Life today is not like you need to wash, to cook. And I think (...) because of these things they do not get on. Yes, there already is a shift. Now I say so, now there is no such thing, that the girls wear long skirts, of course, many do not like that either. (...) Several do not get on, because it could be that the wife sleeps until ten, eleven and like they are awake from seven. Maybe because of this as well." (26-year-old woman, active worker, translated by the author)

As it shows from Rubina's narrative, for the wives today, other values are more important than the older generations. One of the causes for this change is that the young brides take up certain elements from the non-Roma community when in contact with them (Prónai 2007:207-208). What Rubina calls development, that is the acceptance and reusing of non-Roma elements (Prónai 2007:207).

That the young of Dány respect the former norms, behavioural rules and traditions less is due to the fact that more and more of them are on some sort of social media portal. In the Dány community, the parents and the husbands often limit the use of social media for the girls, because they are afraid that the girl would find herself a partner there.

"[Szamanta:] Yes, you know it is just weird for us, that we did not grow up like this, we did not do anything like this, I already, from the age of 8-9, for me it was like I cleaned, so I would do something. Because my mother taught me. (...) [Cserhaj:] Now is not like our time was. [Szamanta:] (...) I did not have a telephone. Or earlier the telephones were not like this. [Cserhaj:] Facebook was not so popular. Now the Romas also do things on Facebook, like the Hungarians. [Szamanta:] As an example they write to other boys, to look for somebody else for themselves. Instead of their husbands. You understand. [Cserhaj:] She means, that for you it is natural that you have more boys in your life. Like more partners. Let us say you break up with him, comes the other. And with us, this was not like

that. Now the custom is that they cheat on their husbands and have more boyfriends. Like, through Facebook" (26-year-old woman, housewife; 28-year-old woman, housewife, translated by the author).

With the girls having Facebook, the community not only risks that the brides cheat on their husbands or that they escape. As it shows from Szamanta's and Cserhaj's conversation, social media also became the transmitter of a non-Roma value system.

Roma live on the edge of Hungarian society (Stewart 1993:127) and the Roma know that the non-Roma look down on them, that they find it difficult to bear the presence of the Romas – writes Stewart in the *Brothers in Song* (Stewart 1993:127). The feeling in the Romas, which is created by the non-Roma community, which has power over them and is hostile against them, is called "siege mentality" (Stewart 1993:130). The reaction of the older generation in the Dány community to the "siege mentality" rather fits Stewart's experience, which is that "one of the characteristics of resistance is the homogenization of the activities" (Stewart 1993:130). Dóra Pálos also reports the "siege mentality" in her research "*Gypsies*", "*New Hungarians*" or "*Roma*"?. Pálos studied the differences between the generations and came to the conclusion that the younger generation is more willing to adapt to the majority society (Pálos 2004:346). A similar process also started in Romas of Dány. The young generation, not only in personal interactions but also in the online sphere experience the feeling of "siege mentality". This is the reason why, while the seniors choose the strategy of homogenization, the younger generation, due to the greater pressure, tries to assimilate. This is why it is possible that they also take up customs from the majority society, like dating, which is not usual in the Roma community of Dány.

The power loss of the mothers-in-law also comes from the fact that the respect of the elderly is declining in the community. As it also shows from the narrative of Rubina, Cserhaj and Szamanta, the worldview of the older and the younger women greatly differ from each other. Thanks to this, the position of the elderly is starting to change in the Dány community. "Traditionally, in Roma society the old people have a key role, they think that due to their age they have the most knowledge, so their figure is identified with the wise" (Pálos 2004:344, translated by the author). This analysis, so far, also points this way, which showed, that the bride needs to respect and listen to her mother-in-law. Today, however, this authority is disappearing. The mothers-in-law learned other rules from their mothers-in-law than to which the daughters-in-law of today identify with.

In the last subchapter of the analysis, the changes in the Dány Roma mother- and daughter-in-law relationships and the reasons for these shifts were explored. The research question is answered in the next chapter.

Summary

Conclusion

In this research, the Dány Roma community was examined. To this day, the majority of the community lives according to Roma traditions and thus the relationship of the daughter- and mother-in-law has an important role. Since the two women live together for years or decades, every little conflict has significance. The mother-in-law appears as the guardian of values in the community. She lives according to what was taught to her by her mother-in-law, she does the same tasks and represents the same mentality. It is her task to teach and pass on the value system of the family and the community. In Dány they think that the daughter-in-law will be the one who will carry on the traditions; the value system of the family. The community expects the daughter-in-law to listen to her mother-in-law, take up her customs, learn to manage the household and the norms of raising children. The wife needs to take up the identity of the family and the community so she can pass those on later to her daughter-in-law.

This perception is changing. The relationship of the daughters- and mothers-in-law are different than before. It is noticeable in Dány that some of the brides do not behave in an expected manner. They do not obey their mothers-in-law and they do not take up their habits. Contrary to this, new practices appear in their life management, which somewhere corresponds with the non-Roma norms. For example, waking up late, continuing nightlife, the usage of social media or dating. This change can have more reasons. On the one hand, the young Roma women of Dány are more severely affected by the feeling of “siege mentality” by being present on social media. The young generation, instead of isolating themselves, tries to assimilate into the majority society, takes up their customs, which are alien from the Dány community. Along with this, affected by a modern, rapidly changing and globalising world the young cannot identify with the generation of their mothers-in-law, thus the latter lose their authority and power over their daughters-in-law.

This observation suggests that the Dány Roma community is changing. Romas in Dány keep the traditions, pay attention to and follow the rules. Their norm system is still

very strong. If someone does not follow the rules, the community condemns and exiles them. However, the number of violations is growing, which becomes more accepted, thus the value system of the community changes. The wives of today respect the values of their parent's age group less. They work to get those life management norms accepted in the community that they have already adopted.

The further possibilities of research in the topic

It is important to highlight that the practices and relationships written in this paper are more nuanced than what I had a possibility to research in the past months. The decrease of the significance of the daughter- and mother-in-law relationship has a lot of other possible reasons. Due to the limits of the research, all the possible solutions cannot be explored. Nevertheless, this paper can be a good base for further research. As it can be seen from the analysis above, lots of kinds of interpretations can be used when examining the relations of the Dány Roma community. So the topic of the paper is suitable for further, deeper research. It would be especially worth researching this topic with the participant observation method, in the interest of gaining a more nuanced picture of the practices and tendencies of what this paper could show.

The Dány Roma community is a special and exciting research area. The research of the evolution of the fate of the women of the settlement and their relation to the non-Roma society and the internet is an exciting research possibility. It could be an important research topic, how the change of the prohibition of the community's media usage in 2020 changes, due to the appearance of distance learning and more comprehensively how the use of social media further transforms the mentality of the Dány women and the value system of the whole community.

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BODY AND HEALTH IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL MEANINGS

Aleksandra Cejovic

Biopolitics behind the impact of menstruation-related symptoms on the neoliberal notion of productivity

Abstract

Menstruation is traditionally perceived as a sign of belonging to womanhood, yet it is often related to negative feelings such as shame and discomfort. Although feminists worked towards emphasizing the social dimension of menstruation, it is still unquestionably experienced as a bodily process.

This qualitative research is focused on the community of international menstruators who reside in Budapest and their perception of menstrual experience in relation to the notion of productivity, including menstrual shame, sexual decision-making, menstrual suppression, birth control, and hygiene management. This work is genuinely interested in discussing and analyzing the paradox of vaginal bleeding coming out of the closet alongside the rise of efforts to conceal it.

Through utilizing the theory of intersectionality and biopolitics, this thesis represents the attempt of identifying mechanisms of cultural and societal forces in the construction of menstrual experience. Each informant is at the intersection of her social structure identities which implies that menstrual experience and its connection to menstruators productivity are interconnected with myriad axes of difference and sameness.

The findings show the connection between the menstrual cycle and changing feelings in terms of women's perspective towards their daily tasks, sexuality, and participation in societal settings.

Keywords: *menstruation, productivity, menstrual experience, intersectionality, biopolitics*

Introduction

Menstruation is traditionally perceived as a sign of belonging to womanhood, yet it is often related to negative feelings, such as shame and discomfort (Kissling 1996), which leads to assessing menstruation as a phenomenon strongly situated within modern societies. From institutional blindness to the biological needs of women in the workplace, school, or halls of government buildings, to social attitudes held by peers and family members, menstruation is treated not as a basic biological function that needs to be accommodated, but as a burden for women to bare alone and in private. This results in women learning that their menstrual cycle is something that should be carefully hidden from the eyes of others, especially men (Hensel, Fortenberry, & Orr 2007).

Due to the fact that every human being is affected in a certain way by social, and scientific values of bodily processes, the intention of my research is to examine how women from different cultural and economic conditions encounter social consequences, specifically the notion of productivity, in relation to their menstrual cycle. The intention is not to present menstruators as a weaker link of humanity, but to highlight compound dynamics behind the shame brought upon their bodily process and the lack of questions on this matter directed to a system, in which the needs of at least half of the world's population are dismissed as irrelevant to the public.

My year-long work depicts menstruation to be a multidimensional phenomenon whose secrets have the potential to cast light onto compound constructs developed by cultural and societal forces. Analysing the examples introduced by informants when discussing menstrual hygiene management, pain mitigation, work ethic, and birth control, a common topic of discussion revolved around how choice is a privilege. Diversity of informants' socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds was necessary to reach the research goal of this thesis, which is to identify power dynamics that shape menstrual experience. This further led to the realization that menstruation is not just a feminist topic, but a topic of race, gender, class, and other characteristics that are in relation with the intersectionality of identity that distributes privilege, and therefore an opportunity of making choices.

The menstrual cup, tampons, reusable pads, hormonal IUDs, and pain medications present exclusively a narrow spectrum of examples of what pharmaceutical companies and ordinary 10 consumption have to offer to menstruators in order for them to be fit in obtained social roles of a mother, sexual partner, employee, student, or a friend, including

countless others. Searching for a balance between accepting their bodily process and meeting their daily obligations and expectations led women menstruators to either listening to, or completely silencing their menstrual bodies.

Literature review

The collision of biopolitics and intersectionality

"Polymorphous techniques of power" (Foucault, 1978(1):11) or "deployments of power and knowledge" (ibid 73) which diffuse through contemporary society, are pointed at by the notion of biopolitics according to Foucault (1978(1)). As Liesen and Walsh (2012) claim, Foucault identifies power and knowledge as the most influential forces, which simultaneously and correspondingly form societies.

It should be noted that biopower does not imply exclusively the power of government. Schools, families, hospitals, workplaces, and also social media are considered to be a multitude of power channels through which biopolitics is invoked (Downing 2008). Foucault (1978(1)) culminates with the conclusion that there is "no escaping from power" (ibid 82). The connection between Foucault's notion of biopolitics and intersectionality seems quite clear. Both paradigms tend to focus their attention on a myriad of power relationships that are important for the elaboration of the topic of menstruation and social experience connected to it.

Thus, intersectionality is inevitably intertwined with an analysis of power even though objection to intersectionality is its purported tendency to highlight categories of identity in contrast to structures of inequality (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall 2013). The research conducted for the thesis shows that categories of identity are, indeed, structures of inequality, which explains the choice of Foucault's theory of biopolitics and intersectionality as main theoretical frameworks. The intersectional theory has the potential to depict "multilayered and routinized forms of domination" (Crenshaw 1991) in certain contexts, such as control over menstruators' bodies. Current definitions bolster the perception of intersectionality including diverse ways of categorizing human populations like age, attractiveness, body type, citizenship, education, ethnicity, nationality, physical ability, sexual orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status. This happens due to the placement of every individual at the intersection of polymorphic social identity structures that subject the menstruator to the set of social advantages and disadvantages characteristic for their junction (Gopaldas 2013).

Most of the population are forced into physical and mental discipline within their workplaces, which Foucault identifies as the “micro-physics of power” in the process of producing “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1979(2):139). As Martin (2001) highlighted, many women report that during PMS, they are less motivated and able to tolerate such discipline. Still, some menstruators do have more choices when it comes to managing their menstruation freely at the workplace than others, and it depends on their socioeconomic, cultural, and religious background.

In the case of menstruation, the core problem is simply its existence (Bobel 2010). The answer is to conceal the process by controlling the menstruating body with the help of commodities such as tampons, pads, menstrual cups, or, to conceal menstruation by rendering the process invisible by containing the menstruating body or, continuously more common, suppressing menstruation through hormonal contraception. In other words, not every menstruator is free to freely manage and experience their menstrual body mostly due to lack of access to specific resources, or the privilege of making a choice. Rethinking our bodies leads us to transforming ontological, embodied experiences of being in our bodies, no matter how we choose to handle our periods (Mamo & Fosket 2009).

What does the notion of productivity mean for menstruators?

Productivity, in a wide sense of the word, can be considered as the efficiency with which goods are produced by the resources utilized. It is measured as a ratio between input, such as materials, energy and labour, and output reflected in commodities, and services (Rastogi, 1986:148). This definition may be interpreted within the case of menstruation as well. Menstruation is connected to the image of the productive system that has failed to produce, alongside the notion of production gone faulty of which outcome are wasted and unusable products (Martin 2001). On the other side, scholars like biologist Margie Profet (1993), offer a new theory of menstruation as a significant component of a woman’s flexible immune system, which argues that the female body goes through various adjustments each month including ovulation, the late luteal phase, and pregnancy.

Productivity, in a neoliberal sense of the word, is a type of mindset that seeks to explore, create, and seize new opportunities for improvement (Rastogi 1986). How “inconvenient” and “unproductive” it is to have a period is shown by UNICEF (2019) which claims that around 10 percent of African girls are not able to attend school due to an

inability to control and manage their menstruation. This includes a lack of menstrual care products, clean toilets, and running water. Even within developed countries, the fact is that most students who menstruate are frequently affected by endocrinological and physiological changes connected to the cyclical process of ovulation and menstruation. Even though most menstruators experience some menstruation-related symptoms, approximately 50 percent of them experience serious menstrual pain known as dysmenorrhea (Richardson 1991).

Not only menstruators affected by period poverty report changes in their daily work routine during menstruation, but women all around the world report symptoms related to emotions and mood, and a considerable number of them, but still a minority, report deteriorated academic and work performance (Richardson 1991). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Gordon and Lee's (1993) study showed no difference in cognitive performance between the phases of menstruation.

But in menstruator's case productivity seems more complex than just simple reflection of vaginal bleeding on their work routine. Many informants confessed that menstruation affects their sexual lives. This happens due to wide spectrum of reasons, however majority of them explained how they believe that tradition and religion within which they were brought up play an important role when forming an attitude towards menstrual sex. Even though sexual intercourse during menses is explicitly prohibited by Islamic, Talmudic, and biblical texts, alongside hygienic and ideological reasons, both individual and relationship factors provide enough influence to decide on sexual unavailability due to menstruating (Hensel, Fortenberry, & Orr 2007).

Another example that argues the expansion of the menstruators' notion of productivity could be presented through their engagement in sport. Most of the ideas forming the "menstrual politics of sports" (Delaney, Lupton, & Toth 1988) are rooted in assumed negative effects of menses on athletic performance and the effect of athletic performance on menstruation, reproduction and fertility (Apter & Vihko 1983; Arena, Maffulli, & Morleo 1995; Constantini & Warren 1995; Dowling 2000). But, when asking athlete menstruators about this topic they would emphasize the pressure of "public gaze" and concealing menstruation when interacting with teammates and coaches. Their biggest concern is hiding menstruation from others when performing specific sport activities (Moreno-Black & Vallianatos 2005).

A study by de Jonge (2003) suggests that regular menstruators who compete in strength specific sports and intense aerobic sports, do not need to adapt to their menstrual cycle phases in order to maximise their physical performance.

Expanding the concept of productivity is necessary in order to understand the mechanisms behind menstrual experience from various perspectives. The intention of this thesis is not to present menstruators as passive, and weak, but to bring attention to their menstrual reality and its connection to their productivity levels.

Methodology

Data were collected through interviews and a focus group with twenty women within the international community who reside in Budapest. They come from 18 different countries: Ecuador, Turkey, Philippines, Morocco, Zimbabwe, the USA, Syria, Norway, Hungary, Tunisia, Mongolia, Iran, Jordan, Mexico, China, Ukraine, Montenegro, and Serbia. There were no rules for selecting whom to include in my research besides trying to make it as culturally diverse as possible. The cultural diversity among informants implies differences in their religious, ethnic, socioeconomic, and sexual backgrounds. This was important for the research's intention to apply the theory of intersectionality in a clearer way when gathering and analysing data.

Alongside the topic of my research and their attitude towards its position within society, women were willing to participate in interviews due to miscellaneous reasons. Some of them offered help as a friend, others enjoyed being part of academic work, but all of them saw it as an appropriate chance to share, think, and discuss their feelings, struggles, and perspectives on the menstrual experience.

The random sampling method was based on the transparent presentation of interest and intentions of researching menstrual experience in terms of productivity to acquaintances who have different cultural backgrounds but currently live in Budapest. Later, they would have decided to be participants themselves, or they would let me know about people close to them who expressed the wish to be a part of the research.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and regulations placed to control it, informants could choose if they preferred meeting in person or via online platforms. The three of my informants chose to participate together and form a focus group due to their closeness to each other, while with others I conducted individual unstructured interviews. I used both prepared and throw-away questions depending on where the conversation

was going. The questions were about their first encounter with menstruation and vaginal bleeding; how it affects them in everyday life activities related to school, work, family, sex; what is their attitude towards menstrual products, and their opinion on birth control with an emphasis on oral hormonal contraceptives.

Intersectional research, such as this one, uses primary data, such as on-site interviews and participant observation, and secondary data, such as historical texts, so that multiple perspectives can be collected within a specific context. While interviews serve the function of getting in touch with lived experiences of social (dis)advantages, the function of genealogical analysis is to distinguish the historical and structural dimensions behind them. This means that intersectionality as a methodological framework serves to deconstruct the how and why of the (dis)advantages present in the past and their transformations in the present (Gopaldas 2013).

What makes an analysis intersectional is, in fact, its adoption of an intersectional pattern of perceiving the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall 2013). This is one of the reasons the fieldwork has been conducted at the international level since diversity of sameness and difference within menstrual reality of informants who are part of different economic, social, ethnic, and religious settings is appropriate ground for utilizing the theory of intersectionality.

Transcripts of the conducted interviews were analysed using interpretive feminist critical methods (DeVault 1990; Langellier & Hall 1989; Nelson), which implies listening to women as individuals who have power over their own experiences and depicting their words in a written text, rather than just psychologically interpreting and not allowing the reader to question them (Rogers 1996).

Due to analysed literature, the hypothesis was acquired that there is a direct connection between biological, social, and cultural aspects of menstruation that play a huge role in the menstruator's perspective of productivity.

Findings and Discussion

Menarche as the Birth of Menstrual Body

"It's like the first sex, you know? It's your first experience and you can never forget it."

(Petra, Ukraine)

Nalebuff (2009) explains how "every woman remembers her first period - where and when it happened, who, if anyone, she told, even what she was wearing"; still, "almost no one talks about it. Even fewer people write about it" (ibid:1). Accounts of menarche as a milestone characteristic for every menstruator's life showed how informants tend to normalize their first menstrual experience through comparing it between peers and accepting the universality of menstruation. Women explained how they were usually congratulated on their first blood and how it made them feel more connected to womanhood.

"Then, I felt more equal to my mom." (Eylul, Turkey)

"My friends and sister started laughing at me. »Welcome to womanhood!« they said."

(Salima, Zimbabwe)

Even though going through a normal life transition called menarche presents the link between interviewees, their first menstrual experience differs due to the cultures within which they are brought up, religions whose rules they obey, and dynamics of their interfamilial relationships. Each informant is positioned at their intersection of social structure identities, which resulted in the construction of individual unique menstrual experiences. From assuming how their parents were melancholic because of it; to explaining the reason behind the decision not to tell their mother about it; and claiming that their experience was negative since their parents had an adverse approach to menstruation, it may be concluded that the focal point of the menarcheal episode is the content of child-parent interaction. Literature analysis shows how neglected the topic of child-parent relation is in terms of menarcheal experience when it is, indeed, one of the factors that had the biggest influence of informants' perception of the first blood.

Most informants considered that their menarche could alter their social status among peers. These women, back then girls, depended on the affirmation of their

classmates and friends, as Emily (USA) confirmed by explaining how she wanted to be “cool” because everyone else got their period before her. She justified the statement by explaining the excitement and expectations all girls in school went through regarding menstruation. All of a sudden, to be “cool” and to be part of menarcheal girls was conditioned by your menstrual status, as Emily recalls.

The literature lacks narratives that would assist in the further examination of the connection between pressures of one’s surroundings and menarche. Inquiry of these phenomena is important due to the accounts of most informants, which argue the notion of menstruation as not only a private phenomenon but also as an occurrence that constantly interacts with a variety of social factors. It seems that the menstrual experience is found in a state of constant change affected by transforming cultural and societal forces. Understanding the link between the private and public regarding menarche could be of great help when casting light on compound societal and cultural mechanisms of power and their domains.

Menstruation as (In)visible Bleeding

Distress caused by menstruation itself, and negativity attached to it, shows how various products shape menstruators’ consumer attitude in relation to their menstrual bodies.

Eylul (Turkey) recalls her struggles and worries about leaking for the first few years since menarche, while Andrea (Ecuador) claims how she still hates when that happens. Houppert (1999) coined the phrase “the culture of concealment” with intention to illustrate how menstrual taboos and stigma mold menstruators’ experience of menstruation by manipulating them into menstrual shame, often via socially acceptable menstrual hygiene products. As it was highlighted in the previous chapter, cultural and societal forces reach the domain of the private – menstruator’s reproductive system – which is reflected in obedience towards patriarchally structured notions of cleanliness and beauty.

Data collected during interviews supports Houppert’s (1999) theory. Consumption of a variety of menstrual products is one way of transforming menstrual hygiene management into “the culture of concealment”. For Mina (Syria) “*all of the menstrual products are missing something*” while Andrea (Ecuador) expressed her feelings that “*just industry profits from them, not women*”.

"If you are a virgin you can't use tampons because you will lose your virginity." (Serena, Mexico)

"I grew up using pads, and I still do because tampons are considered a 'taboo' thing. I never used them and I was never kind of brave enough." (Mina, Syria)

"In Turkey, they told us if we use tampons we will lose our virginity." (Eylul, Turkey)

"Girls mostly use pads. Tampons are also popular but not among unmarried ladies." (Salima, Zimbabwe)

Data collected during interviews supports Houppert's (1999) theory to the point where socio-cultural influences construct menstruation not just as invisible, but also as the subject of the panoptical gaze that is focused on internalization of the patriarchal notions to the point where menstrual bodies purely act to adhere to cultural norms. Narrative of a tampon being a competitive factor towards males when it comes to 'taking' women's virginity argues that culture shapes the attitude of menstruators' towards their own body. Their accounts support the hypotheses of menstrual dimension and its intersectionality. In other words, depending on informants' socioeconomic, cultural, religious, class, and even sexual orientation background, they have more or less agency when it comes to decision-making about their menstrual bodies.

As it was already argued, panoptical gaze can be identified as the access to different menstrual products. From the range of choices to the range of prices, pads, tampons, and cups are not available to everyone. Yasmin (Morocco) recalls how limited she felt back in her home country, alongside Salim (Zimbabwe) and Serena (Mexico) who says:

"Not every girl in Mexico has access to it because it's expensive. It is considered a luxury product. Menstrual pads and tampons are not like those basic products, you can buy without tax. . . Now I feel I have more options than when I was a teenager. . . But still in Mexico, there are no supermarkets where you can buy a cup. So if you want it you need to research and order it online. Here it's so easy and you have different options."

Findings show how menstrual shame is encountered as an intense sense of inefficiency. This particular occurrence may be analyzed through Foucault's (1975) concept of the docile body created through surveillance and organization of individuals within a particular space, such as prison, or in this case, the menstrual body (Rabinow, 1982). Not being able to control their menstrual bodies according to social expectations due to their

intersectionality of social identity structures may result in women averting social contact, feeling isolated and agentless. This is related to access/lack of access to menstrual products and pain mitigation but it may be expanded into menstruator's overall perception of vaginal bleeding and its social consequences as a holistic approach. Emily (USA) acknowledged this issue by claiming that she, "can't imagine not being able to afford menstrual products or have access to it", which could result in having to, "be home for a week just because you have no pad." In other words, limiting supplies for women was found not to be only financial but is strongly related to the power and ideology of biopolitics as well (Bozelko 2020).

Menstrual products and their accessibility turned out to be a significant factor in menstruator's changing attitude towards their body. Informants who switched to using the menstrual cup or reusable cloth pads instead of commercial disposable products reported an increasingly positive experience managing vaginal bleeding. "*I think I've become more comfortable with my menstrual blood since using the cup. And that's one thing I really appreciate about the cup*", as Emily (USA) pointed out. Interviews with Serena (Mexico), Ida (Norway) and Emily (USA) highlighted earlier findings that argue how different hygienic products affect menstruator's perception of themselves in distinct aspects. Informants from Mexico, the USA, and Norway have been using the menstrual cup for awhile, while Salim from Zimbabwe tends to manage her bleeding with reusable cloth pads. A quite interesting finding is this transformation of menstrual reality over the course of time.

Menstruation as (Dis)advantage

Martin (2001) argued that menstruators do not recognize menstruation as a phenomenon that solely belongs to the sphere of private space, but an inevitable part of their social lives at work and school as well. While arguing against the notion that menstruation is limiting for most menstruator, there is still the obligation to attend to problems that may exist (Bobel 2010). Rather than focusing on human behaviour as a result of rational, psychological, or cultural dimensions, the notion of biopolitics may be utilized for further examination of how biological factors shape or produce human behaviour (Liesen & Walsh 2012).

Similar to Richardson (1991), one of the findings of this research is that most menstruators tend to experience various physical, psychological and behavioral changes

not just during menstruation but throughout the whole menstrual cycle, especially ovulation and the late luteal phase. For example, during pre-ovulation and ovulation, menstruators tend to feel more energetic and social due to spikes in estrogen and progesterone, which contrasts with the experiences regarding paramenstruum when the body stops producing these hormones. Due to this, most informants claim that they schedule their lives around their period.

"I always control when I am about to have my period so I can plan a trip or I can decide when to do more of this or that." (Andrea, Ecuador)

"My boyfriend told me that he schedules his life around my periods. Even though he was joking I think he meant it for real." (Eylul, Turkey)

"I have this application on my phone so I know when my period is going to come. I plan my month around the date, because if I'm going to travel too much. I should avoid the first and second dates. Also, I teach so If I got my period one day before the class I have to cancel it."
(Fatma, Tunisia)

Findings show that women who experience painful menstruation tend to organize their lives around it more frequently. This supports Ylikorkala and Dawood's (1978) suggestion that dysmenorrhea is one of the main causes of lost working hours and school days among young women due to incapacitating them for up to three days in each menstrual cycle. One possible explanation for the silence surrounding menstrual pain is either ignorance or fear. Interviews lead me to the conclusion that informants' tendencies to ignore period pain in order to keep up with everyday tasks testifies to how society not only alienates menstruators from their bodily functions but also that their distress is either justified as an excuse for their subordination, or it is trivialized. Utilizing the theory of biopolitics argues how the decision-making process is inevitably affected by menstruation, even irrelevant to the case when a menstruator's behaviour is not impacted by vaginal bleeding since the effects of their decisions are culturally normed to abide by patriarchal expectations.

Other informants with different experiences with menstrual pain have differing perspectives on this phenomenon. Emily (USA) explains how she has "*cramps the first day but they're not bad at all, I can still live a completely normal life*", while Serena (Mexico) believes that her period does not change the fact that menstruators still have deadlines to meet, things to complete, and people to see. However, she reported how she is becoming more conscious about her menstrual body and even though she does not organize life

around it, she is more aware of how it affects her. This allowed her to be released from the pressure she used to feel that she needed to keep up with everything. When discussing menstruation-related symptoms, she explained how PMS for her happens more on a psychological level, while menstruation is physical.

The PMS experiences are usually based on common dismissals such as "it's all in your mind," "grin and bear it," or "pull yourself together" (Martin 2001). Similar to Richardson (1991), informants ascribed their irritability, tension or depression to the late luteal phase, or PMS. This finding argues how difficult and, perhaps, inaccurate it is to extract and research exclusively specific menstrual cycle phases. In other words, causes of abnormal menstrual pain, or extreme mood changes, could be explored as a part of other menstrual cycle phases such as the absence of ovulation due to hormonal imbalances. Namely, the menstrual cycle including all its stages should be approached holistically for inquiry and better comprehension of the phenomenon.

When it comes to the correlation between vaginal bleeding and productivity, informants reported a variety of experiences.

"Even though it's short it's quite painful so I can't do much physically. I am in pain and I can't concentrate and I have a lack of energy. I cannot think straight. . . Before, when I used to work 8 hours a day every day in an office, and I was dying, I didn't have any choice, so you somehow find a force when you are pulled in these responsibilities but if you had a choice then you are able to freely manage this pain." (Andrea, Ecuador)

Most women explained how menstrual pain does not make them less productive since they are aware of their everyday obligations and fulfilling them but they claim how menstrual pain made academic deadlines, workplace duties, or household chores, harder to complete. When asked if women got comfortable with pain because of the imperative of productivity Eylul (Turkey) affirmatively responded by adding how she thinks "we would get bullied more" if we showed the discomfort that is occasionally felt and dealt with.

Elizabeth Kissling explains how "the social construction of menstruation as a woman's curse is explicitly implicated in the evolution of woman as Other." Although "menstruation does not make a woman the Other; it is because she is Other that menstruation is the curse." (Bobel 2010:28)

The dominant menstrual narrative affects menstruators by alienating them from their bodily process. For example, Petra (Ukraine) used to faint whenever she was on her

period back in high school and still has painful menstruation, but she refuses to do or be considered less.

"When I'm at the workplace or university, I pull my shit together and no one ever knows."

(Petra, Ukraine)

Andrea (Ecuador) elaborated how it happens that there are days when she feels like she cannot think straight but scheduling helps her to keep up with academic tasks she has to complete.

"There are times when I just don't feel like doing anything and I feel the pain that I can't control it and it makes me less able to concentrate. . . But period doesn't affect my grades. When I have to push myself to do something I do it."

Time management and body literacy turned out to be the main tools for maintaining their usual levels of productivity. Results showed that menstruation does not make women less capable but it can be used as an argument for their developed skills of time management.

"I usually work more afterwards because most of the time the first two days are quite painful, but there are periods when they aren't so then I can function normally on those days. . . It's not really the mental capability. It's just that I can't bear the pain I can't be at my desk. So it does affect my productivity during menstruation." (Mina, Syria)

Ida (Norway), as the only informant who does not menstruate regularly due to her oral contraceptives, showed empathy for difficulties experienced by menstruators surrounding her. She believes that menstrual pain is being normalized and "seen as something women have to deal with". "[The] problem is that there is not enough research on female reproductive health", she adds after commenting how sometimes it happens that her friend has to "lay on the floor" because of the menstrual pain. Still, Ida (Norway) continues by explaining that the effects of period pain on the productivity of women can happen to even non-menstruators if they get the flu or have a hangover and are not able to think or act the way they are supposed to. The only thing is that people who do not have menstruation are not aware when they will get sick like women with painful menstruation are.

Most menstruators tend to experience a wide spectrum of physical, psychological, and behavioral changes during the period between ovulation and menstruation, and later during menstruation itself, such as irritability, depression, anxiety, breast swelling and pain, headaches, abdominal bloating, poor concentration, poor coordination, food

cravings, weight gain, and change in libido (Brush & Goudsmit 1988). Similar to Ida's (Norway), one of the informants, Serena (Mexico), had the same opinion on this matter. She illustrated how "*a bad day*" can always happen without any correlation to menstruating, which could also affect the level of productivity. The interviews conducted for the thesis showed how even biology became the subject of analysis and calculation for the sake of maximizing the human "abilities-machine" (Foucault 2008(3):296).

"The very first day at work it would normally take me longer to do a specific task because I don't feel motivated and I am completely exhausted. . . Still, I wouldn't say it affects the quality of my work, but It just takes longer because I feel extremely tired and uncomfortable." (Dani, Ecuador)

Testimonies of a significant number of informants argue that menstruators are often brought to the point where they need to ignore, trivialize and pathologize their menstrual pain in order to abide by the notion of productivity and work ethic. Milena (Montenegro) explained how she believed at first that managing her period will be challenging because of the pain but she ended up knowing her body and how her menstrual pain works. This led to the mindset that if her menstrual pain affected her daily responsibility she would think: "*Okay it hurts. I will take a pill and I will be okay.*"

Results of the fieldwork indicate that menstruation does not affect the productivity of menstruators *per se*. Similar to Sommer's (1983:57) conclusion that "intellectual function in normal healthy women is stable and independent of the fluctuation of the menstrual cycle", most informants reported a similar notion. Still, menstruators with diagnosed hormonal imbalances and other health issues like PCOS and endometriosis find it harder to comply with the "culture of productivity" during the first couple of days when menstruating. For example, Dorci (Hungary), who was diagnosed with PCOS, explained how once she "had such bad cramps" that she had to stop her class presentation. However, she elaborated how this did not impact her grade and her education as a whole. In other words, menstruation did not affect her overall academic performance at the end of the semester.

The more examples I have been introduced to by my informants, the less it seems that menstruation is a threat to the "culture of productivity" since most of the informants abide by social expectations no matter whether they are menstruating or not. For a better comprehension of social consequences menstruators encounter due to their menses, the

notion of productivity needs to be expanded. Namely, it is not enough to observe menstruation as the factor on which a ratio between input and output in working conditions depends. Menstruators occupy many roles, such as that of mother, student, athlete, consumer, religious believer, etc. Productivity, in this sense, should be identified as the ability of menstruator to lead their lives without being negatively impacted by menstrual pain, shame, or poverty.

Some of the informants accounted for how menstrual bleeding affects physically, socially or psychologically other aspects of their lives. When discussing socializing, various answers were given due to diverse menstrual experiences of the informants' and unforeseen menstrual symptoms depending on cycles.

"It depends on the period. One month it happens I can't get out of the bed, the other I just feel fatigued...But I try to avoid it. Especially when I am in pain." (Andrea, Ecuador)

"In the case, if it's at the beginning, which are the worst days, I usually do cancel. Other times, I would normally be okay with going home like hanging out with friends, unless I am in a bad mood....If I'm PMSing then I would cancel because I'm not in the mood to talk or socialise and also because of the other people they do not feel awkward. Because when I'm somewhere I like to be present." (Mina, Syria)

The findings did not show any behavioral pattern when it comes to socializing since the same number of menstruators reported that menstruation does not impact their social activities, but still a significant number of informants confirmed they do not feel comfortable being out and surrounded by many people. What is important to highlight is that interviews showed how paramenstruum is the period within the menstrual cycle when some women choose to distance themselves from social occasions.

"My blood pressure is low and I feel cold.... Sometimes, I can't participate in physical activities. And I always have a headache, so I can't really concentrate during the period. And during the PMS, I experience the same. So it's half of the month I feel kind of...Yeah, I feel weird." (Sarnai, Mongolia)

As it was claimed above, menstruation-related symptoms can affect women and their 'productivity' on multiple levels. Not only social sphere of menstruators' lives is influenced, but private as well, even though menstruation is a phenomenon that elaborates on the interconnection between them two. The link between menstrual shame, body shame and sexual decision-making was established through informants' narratives of cultural expectations in terms of sexual behavior.

"I mean, there's a lot of stigma behind it so even if you weren't a believer it's not that simple to say »I don't believe so I don't abide«, you know? It becomes cultural as well. And it's a social norm basically, that it is dirty and unhealthy". (Mina, Syria)

"It is pretty stigmatised because there is a belief that it is not healthy for both of them. It is not smart and it is risky." (Salima, Zimbabwe)

"In general, it is considered unclean and if you do this you are thought of as a nymphomaniac or addicted to sex because you can't take a break." (Dorci, Hungary)

As Holland, et all. (1990) argued, sexually assertive women who discuss their own desires, who are prepared with contraception, or who make sexual decisions based on their own needs are often labeled 'sluts'. This statement may be connected with the case of coitus during menstruation where women encounter the higher risk of being perceived as immoral as Dorci (Hungary) elaborated.

Fatma (Tunisia) explained how in her home country is strictly forbidden to have sex while menstruating due to religious reasons. It is considered unhealthy for women. *"In Morocco, they don't have sex during menstruation and it's related to religion."* Yasmin (Morocco) confirmed. She continued on explaining how she does not care about these religious reasons yet she still believes that coitus and vaginal bleeding are not "*a good idea*".

Coitus in connection with vaginal bleeding reduces quite strong socio-cultural prohibitions, meeting the possible feelings of discomfort or messiness associated with that kind of behaviour (Hensel, Fortenberry, & Orr 2007). Menstruators often see menstruation as 'messy' and the blood as 'gross' (Martin 2001). As Andrea (Ecuador) noted, *"I do not like to look at that part"*, and by 'that part' meaning vagina while bleeding, negative feelings about genitals and menstruation itself may be brought in connection with menstruators' sexuality. Schooler, et al. (2005) presented in their findings how the aforementioned negative feelings affect women's abilities to take pleasure in their bodies and sexual experiences, especially if they are menstruating. Still, as Schooler, et al. (2005) concluded, menstrual shame is directly linked to sexual decision-making. Due to the intimate location on women's bodies that is an object of both menstruation and coitus, a menstrual experience characterised with shame might strongly affect menstruators' general approach to their sexuality.

Considering the fact that all of my informants come from different countries and communities, the results of this research highlight possible differences among women

referring to menstruation and sexual behavior and deeper studies are needed for comprehension of these findings. Results of this research perhaps did not delve deep into the issue of sexuality and menstruation but they certainly raised questions referring to how menstruators embrace sex while bleeding, whom they perform sex with and, of course, why.

All of the informants were asked whether they would have menstrual sexual intercourse with the person they never had sex before gave a negative answer. "*If you have a partner that you trust, and you want to do it, it can be done. . . I think it's pretty normal*", Ida (Norway) explained. So, for some menstruators, it seems that feelings of love serve as a reason that justifies socially sanctioned forms of coitus (Hensel, Fortenberry, & Orr 2007). Ida (Norway) continued by comparing her views with the attitudes of others she met in Budapest: "*I spoke to a Hungarian guy here who talked about this girl he had had a relationship with. And he said, »We had this crazy relationship! You know what? We even had sex when she had her period!«*"

For other informants, sexual intercourse while being on their period seemed quite normal. Petra (Ukraine) argues how she feels more sexually aroused during PMS and menstruating, while Israa (Jordan) confessed how her boyfriend once even performed oral sex when she was on her period. Israa also added that being sexually active makes her menstrual cycles more regular. As noted, some adult women report increased sexual interest in menses. This can be explained by individual differences in cyclic hormonal changes connected to increased interest in menstrual sex (Hensel, Fortenberry, & Orr, 2007).

Young (2005) explains how individuals are in a position to form their own actions as variations on prohibitive norms regarding coitus while menstruating. Interviews showed how informants, indeed, negotiate social norms through culturally shared sexual scripts. Sexual behavior is influenced by ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status as well, which allows us to perceive menstrual sex as the topic of intersectionality.

Before taking into consideration all informants' testimonies, we must ask whether menstruators have been in a position to use any aspect of menstrual shame for their own interests. Results showed that some of the experiences these women had put menstruators on a pedestal where they are not just passive victims of an ideology, but they are able to use menstruation as a tool of manipulation.

“When I was in college mj (cannabis) was not legal so we used to put the joint in a tampon wrapper because we knew that we will never be in trouble since not a single police officer is going to open up a tampon.” (Emily, the USA)

“We had gym classes in high school... I really hated that. And we had this kind of a bit old weird male teacher and I used to say I was on my period [in] almost every class, and he got so embarrassed. I just used to say I have female issues and he was like, »Okay, well you don't even have to have a class«. It is so stupid that a grown man would be so embarrassed that a 15- year-old girl is saying that she's on her period and he will just let me skip class every day because of that.” (Ida, Norway)

Milena (Montenegro) also confirmed how menstrual shame can be used as an advantage by giving an example of a girl who used to skip her lecture by telling a professor that she was in pain due to her menstruation. Examples introduced by informants argue menstruator, not a passive individual but a person who is in a position of leverage when it comes to specific ways of manipulation. Menstrual shame can be utilized against patriarchal forces that dictate social norms regarding vaginal bleeding.

In conclusion, interviews conducted with informants for this study argued that menstrual experience is situated at the intersection of social structures, ideologies, and a wide spectrum of beliefs. Also, it has been shown that menstruators tend to completely conceal their menstrual status and potential failure of it could lead to negative feelings about their bodies. Findings further report that menstruators' bodies produce use-values by the consumption of specific menstrual products. Managing menstruation is generally narrated either as a hygienic crisis or a health issue through definitions of ideological frameworks constructed by biomedicalization, social norms, and cultural values. The discussions with informants about the topic of menstrual pain led to conclusions that this symptom is either pathologized, trivialized or ignored as part of problematic “it is just in their head” patriarchal narratives of women's frailty and instability (Bobel 2010). Martin (2001) states that menstruators' accounts of how they function differently during certain days, which makes it harder for them to tolerate the discipline of our society, should not be perceived as flaws inside women that we should focus on fixing. Instead, she adds, menstruators' experiential statements should serve as insights into flaws in society that need to be tackled.

“I think it is not the issue with my country but with patriarchy” (Petra, Ukraine).

Conclusion

The menstrual cycle is not just a characteristic of a female's body. It represents a model that the researcher can utilize in order to understand the compound connection between mind and body, and between bodily processes and social meaning of individual experience.

Data collected through interviews resulted in the conclusion that privilege, or Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital", is necessary to achieve a way of living that may violate sociocultural norms of menstruating. Gender, class, race, sexual orientation, physical ability and myriad other axes of identity mold the privilege and distribution of it (Bobel 2010).

Menstruator, in order to acquire a certain amount of agency, have to come to the understanding that their multiplicity is inherent in their bodily process, and that all of their 'identities' are interconnected with one another. To be Syrian is to contain all nationalities. To be defensive towards biomedicalization of the menstrual cycle is to be engaged in dismissing all misogynistic attitudes against the female body.

Various informants' accounts confirmed that menstruation is not a mere part within the domain of menstruators' privacy, but it is a process that interferes with their social roles as well. Expanding the notion of productivity was crucial for this finding. Social expectations and assumptions of the menstrual body constituted the panoptical gaze menstruators felt when working, having a presentation, buying groceries, drinking a coffee with a friend, or even having sexual intercourse with their partner.

Considering dominating patriarchal narrative, representation of menstruation in much of the existing literature as a problem, and the reality that women rarely get to define the meaning of their bodily processes, I conclude that research on menstruation-related symptoms and their effects on menstruator's productivity makes an important contribution to reducing the existing research gap. However, there are many ways in which this research problem has the potential to be expanded. Examining the connection between hormonal oral contraceptives for suppression of menstruation and its connection to the menstrual shame; the menstrual myth of "tampon – the virginity taker"; contemporary menstrual products, such as reusable cup, and its relationship with consumerism; and biomedicalization of menstruation, are just some of them.

When working with many individuals, it is hard to predict the outcome of the fieldwork. Still, collecting the voices of many constructed the revelation of many truths.

Testimonies of these women elaborate on many versions of life, different for different menstruators and different from reality served.

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Anikó Veronika Vukov

RESEARCH ON THE CURRENT PRACTICES OF INFORMAL HEALING – ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Abstract

This study attempts to provide insight into the workings of today's unofficial healers through their own and their patients' narratives. The subjects of my study engage in practical activities that can be traced back to the work of healers in traditional peasant communities. After a conceptual and research history review, I analyzed the narratives of healers and patients according to the literature of folk and alternative healers, focusing on the healing image, self-representation, the background philosophy of healing, and the economic aspects of their activity.

Introduction

Among the different areas of traditional peasant culture, the world of folk medicine traditions has been preserved in great details by ethnographic literature. Considering the fact that we can meet informal healing strategies today as well, the following question arises: How are these phenomena related to the old world of traditions? Furthermore, what would be the terminological framework that is appropriate for presenting their similarities and differences? In my study, I research healing with the use of herbs, as well as chiropractic techniques, as practice-based healing activities of the present. I attempt to interpret certain parts of my interviews with healers and their patients/customers along the notions and characteristics of folk and alternative healing. These two categories will be defined briefly as the contexts of my research. Gabriella Vámos compared the main characteristics of the work of folk and alternative healers under different headings based on the data from literature and cultural history (Vámos 2014:150–152). I interpreted my own interviews with the application of this typology. I intend to answer the question of

how these two areas relate to each-other in the individual narratives – do these two types diverge, or overlap instead?

The current healing/recovery strategies fall outside the official canon and are based on (word-of-mouth) tradition and custom; thus, I interpret them as ethnomethodological phenomena. According to the developer of this notion, Harold Garfinkel, ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities as members' methods for making those same activities visibly-rational and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e., 'accountable,' as organizations of commonplace everyday activities." (Garfinkel 1967: 1).

I have divided the study into the following sections: first, I introduce the methodology of my research; then I review the use of the notions (folk, folk healing, alternative medicine, naturopathy). Following this, I analyse the narratives collected by me relying on the literature.

I hope that revealing this small section of the diversified topic can serve as an addition to becoming aware of the "culture of the everyday" characterized by the diversity of different strategies. Although both the field of my research and most of the literature are Hungarian, I believe that these current "findings" may represent phenomena that are familiar for cultural researchers from other countries as well.

Research methodology

In this study, the reference point of the research conducted, is aiming at the individual micro levels. This is the approach of Vilmos Keszeg and Dóra Czégényi, according to which the behaviour of the healer and the patient is a cultural category (2010:423). The study of the situations and attitudes of healing reveals whole systems of social worlds and human relationships. (Keszeg and Czégényi 2010, 428). The objective of my fieldwork – performed in different settlements within Csongrád county – was becoming aware of the phenomena of contemporary informal healing. I conducted individual semi-structured interviews that I analysed using the typology of literature, trying to find answers to the following questions: how do people performing healing activity rooted in the peasant culture relate to old tradition of healing? Based on their narratives, do they resemble the healers of the old traditional culture, or can they increasingly be considered as parts of the alternative healing segment?

Folk healing, alternative healing, naturopathy- a review of notions

According to the Lexicon of Hungarian Ethnography, “in the traditional peasant culture, village people engaged in healing are called ‘javas’ (medicine man), ‘kuruzsló’ (quack), ‘látó’ (seeing person), or ‘orvos’ (doctor). Until the middle of the 20th century, healthcare in villages had not been satisfactory. As we are moving back in time, we see fewer and fewer professional physicians, and we can observe that patient care in segregated communities of small settlements used to be performed by healing specialists. These people usually had acquired their skills from other, one- or two-generation-older and more experienced healers (often through family tradition), which they then enriched with their own experience. The healers show some kind of specialization. (...) In most villages, there lived a man or a woman who was famous for their good knowledge of the healing effects of herbs. Fixing sprained (or broken) limbs required special manual skills – this was performed by bonesetters (“csontrákó”)⁸ (Grynaeus et al. 1979, 362–363).

According to Mihály Hoppál, the expression “folk healing” embodies the self-healing practice that used to characterize village lifestyle, opposed to official medicine and scientific healing. “Folk healing used to work as a part of everyday traditional culture. Everydayness is an important criterion in this respect since there used to be someone in every family (...) who was familiar with at least a significant part of the knowledge of folk healing. Naturally, there were also healing specialists in every community.” (Hoppál 1990, 694).

In my research, I interviewed people from the county seat, smaller towns, and villages as well, and the statement above is focused on the knowledge set of traditional peasant communities. Talking about the traditional peasant culture, Mihály Hoppál mentions everydayness, self-healing strategies, and the statement of independence from the principles of official/scientific canon. These concepts feature the lay healing methods of our days as well. Balázs Gémes’s study presents conclusions that are also valid and current in the interpretation of contemporary folk healing and folk healers. He emphasises that “folk” means belonging to the “common people”, and on the other hand,

⁸ The words bonesetter (“csontrákó”), or more often chiropractor (“csontkovács”) are commonly used today as well in relation to people performing manual therapy and chiropractic treatment.

it can signify an ethnic community, too. In his study, he highlights the necessity of the current research that also enables an easier understanding of the changes. (Gémes 1979, 26).

American folklore researcher Alan Dundes writes: "The term 'folk' can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is- it could be a common occupation, language, or religion- but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. In theory a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally most groups consist of many individuals. A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity" (Dundes 1965:2). Regarding "non-orthodox" healing, Keith Bakx uses then notion of "folk" consistently, which – in his understanding – „combines two distinct but essentially connected elements: the first is that of culture; the second is that of choice. The medical practices are intimately related to consumer preference patterns that operate within specific cultural milieux". (Bakx: 1991:21).

Currently, the expression "folk culture" rather refers to a historical category: it can be attached to communities with a traditional lifestyle that pass on their tradition by word of mouth. Since we are in the age of mass media, we can access information from the media or the internet. István Povedák applies the notion of "popular culture" to the phenomena of our days. This is how one can refer to the diminished separation line between the former "elite" and "folk" categories. (Povedák 2004, 86).

A folk healer is the healer of the peasant community in its "classic" sense, as opposed to the alternative healers of the present. Gabriella Vámos distinguishes alternative healing from both official and folk healing which she defines the following way: "A system of healing supported by a specific theory of interpreting health and illness. Besides the required skills of anatomy, it also includes the knowledge of pathology and counselling, and relies on materials of plant and mineral origin known in folk healing, as well as the role of diet and the faith in the self-healing power of the body. Its followers develop a new type of health and illness notion that becomes their philosophy of life. From the early 20th century, when Eastern teachings also became influential, and especially after the esoteric explosion of 1989, healing methods reflecting the features of alternative spirituality appeared as well." (Vámos 2014:147).

With respect to the worldview the determinant factor of alternative healing was the spiritual-esoteric trend of New Age that incorporates Eastern philosophies, Christian gnosticism, and various mystic trends as well. It is connected to the holistic view on the body and health that emphasizes alternative and natural healing methods such as massage, diet based on natural ingredients, chiropractic procedures, and acupuncture (Melton 2016).

The unofficial healing methods appearing in the contemporary scene are compressed into the common notion of CAM (Complementary and Alternative Medicine) in the English-language literature⁹: “Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), any of various approaches intended to improve or maintain human health that are not part of standard medical care, also known as conventional, or Western medicine. The various approaches of CAM typically are used in a manner that is complementary to standard medical practices or are used in place of standard medicine. Such approaches are sometimes referred to as holistic or traditional medicine, although those areas of medicine do not cover all forms of CAM. Indeed, CAM includes not only classical systems, such as Ayurvedic medicine and traditional Chinese medicine, which are centred on bringing together the mind, body, and spirit, but also a wide range of other forms of therapy, including chiropractic medicine, biofeedback, art therapy, hypnosis, prayer, specialty diets, and therapeutic touch” (Saks, 2018).¹⁰

Since the end of the 1980s, the widespread name for the activity of healers in the fields of phytotherapy, manual therapy, traditional Chinese medicine, etc, has been called naturopathy. Similarly to CAM, it is an umbrella term used in public language, as well as in medical and legal professional terminology: In Hungary, Decree 11/1997 of 1997 of the Ministry of Health (V. 28.) assigned specific frames for the activity of healers practising naturopathy. According to this, specialized qualification is required for pursuing the activities under naturopathy (acupressure, alternative exercise and massage therapies, lifestyle counselling and therapy, reflex zone therapy). Continuing education concluded

⁹ The notion of CAM is equally used in professional terminology and by mass media. The phenomena of CAM are mapped by medical and healthcare literature on a continuous basis, supplemented also by social-scientific considerations in specific cases (e.g. Ribeaux and Spence 2001, 188–193; Tovey et al. 2004; Nichol et al. 2011, 117–125; Bishop and Holmes 2013).

¹⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/science/complementary-and-alternative-medicine>

with an exam is required to practice the following activities: alternative physiotherapeutic methods, methods applying bioenergy, phytotherapy, addictology procedures with ear acupuncture, kinesiological methods, eye training procedures.” After clarifying the most essential concepts and definitions, I would like to start the next section about interpreting the results of my empirical research.

Folk healing and alternative medicine in the interviews

Erika Koltay’s study provides a reference point for interpreting the notions of naturopathy and alternative healing methods, as well as for mapping their relation to folk healing (1993:53– 64). In her study, she reflects in a sensitive way on “alternative healers” emerging as a new cultural effect of the period after the regime change. She distinguishes between the categories of the former folk specialists and the contemporary alternative healers. Based on this, Gabriella Vámos added the intention of interpreting alternative medicine to Erika Koltay’s categorization, highlighting the points where the differences between the two areas are the easiest to apprehend according to her opinion: acquiring the knowledge, the initial experience, the philosophy behind the healing, the method of healing and the payment, based on the relation to the community (Vámos 2014: 150– 151).

By the reason of thematic overlaps, I merged certain points for the analysis of the narratives collected by me: 1. Acquiring knowledge and the initial experience; 2. The method of healing/recovery, and the philosophy behind it; 3. Payment and the relation to the community.

I interviewed four healers, two of which use herbs for treatment: HB (born in 1986) and Mrs. FK (born in 1941); while the other two are chiropractors: PG (born in 1959) and SB (born in 1962). I also interviewed five patients: SZE (born in 1976), Mrs. FK’s patient; KL (born in 1968), has seen both PG and SB, MA (born in 1980), a customer of HB’s herbal products; JI (born in 1973), SB’s patient; and EK (born in 1965), a patient of both PG and HB.¹¹

¹¹ The subjects of my interviews, according to our agreement, are referred to by combinations of letters in my study.

The subjects of my interviews live in different settlements of Southern Hungary, Csongrád County. I interviewed healers from Ásotthalom, Mórahalom, and Szeged,¹² as well as their patients as I had the intention to present the healing activity and bounding of the inhabitants of the village, the smaller town, and the county seat as well. Since I am also interested in the eco-ethnographic aspect of informal medicine, I ensured “diversity” here as well: three of the healers are registered to issue invoices, two of whom claim they always issue an invoice at payment, while one of them gives a receipt to new patients/customers only. The level of education and cultural background of my interview partners also showed diversity. Each healer has customers from all segments of the scale regarding their level of education. Two of the healers hold university degrees, and three of them have obtained certificates of specialized courses (sports masseur, medical masseur, herb-shop assistant).

1. Acquiring knowledge and the initial experience:

The healer who acquired their chiropractor skills from an old peasant man often uses the expression “healing energy of the universe” that they had heard in a TV programme. Another healer, who performs manual therapy, says: *“...I myself also learned the technique from old folk healers of Békés county after it was found out that I had some natural abilities for it”* (PG). The “folk” source, on the other hand, mythicizes his activity and contributes his personal brand.

The knowledge acquired in traditional ways can be in harmony with a herb-gatherer qualification of the National Qualification Register, a Pharmacist university degree, or a medical masseur qualification – the subjects of my interviews not only have deepened their knowledge with these but also aimed to create the legal basis for their activity in the modern healthcare market. Books, journals, contents available on the Internet, articles, forums, and blogs, etc. offer further opportunities to access information. Among journals, *Herbáció* is one of the most popular ones¹³, while Maria Treben’s “Health through God’s Pharmacy” published in 1990 is the single most popular book in the field.

12 The large village of Ásotthalom had 3,856 inhabitants based on data from 2017,-the small town of Mórahalom had 6,090 inhabitants in 2011, while Szeged, the county seat had a population of 161,879 in 2016.

13 The objective of the magazine published quarterly since 2006 “is to collect formulae from all parts of the world in the subject of using herbs and spices in special folk medicine, naturopathy, and phytotherapy.” (Source: www.herbacio.hu)

The German housewife, an enthusiastic follower of phytotherapy, not only gathered and used herbs, but also wrote several books about their beneficial effects. After the regime change in Hungary, this book created momentum to a wave of interest in herbs, furthermore, the older generation recognized the legitimation of their knowledge acquired during their childhood/young adulthood. Erika Koltay describes the effect of the book the following way: "its popularity, however, is not the result of the factual data and the greatness of the book itself but rather the content that has met tradition built on Christian culture – in this case, traditional healing and its old-world practice, to such an extent that during my collection activity in Transylvania I met, several times, the teas and infusions mentioned in the book that the herbal-medicine women built into the repertoire of their own formulae" (Koltay 1993:169).

Dorottya Balázs reports similar experiences in her study presenting the contemporary folk healing of Siklód: "the effect of literature on naturopathy is still very significant with respect to natural sciences of the village. Maria Treben's book *Health through God's Pharmacy* is available even in the local small convenience store, and this book is present practically in each household of Siklód. One of the specialists of the village specifically collects publications on naturopathy, and acquired the major part of their knowledge from these books." (Balázs 2010: 93).

The miraculous basic experience is present for both the former folk healers and in alternative medicine. (For example, the Visitation of the Virgin Mary, or they feel the healing power since childhood, and it is activated in unexpected situations, etc.). In my own research, I had the following narratives of the initial experience: "*Already when I was a small child and I was around herbs, or I noticed any plants, even flowers, in the field or by the banks, I immediately asked: What is it for? That is, I did not say how nice it looked, neither did I tear it off – instead, I was really interested in them already, as others told me. And later too, it was obvious that this is what I am interested in and what I would like to do. I learnt the basic and most important things about herbs from my grandmother and my mother. They kept saying: M., you have an eye for this.*" (Mrs. FK)

"In front of my eyes, in front of my mind's eye, so to say, these warnings are displayed. It is like a huge red caption on a white board. It appears even in my dreams. This is how I saw, a long time ago, when I started massaging people that I could use this for healing as well."
(SB)

The healers' initial experience is important and interesting information for the patients, too.

"I know that M. has been committed to herbs since she was a little girl. This is what older people noticed, too, and this is how she learned it from them." (SZE, who is Mrs. FK's patient)

"I think this is not something you can just learn. I mean, there are practical things that a master can teach to their disciples, but you need some innate, natural ability for it. This is why, one can say, a good chiropractor is different from a general practitioner." (KL, who is a patient of PG and SB).

"Who can become a healer? Well, it can be based on somebody's knowledge, their radiance, too, or they can even bring it from their previous lives." (JI, who is SB's patient).

According to the interviews, the world of folk tradition appears in the healers' and patients' narratives through mentioning the "older ones" (a parent or a healer from whom they had acquired their skills). By referring to them, the healer legitimizes (and also mythicizes) the skills they profit from in the present. "Innate, natural ability" and skills play a special role in the alternative narratives of the New-Age trend. The only difference is that they are less connected to the teaching/raising community, but these turning points are increasingly determined by the healers themselves in relation to their own healing life path and image. In the patient's/customer's narrative, it is mentioning the "radiance" and the "previous life" that signifies the use of the notion of the alternative field.

2. The method of healing/recovery and the philosophy behind it:

When referring to the "old healers" and the "old world" in an idealized way, the patients interviewed emphasized the close-to-nature lifestyle, and as a result of this, the "naturalness" of the materials used for healing, as well as the relationship between the healer and the patient.

"In the past, in small communities like villages, or even a longer time ago, in the tribal world, and even more, among ancient people, a factor was still present in healing which is completely missing now. What I mean is that the healer treated the patient with herbs that they themselves could see every day, anywhere, or even grew themselves, without being

aware of their healing effect. For example, they said: these are nettles, and they are good for this and that. And the patients saw and knew about nettles, but they were not familiar with their healing effect – this was the herbal-medicine man's job. Now, on the other hand, pills are prescribed, and you have no idea what is in them. And you know even less about who made or developed them." (MA, who is HB's patient).

Those who see chiropractors or healers using herbs reason their decision with ideas that are part of the notions of alternative medicine and New Age.

"Healers of the old world, that is, herbal-medicine men and healers of the old Hungary, were definitely in harmony not only with the world around them, but with the whole universe. The reason why we have lost harmony at the universal level is the fact that medications are produced that often make people even sicker through their side effects. The out-of-harmony condition of all these people is reflected by the whole of the universe; this is the reason, among others, for the ozone hole and all the natural disasters" (EK, who is PG's and HB's patient).

The subjects did not use the word "alternative", but they used the notion of naturopathy: *"Naturopathy is a very interesting thing, I think it can be learnt during a specialized course. One can also learn the old methods of healing"* (KL, who is PG's and SB's patient). *"I am interested in naturopathy, I often read the magazine with the same title. As far as I know, naturopathy touches on some abstract topics as well."* (SZE, who is Mrs. FK's patient)

The meeting of the folk/old and the expressions used by the New Age trend can also be tracked down in the healers' statements. The subject who learnt their chiropractor skills from an "old peasant man" is happy to use the expression "healing energy of the universe" as well, which they heard in an educational TV programme. Catherine L. Albanese also highlights that the discourses of New Age and healing include statements like: „healing energies of the universe" or „harmonizing", reflecting that healing also occurs at the level of the universe in the studied cases; therefore, one's health can be interpreted together with their harmony with the universe. The opposite of this is also true: the lost balance of the universe leads to the development of diseases. (Albanese 1992: 75–76).

3. Payment and relation to the community:

"The healers of the traditional peasant communities were „not motivated by money” (Koltay 1993:61). I have not seen an example of this among the contemporary healers as they do their activity for subsistence. I have learnt about two more confidential relationships where payment was delayed or based on barter: „... *they could not pay, and then I offered them to pay later when they can*” (SB)

"We agreed that they would help to paint the house in exchange" (HB)

Patients described the relationship between money and healing in the following way:

"Obviously, seeing a chiropractor where a treatment costs more than ten thousand forints may be a huge amount of money for many people. I do not necessarily mean that they in fact can't afford it – they could, but they think it is too much. Even if they would really need the treatment. In this case, I say: for me, it is too much to be sitting at the outpatient clinic for hours, and waiting, then coming back again, and so on. And if I think of time as money, then a ten-to-twenty-thousand-forint treatment is worth for me. The other reason is that I am seeing someone who has been wholeheartedly recommended by friends, whose treatment I trust. This is also a reason why it is worth that money for me." (JI, who is SB's patient)

"It is very interesting that when I buy an herbal product or some tea, I can see and deduct how much the active agent, that is, the plant costs, and I know the price of packaging and labour as well. Furthermore, I can ask questions in real time from the person who prepared the product. Of course, one can always say something is too expensive and that kind of stuff. However, for me it is important not to buy medications for three thousand forints or more in the flu season, when I am already sick, but instead, to consciously prevent becoming sick, or even heal myself with the use of herbs – for example, with ginger tonic." (MA, who is HB's customer)

Characteristics of the economic activity of the subjects, examples of individual strategies within the framework of informality. Two of them work full time; their whole income derives from this activity, and they can be placed within “white economy”. They are the ones who are happy to talk to the press, they both advertise themselves through printed or electronic platforms, and one of them operates an own website, too. The other category of healers is represented by the one who is very popular, but does not advertise themselves at all – their reputation spreads exclusively by word of mouth. They invoice

their massage activity, but “*only up to the limit which is minimally required, you know*” (SB). Besides this approach of the “grey economy” kind, “black economy” is represented by the herb gatherer for whom this is only extra income in addition to their “legal” activity, and they do not advertise themselves at all. Their products are sold not only for money but serve as a basis for exchange.

The strategies of the “grey” and especially, the “black economy” field can be fit into the notion of the second economy: second economy is the sector which “comprises all production and exchange activity that fulfils at least one of the two following tests: (a) being directly for private gain; and (b) being in some significant respect in knowing contravention of existing law. (Grossman 1982:245). Healing activity within the segment of the second economy requires communication and self-promotional strategies that individuals, in most cases, establish themselves.

Books and magazines about herbs published since the regime change, including Maria Treben’s extremely popular lectures and books, have contributed to the fact that the information about herbs is present as marketable knowledge. With the spread of the Internet, online articles, writings, blogs, social media sites, and online commerce ensure that information is accessible and for sale, contributing to the evolution of *homo oeconomicus*. The knowledge about herbs can be used not only for making teas and infusions, but for the preparation of different kinds of cream, oil, and soap as well. These latter ones can have a great variety of composition, enabling the use of traditionally-known herbs (such as marigold or chamomile), as well as those that have become popular recently (such as aloe vera, lavender, turmeric, etc.).

Summary

This study provided an insight into the world of today’s informal healers through the recollection of semi-structured interviews. In the narratives presented in the study, a clear separation line between the “folk” and “alternative” fields can hardly be drawn. In this respect, the subjects of my interviews did not seem to show any differences regardless of circumstances (such as their residence, level of education, or age). A confusion of the notions could be observed in all subjects: their narratives include references to folk culture and the peasant world as prefiguration, a source of acquiring knowledge, or a point of reference, and at the same time, they described the ideology behind healing and recovery with notions related to alternative medicine. Based on these

experiences, the quoted narratives can be accommodated into the category of "Complementary and Alternative Medicine". Contemporary "folk" medicine and "folk" as a point of reference can be accommodated into the alternative area marked as an umbrella field within the notion of CAM. As a related statement expresses, „Folk medicine comprises "unofficial health beliefs and practices" which rely heavily (but not exclusively) on oral transmission. It is one form of alternative medicine, and a major source for many other forms such as phytotherapy and mind/body medicine." (Hufford 1997:723).

The adjective "informal" in the title of the study comprises the main characteristics of the old folk and the contemporary alternative categories. The same pieces of information and cultural benefits are available for the subjects of the interviews to an equal degree and intensity. They also have the same options for their distribution and for establishing the narratives related to them – all this gives rise to diversified strategies, the common denominator of which is the appreciation of informality.

Source

Decree 11/1997. (V. 28.) of the Ministry of Health on certain questions of performing activities of naturopathy.

<https://net.jogtar.hu/jogsabaly?docid=99700011.NM>

Downloaded on: 10 January 2018.

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RELIGION AND IDENTITY

Zita Tézer

RELATION BETWEEN AFRO-MEXICAN IDENTITY AND AFRO-CUBAN SANTERÍA IN VERACRUZ, MEXICO

In 2013, in an attempt to find out how local people perceive today the extension of the Caribbean world and its boundaries,, students from the Caribbean islands, Colombia and Guyana were asked to draw a map of what they considered to be the "Caribbean". (Cruse 2016).¹⁴ Even when all respondents agreed that the "Caribbean" means primarily the Caribbean islands (more than 700 islands on the Caribbean Plate), the coast from Guyana, Colombia, and Venezuela, as well as Central America, through the Gulf of Mexico, till the southern coast of the United States was marked blurred, meaning that, in the boundaries of this zone, it became quite questionable whether the territories are part of the Caribbean zone, or not (fig. 1-2).¹⁵ Can the Afro-Mexican culture in the state of Veracruz on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico be called "Caribbean"? Did the phenomenon result from the past, or is it just a created, forced, fictional "Caribbean"? In my study, I will explain how and why the Afro-Cuban religion, Santería, has become popular on the Gulf Coast, the reason for this, the extent to which the original Cuban traditions are followed, the extent to which the respect for the religion has changed in the long run, and whether the "Caribbean identity" of the locals can be considered authentic.

14 The Caribbean Atlas Project, led by geographer Romain Cruse, is the result of the collaboration with several Caribbean universities: University of the West Indies (Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago), Curaçao University, Anton de Kom University (Suriname), Haiti State University, és Havana University.

15 Obviously, it would be worthwhile to involve a larger number of participants in the research in the future to draw more precise conclusions from it, in addition to the fact that everyone has a different opinion about the "Caribbean".

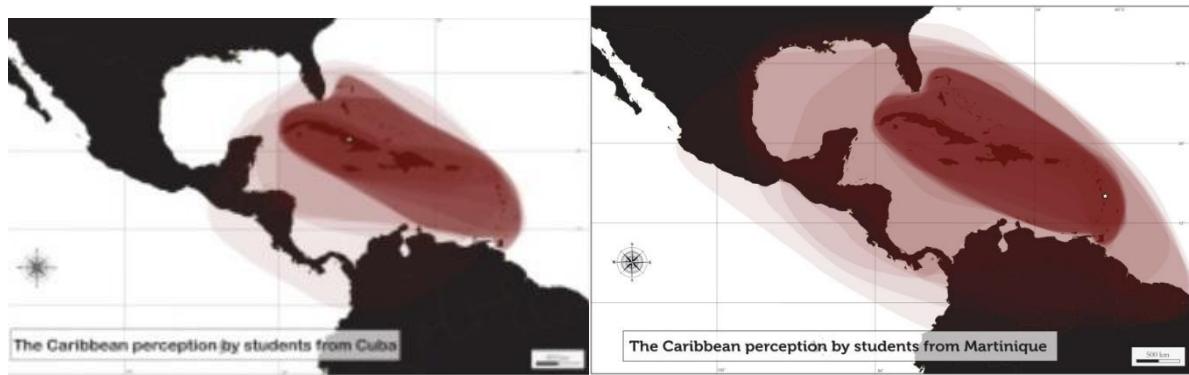


Fig. 1: The Caribbean perception by students from Cuba and Martinique (Cruse 2016)

Regarding the interpretation of Caribbean regional identity, the different perceptions of the border show the divergence within the region. This is partly attributable to the fact that the term "Caribbean", as an umbrella term, has only existed since the 20th century (Horváth 2014:23), partly because the citizens of the Caribbean states began to construct their collective consciousness after their independence. They started considering the region they lived in as their own, and have only been seeking to connect with each other in the last half century.¹⁶

The first subregional integration is the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), established in 1973 as the initiative of the English speaking islands. Its extended version is the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) from 1981 and the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) from 1994, where all independent and non-independent Caribbean states, Central American countries, including Mexico, can be members, as well as Venezuela and Colombia in South America (fig. 3). In summary, this is called the Caribbean Basin or the Greater Caribbean, which is a geopolitically cohesive area rather than a cultural entity (Girvan 2000:9). However, a region can only be successful in achieving common economic goals if it has strong regional cohesion and a regional identity (Lukovics 2004:214). This can be achieved through planned arrangements, creating common symbols with the distinction between the concepts of "we" and "them" with the establishment of the institutions, the implementation of the cultural programs.

¹⁶ Before the independence of the English-speaking Caribbean states, only Haiti (1804), the Dominican Republic (1844), and Cuba (1898) were independent. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago in 1962, Barbados in 1966, the Bahamas in 1973, Grenada in 1974, the Dominican Community in 1978, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and Barbuda in 1979, Antigua and Barbuda in 1981 won their independence.

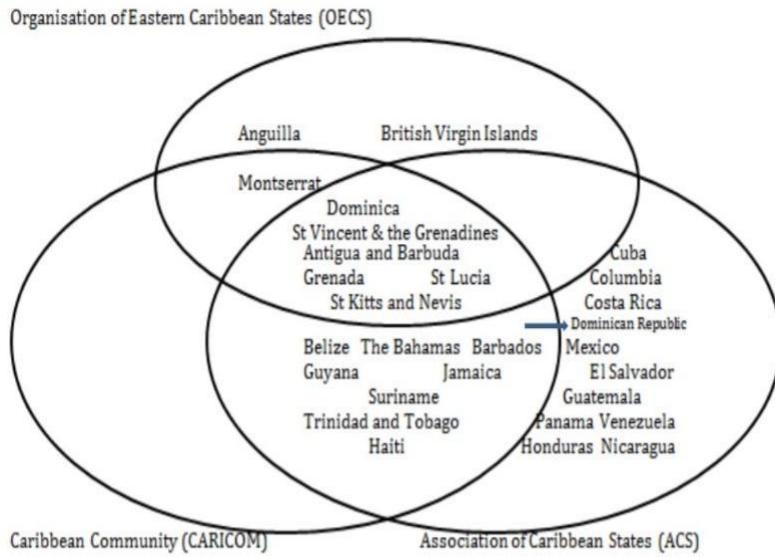


Fig. 3: Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) (Girvan 2000)

For the interpretation of the Caribbean area, after World War II, cultural anthropologists used the comparative study method. A student of Franz Boas, Charles Wagley, pioneer of Brazilian anthropology, in the division of the New World, (Euro-America, Indo-America, Plantation America) used the term Plantation America to denominate "Caribbean", in 1956 at one of the first social science meetings in Seattle. He published his theory one year later as "Plantation America: The Culture Sphere" (Wagley 1957). Wagley argued that Plantation America extends from the coast of Brazil (in the Northeast, the region of Bahia and some smaller states, and in the Southeast Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo states) to the Guianas, further along the coast of Venezuela and Colombia to Central America, across the Gulf of Mexico coast towards the United States, encircling the Caribbean islands. According to Wagley, the basic features of the Plantation America cultural sphere are: 1. the plantation system and monocrop cultivation; 2. rigid class lines; 3. multi-racial societies; 4. weak community structure; 5. Afro-American peasantry; 6. prevalence of the matrifocal family. The author identified many secondary characteristics which derive often from similarities in the environment, the common historical background, and the presence of a large population of African origin. Wagley as well, sees similarities in African-origin folklore and African-American religious cults, which have been fused with Christianity. For example, the Candomblé in Brazil, the Vodou in Haiti, the Xango in Trinidad, or the Santería in Cuba.

Sidney Mintz, an American anthropologist, known for his studies on the Caribbean, creolization and the anthropology of food, has also carried out cultural comparisons within the Caribbean. In his essay of 1966, "The "Caribbean" as a Socio-cultural Area" (Mintz 1966) he delimited the region as follows: mainly the Caribbean islands, but also the Yucatan Peninsula, the Gulf of Mexico, Central America, and the northern coast of South America.¹⁷ Common characteristics within the region include the rapid extermination of indigenous peoples during colonisation, their replacement by the introduction of African slaves, and the introduction of the plantation economy, with sugar cane plantations, coffee and tobacco farms.

The two studies highlight that the presence of the African-origin population, culture and tradition In Mexico, this essential element is mentioned as the "third root" (*La tercera raíz*) near the indigenous and Spanish origins (Beltrán 1946), which was appreciated in recent decades and has played a prominent role in the search of the Afro-Mexican identity (Argyriadis 2013:12).¹⁸ Unlike other regions of the country, the state of Veracruz plays a very important role, as their attachment to the Caribbean area can be clearly demonstrated. Regarding the population of Mexico, it can be seen that most African descendants live in Veracruz after the State of Mexico (Internet Archive 2017:14), that is, according to the data of 2015, 3.5% of the population in the state of Veracruz: 266,000 persons from 8.1 million inhabitants (fig. 4).¹⁹ Within Veracruz, there are parts where the black population reaches 37% of the population (for example Xoxocotla). Their ancestors were largely introduced during the colonial period through the Atlantic slave trade. According to historical statistics, the slave trade in the territory of Mexico was significant mainly in the first period, between 1575 and 1650, when about 200,000 people arrived in New Spain through the port of Veracruz (Hoffmann 2017:130), who were

17 He mentions examples from Guyana, but he no longer takes Brazil as a basis for comparison, as Charley Wagley did, mainly because the three Guianas are separated from Brazil by the vast forest, so the Caribbean definition does not concern Brazil anymore because of the physical separation from the other Caribbean countries and Caribbean Sea.

18 The "third root" is an academic movement following the pioneering work of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, a Mexican anthropologist in 1946, that encourages Mexican researchers and artists to study the African elements of Mexican cultural identity. This movement is part of the network of a wide range of the transnational intellectual groups that have joined UNESCO's The Slave Route program, among others. (see on the UNESCO website).

19 Today, there are 1.4 million African descendants in Mexico (by category: "negrasos", "morenasos", "costeñasos").

distributed to work in the mines and sugar cane plantations. By 1681, half of the thousand inhabitants of the port were already black (Rinaudo 2014:6).

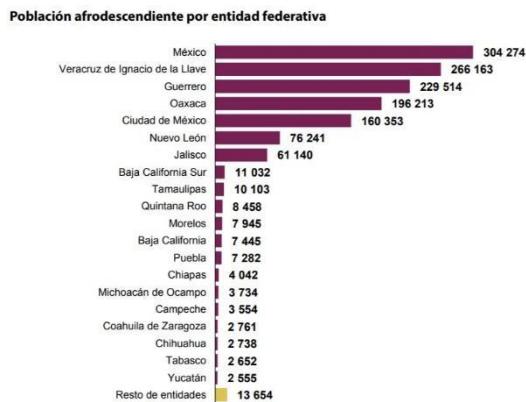


Fig. 4: Number of the African descendants in 2015 in the Mexican states (Internet Archive 2017:3)

Veracruz, on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, founded by the Spanish colonist, Hernán Cortés in 1519 under the name of Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, has been an important commercial city since the 16th century (half of Mexico's exports now take place here) and is the key part of to the Caribbean world. (Castañeda 2007:132-134). It will become an indispensable link not only between America and Europe, but also between the Caribbean Sea and the mainland. Within that, Cuba is also an important point in this relation. There has been a regular connection between Veracruz and Havana for centuries (Castañeda 2007:142). The discovery expedition to the shores of Veracruz also started from Cuba in 1518, led by Diego Velázquez. Tourism, and professional journeys are significant between the two cities, cultural exchanges have been established, the Cuban music in "Son" and "Danzón" style has been listened to in Veracruz, and in the 20th century the influence of the Afro-Cuban Santería has reached the multicultural city of Veracruz. (Argyriadis 2006:8).

There are two reasons for the Cuban attachment. On the one hand, since Cuban ancestry is more accepted, it is often suggested that black skin colour is a legacy of Cuban ancestry, rather than evidence of African origin. This kind of reinterpretation of their origin helps to avoid stigmatisation (Argyriadis 2006:8). On the other hand, the reasons why they can refer to themselves as Cubans are can be traced back to their shared history. It was highlighted by Charles Wagley and Sydney Mintz as well. That is, the most important common elements are colonization, slavery-based plantation farming, the slave trade carried over from Africa, and the greater presence of descendants of African

ancestors in our time. In light of all this, it is easy to understand why in the period of rediscovering Afro-Mexican identity, trying to find their historical and cultural heritage, redefining themselves, why they became interested in Santerian religion whose origin came from the Yoruba kingdom in Nigeria, interwoven with African-Christian elements in Cuba.

Their believers performed their rites in secret during the Spanish colonial period, as Catholicism was considered the official religion, and Santería was considered only a superstitious religion of blacks, which they sought to ban as much as possible (Dornbach 2016b:106). The situation did not change in the following decades. After Cuban independence (1898), in the first half of the 20th century, the Santería has branded a “faith of the poor and black people” (Juarez-Huet 2018), then, after the 1959 revolution, the local practice of the religion without official control was prohibited in a secularized state based on Marxist-Leninist ideology (Dornbach 2009:142), thus, believers could still not express their religious affiliation freely. However, Mexicans were able to inform about the Santería from movies, Cuban performances, and Cuban immigrants who fled to Mexico. The change was brought about for political and economic reasons by the 1990s, when tourism started in Cuba and the regime became permissive with the Santería, partly as an attraction for tourists (Dornbach 2016a:171). Thus, Mexicans susceptible to the Afro-Cuban religion were also able to gain personal insight into the ceremonies in their original homeland, where it was the most common religion among blacks and mulattoes. The reason for this was that the Spanish colonists, and later their descendants, followed the Catholic religion, which remains the religion of the majority of the white elite and middle class to this day. Thus, Santería remained the religion of the marginalized class, the black and mulatto population, for whom it plays an identity-bearing role (Argyriadis 2006:3).

Thanks to Cuban migration, after the spread of this religion from Cuba to other countries in Latin America, as well as to the United States and the major cities of Europe (Argyriadis 2006:1), a kind of whitening process is taking place and Santería is already appearing among the white middle classes. However, in Veracruz, Mexico, as in Cuba, it was mainly the black population that began to sympathise with the Santería, while searching for their own identity. The process by which they came to discover their own identity in the second half of the 20th century can be seen as part of the process of cultural decentralisation. In Mexico, it was initiated by the federal administration in all states of Mexico through the creation of organisations and institutions that helped local cultures to

flourish (Rinaudo 2014:7). The difference is illustrated by the first official Veracruz tourism book published in 1940 by the Mexican Tourism Association and the Department of Tourism of the Gobernación Secretariat (Rinaudo 2014:4), entitled Travel in the Land of Flowers, which encourages readers to enjoy a beach holiday (fig. 5). In the 1920s and 1930s, when tourism began in Veracruz, tourists from Europe and the United States who enjoyed sports, bathing, and sunbathing arrived at the same time as constructing the rail network and modernizing urban transportation. In the tourist book, most of the photos show upper- and middle-class tourists in swimsuits or wearing urban, fashionable clothing in the idyllic surroundings of palm trees at the sea, while the happy local people sing, play music and dance. The latter were depicted in the spirit of post-revolutionary nationalism as those who had moved away from poverty and peasantry, and their posture and dress also symbolised the "whitening". This period and the centralist homogenizing cultural nationalism ended in the 1980s (Rinaudo 2014:7).



Fig. 5: Pictures from the Tourist Book of Veracruz, 1940 (Rinaudo 2014:4-5)

The National Council for Culture and Arts (Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes - Conaculta) was established in 1988 as an example of the cultural policy coordination aimed to create new relations between the state and society in the field of culture, followed by the National Endowment for Culture and Arts (Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes – FONCA) which fund individual or group projects and scholarships (Rinaudo 2014:8). As part of this, a national program was launched in 1989 under the name "Our Third Root" (Nuestra Tercera Raíz). It aimed to study Afro-Mexican heritage

and their cultural value by recognizing the “Third Root,” the African elements. All this led to the realization of research, exhibitions, symposia, and workshops. An example is the Dirección General de Culturas Populares, where ethnographers (Guillermo Bonfil and Luz María Martínez Montiel) organised research and a series of cultural events in different communities within the state of Veracruz (Hoffmann 2017:137), like the Afro-Festival in Coyolillo (fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Pictures from the Afro-Festival in Coyolillo (Hoffmann 2017:137)

The state-funded Veracruz Cultural Institute (Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura - IVEC), consciously emphasizing “Caribbean”, was founded in 1987 (Rinaudo 2014, 7.), launching a series of university events and, as a consequence, , the now very popular International Afro-Caribbean Festival, which is organised every year (Castañeda 2007:136-137), was advertised with characteristic posters (fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Posters of the International Afro-Caribbean Festival (Rinaudo 2014:9)

Santería priests (santero, babalawo) were invited to the first event from 1994 (Castañeda 2007:137), who, in addition to local witches and healers, publicly introduced religious rites, built altars, and held consultations (fig. 8).



Fig. 8: Dancing to sacred drums at the festival in 1996 (Castañeda 2007:137)

However, the initial enthusiasm soon came to an end, one of the reasons being the presentation of the bloody scene of the animal sacrifice (fig. 9). In 1999, religious events were cancelled due to the start of protests by Catholic groups and animal welfare organisations (Castañeda 2007:138). Thus, the organisers eliminated the religious part of the festival despite being by far the most popular event regarding the participation. This was a sign that the presence of religion, especially Santería practitioners, had become

important to the local community in Veracruz. The change in the organisation of the festival has therefore been criticized by some local residents.



Fig. 9: Animal sacrifice at the festival in 1996 (Castañeda 2007:139)

The exclusion of the religious aspects of the festival called into question the original purpose of the event. In addition, a temporary change of the name was also made in 1999. The "Afro" part of the title has been omitted (fig. 10), and the festival was simply called "Caribbean Festival" (Castañeda 2007:137). The change of the name was a consequence of the protests against the African religious practices that were mentioned earlier. Furthermore, new festival themes were introduced, highlighting products directly related to the local and state economy in Veracruz (sugar, tobacco and coffee) which means that the festival was used for marketing purposes of the local products, with a real aim to increase the trade with the Caribbean neighbours. With this act, they "whited" the festival and ruled out the presence of Afro-Mexicans (Castañeda 2007:140).



Fig. 10: It was written “Caribbean Festival” on the poster of 1999 (Rinaudo 2014:10)

Under great pressure, they were finally forced to restore the Afro-Caribbean name in 2001 (Castañeda 2007:140), even in 2005 it was already emphasized that “Festival for everyone”, open to everybody (fig. 11).

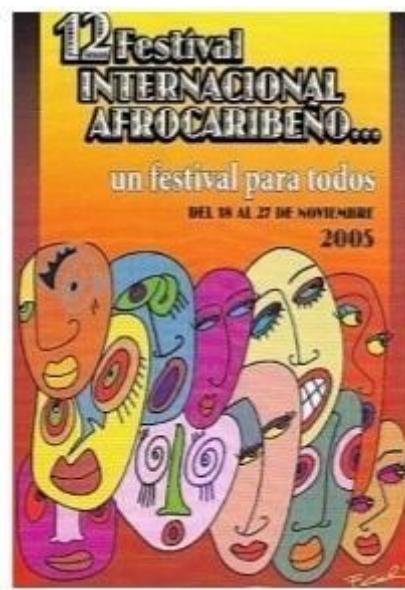


Fig. 11: Poster of the festival in 2005 (Rinaudo 2014:10)

The symbols representing Afro-Caribbean religion and culture were reintroduced on the posters of the festival in 2002, with a strong depiction of an African man and pearl necklaces that directly relate with Santería (Castañeda 2007:140-141). When individuals are initiated into the Santeria, they get to know each deity and give them ritual offerings. By the multi-level initiation, people acquire their necklaces, which symbolize the particular deities (fig. 12). Such pearl necklaces can also be seen on the 2004 posters (fig. 13).

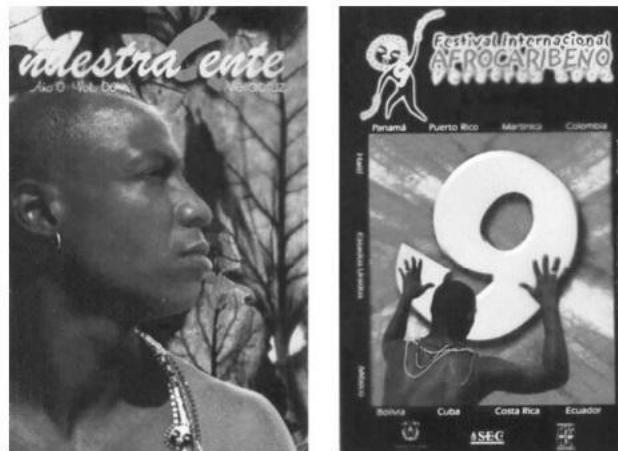


Fig. 12: African men with pearl necklaces on the posters of 2002 (Castañeda 2007:141)

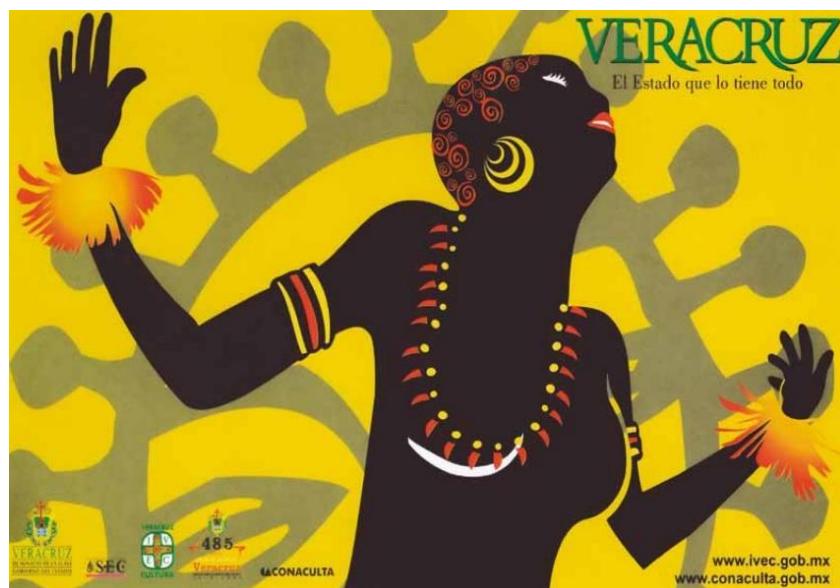


Fig. 13: Ritual dance and pearl necklace symbolizing the initiation on the poster of 2004 (Hoffmann 2017:138)

Thus, highlighting the Afro-Caribbean identity, the festival was given a unique character that differed from other state events in Mexico. Nevertheless, the state-sponsored, elite-organised festival actually used the local ethnocultural group for economic purposes, yet the Afro-Mexicans succeeded in the search of their self-definition, as it demonstrated the need of the local residents to revive the identity of their community. In addition, the public acceptance of religion and rituals within the festival made it more convenient for locals to practice their religion openly, of which several examples could be seen. An example is the small sanctuary of a local restaurant in Veracruz, depicting the Holy Infant of Atocha (Santo Niño de Atocha), who has been

dressed in elegant red and black since 2004, thus, from now on, his figure was identified with Elegua orisha / natural force, who has similar personality: childlike, healing power, and protector of the travellers (Castañeda 2007:145). The transformation of this altar exemplifies how the religious performances affected the local people (fig. 14).



Fig. 14: Holy Infant of Atocha (on the left) has been converted to Elegua Orisha (on the right) (Castañeda 2007:145)

The popularity of Santería, made public by festivals, also increased in the early 2000s for economic reasons. As unemployment increased in Veracruz, people turned to alternative solutions, and the Santería was able to provide spiritual healing (Castañeda 2007:144-145). Today many people offer consultations, there are several Santería centres within Veracruz where people offer consultations in the form of predictions, and this has become a good source of income for locals. In a newspaper, for example, between two announcements of anti-stress massages, consultations with a Yoruba priest (actually of Veracruz descent) who could solve every problem for \$ 25, are promoted (Castañeda 2007:146).

One of the most important differences in its religious development, in contrast to the Cubans, is that the religious community is absent or only very weak (Castañeda 2007:142). In Afro-Caribbean religions, as in Voodoo in Haiti, religion serves to create community as a religious family. In Cuba, a strong link is established between the initiator

and the initiated. The initiator can count on the spiritual help of the "godfather", the "godmother" throughout his life. In Veracruz, however, this strong connection does not exist within the Santería. Instead, people are called together to perform a ritual, and after that they often never see each other again. Many times Cuban priests are invited to Veracruz to perform the most complex rituals, paying their costs, and no longer keep in touch with believers when they return home.. Moreover, the Veracruz santeros care little about being godparents (Argyriadis 2013:18). They work individually and adapt to the needs of the local people in solving material wealth, health, marriage, and love problems. As believers are not attached to them, this creates a competitive situation and jealousy. They cite an example where a person whose initiation took place in Veracruz decided to organise individual rituals in Cuba, and upon his return, the local santeros refused to support him (Castañeda 2007:143-144).

Since the local priests work individually, it means that they are trapped outside the transnational network of religion. They miss out on the congresses, the main debates, and do not use enough the opportunities of the Internet (Argyriadis 2013:10-11). The model of ritual networks is thus not reproduced, they are only organised at the local level. Moreover, since this Cuban culture is foreign, not their own, it also slows down the spread process. Becoming santeros is a real identity problem in Veracruz: the character of the Santería is Cuban, its African nature is not a good enough argument for the acceptance in the whole Afro-Mexican community, and its religious status is questioned, as it does not fit properly with the church model and Christian rites (Argyriadis 2013:18). This is why local interpretations have emerged on one hand, the ritual practices are often "re-Catholicized", and on the other hand, it is removed from the scope of institutional practices, so the only place that remain is the local market. This is the reason why there is no mention of Santería in the videos and posters of the International Afro-Caribbean Festival in 2019 and 2020, despite the fact that in 2019 the guest of honour was Havana. In conclusion, the common historical past, the large number of the African descendants, and the similar culture is not enough to immediately absorb and master certain Caribbean elements. It is a long process that presupposes a regular connection between the two regions in order for a cultural phenomenon to survive for long term. The acceptance of the Santería as an official religion in Cuba can only be dated to the 1990s. In any case, the religion interwoven with African elements has clearly aroused the interest of the Afro-Mexicans of Veracruz, who, as a result of the festivals, aroused a kind of desire to confront

their past and to redefine and rethink their identities. However, the institutions, cultural programs and festivals that promote cooperation within the region are regulated. From the outset, the various actors of the cultural policy have rejected the rapprochement with the African origins and the Caribbean culture and the recognition of all forms of common heritage. Instead, the aim was to strengthen tourism and trade relations. The state-sponsored festivals which were organised by the elites for political and economic goals rather than local identity-building purposes. Moreover, since the ceremonies have provoked among the Christians and the animal rights activists, in the future it will only depend on the organisation of the residents with the invitation of Cuban santeros, which has obviously high costs. The accepting, adaptable and flexible nature of the religion helps its survival and spread, and it can also be a new source of income for the local people. Another interesting fact is that, in contrast to Mexico City, the “Yoruba centralist” (back to the original Yoruba religion) movement did not develop in Veracruz. Above all, the practitioners of the Santería emphasize the “Afro-Cuban” character, even if there are many African elements. This is partly due to discrimination based on skin colour, which is not enough reason to talk about “Caribbean” in Veracruz. Since the definition of the “Great Caribbean” is only a geopolitical concept, an artificially created entity that is being tried for political and economic integration efforts, it may be considered more correct to accept the view that there are many parallel identities within the region (Girvan 2006).

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