

FOREWORD

The theme of this special issue of the *Romanian Journal of Sociology* (*Revista română de sociologie*) – *Transformation of Traditional Rituals* – is derived from a panel convened at the 12th congress of the Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et de Folklore (SIEF), held in Zagreb last June. The volume presents a collection of papers which were part of this panel (one of two panels organized by the SIEF working group on The Ritual Year).

Rituals are commonly associated with unchangeable human behaviour. Despite this, there are numerous examples that prove the contrary. Rituals do transform in response to particular circumstances, or as a direct consequence of social change. Examples of traditional rituals which have been transformed are the subject of the articles included in this volume. The texts have been compiled into three sections: *Rituals Confronted with Modernity*, *Rediscovery and Transformation of Rituals*, and *Rituals in Evolution*. Two papers on *Religion in Romania*, in addition to *Academic life* and *Book reviews*, complete this special issue.

The first three studies deal with rituals and traditions transformed in contact with modernity. **Tiziana Soverino** opens the volume with her article about the custom of the “Bonfire Night”, or “Saint John’s Night” in Ireland. Observed since the 17th century, the bonfire celebrations have registered a few changes over the years, as they have had to adapt to new changing life circumstances. Through investigation of a large array of sources, three major changes are identified: the material allowed in the fires, the commercialisation of bonfires, and the withdrawal of a certain part of the population from the festivities. The article reveals the reasons behind these trends.

In the second article, **Kinga Povedák** explores the ways in which official and lived Roman Catholic religion responded to the changes of late modernity, with a special focus on the emergence of Christian popular music. The author reveals the dynamic tensions that have arisen from the different ways in which the Church and the communities of believers refer to the pervasive spread of Christian popular music.

Agnes Hesz documents changes which have occurred in funerary rituals in a Transylvanian village inhabited by Hungarian Roman Catholics. These changes are consequent to the construction of a local funeral home and the emergence of local businesses offering full service for funeral receptions. The author shows how rites that were traditionally carried out within the household, have been moved into the

„*Revista română de sociologie*”, serie nouă, anul XXVII, nr. 1–2, p. 3–4, București, 2016



Creative Commons License
Attribution-NoDerivs CC BY-ND

public sphere, and tasks traditionally fulfilled by people nurturing social ties to the family of the deceased have been taken over by the service sector. By focusing on people's reaction to the imposed changes, this study emphasizes their agency in restructuring the ritual dimensions of their lives.

Section two, on rediscovery and transformation of rituals, is distinct with **Anders Gustavsson**'s study of a new, charismatic movement in Sweden, known as "The Oasis Movement". With a particular interest in occurrences and the discourse used within the movement, the author seeks to identify how the movement has changed over time. New rituals, accepted as signs of guidance by the Holy Spirit, arise spontaneously, but their roots are always founded in biblical examples. The Oasis Movement upholds the idea of renewal on an historical foundation, adhering to the fundamentals of the Bible and bringing them into a new age, thus experiencing a continuous oscillation between continuity and change.

The third section of the volume focuses on the evolution of rituals. While **Alexandru Rusu** offers a general overview of Roman Catholic demonology and exorcism traditions from the past to the present, **Aigars Leilbārdis** investigates the tradition of the May devotions to the Virgin Mary, in the Catholic territories of Latvia (Latgale). Both authors focus on the evolution of traditions and on the impact of socio-political factors.

The first three sections, reuniting articles referring to transformation of traditional rituals in Europe, are completed with a distinctive section on religion in Romania. The two articles which are included, written by my colleague, **Manuela Gheorghe**, and I offer a general outline of Romanian religiosity. Relying on statistical data, the articles offer an historical perspective on religious affiliation, followed by a more recent analysis which situates Romanian religiosity in the larger European context.

The section on academic life presents information about the last conference of The Ritual Year Working Group, recently held in Findhorn (Scotland), while the book review section introduces a volume by Ion Petrică and the last printed volume of The Ritual Year series.

At the end of this Foreword, I would like to express my gratitude to Sorin M. Rădulescu, Editor-in-Chief of the *Revista română de sociologie*, for the opportunity of editing this special issue, in English, and to the editorial staff, for assisting me with this task. I would also want to acknowledge the considerable contribution of Barry L. Jackson, who has thoroughly revised all of the articles and corrected the English manuscripts.

This year, the Institute of Sociology celebrates the 150th anniversary of the Romanian Academy, and although it is a coincidence that the publication of this special issue should be during this anniversary, I am pleased that the volume is dedicated by the Editors of the Romanian Academy to the occasion.

Irina Stahl