RITUAL, POWER AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: BAPTISM AND NAME-GIVING IN LITHUANIA AND LATVIA

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ABSTRACT

Power in our life can certainly be expressed in a variety of ways. One of them is power transmission through life cycle rituals. Soviet rule denied "religious traditions" and tried to form a new atheistic communist culture (and traditions). The new rituals were expected to replace older religious rites because communist morality and socialist internationalism was expected to overpower bourgeois nationalism. As indicated by scholars investigating into Soviet rituals and by my fieldwork data collected in 1999 in Northeast Lithuania and in 1998 in Southeast Latvia, the mission of creating communist traditions has not always been successful. I shall try to examine this process in my article by analysing the cases of "traditional" baptism as well as the phenomenon of the so-called "modern" name-giving ritual in Latvia and Lithuania.

KEYWORDS: Ritual • power • Baptism • name-giving • communist culture

INTRODUCTION

Power in our life can certainly be expressed in a variety of ways. One of them is power transmission through ritual. To quote David Kertzer, "rites create political reality". It is by participating in rituals that people identify themselves with larger political forces that can only be seen in symbolic form. And through political ritual, we are given a way to understand what is going on in the world, for we live in a world that must be drastically simplified if it is to be understood at all (Kertzer 1988: 1–2). The analysis of Soviet festive events provides a chance to understand this process. As concluded by Irina Kotyleva, the inculcation of new communist holiday culture was related to the destruction of traditional chronotope and the construction of the foundation of new historical mythology which became one of decisive factors in the formation of a new worldview (Kotyleva 2004: 145). Yet not only a military parade in Moscow on May 1 or other Soviet calendar festival can support the ruling order. Most stabile in time and space are life cycle rites (rites of passage; life-crisis rituals). They are also most important for the everyday life of an individual (Roth 1990: 113). Baptism is especially important. As mentioned by Ülo Valk, in Christian Europe baptism has traditionally occupied a central position in granting a child the right to live, and in accepting him or her into human society (Valk

1997). Until Soviet occupation, birth, marriage, and death events, in the bigger part of Lithuania, had been ritually and legally (civil registration of births, marriages and deaths was officially introduced in Klaipėda region in 1876 while in Latvia this procedure was established in 1921) operated by Christian Church (the Evangelic Lutheran and the Reformed Church also marked the achievement of "social puberty" by the so-called confirmation service). Soviet rule denied "religious traditions" and tried to form a new atheistic communist culture (and traditions). The Central Committee of Communist Party of the Soviet Union took up the topic in 1963 and 1964 in an attempt to control the appeal of religion and to promote atheistic education. Committee resolutions and, later, a ministerial decree called for new civil rituals able to inundate the whole of Soviet life and for the need to establish an "organic connection" between the new rites and the rhythm of people's lives securing in this way a systematic synthesis of the logical, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions of experience. The new rituals were expected to replace older religious rites because communist morality and socialist internationalism was expected to overpower bourgeois nationalism (Bell 1997: 226–227). As indicated by scholars investigating into Soviet rituals and by my fieldwork data collected in 1999 in Northeast Lithuania (42 records) and in 1998 in Southeast Latvia (mostly Latgale – 27 records)[1], the mission of creating communist traditions has not always been successful. I shall try to examine this process in my article by analysing the cases of "traditional" baptism ("baptism at church" – *krikštynos, kristības*) as well as the phenomenon of the so-called "modern" name-giving[2] ("civil baptism") making my contribution, in this way, to the analysis of culture and power interaction problem.

DIFFERENT HISTORIES OF NAME-GIVING CEREMONY IN LITHUANIA AND LATVIA

The development of rituals by socialist states had its precedents in the European history from late 18th to 20th centuries. Secular life cycle rituals had been developed and introduced in many countries in order to complement or replace Christian rituals (Roth 1990: 114). The promoters of new Soviet life cycle rituals were well aware that it was impossible to develop a uniform scenario able to answer the needs of all Soviet republics due to their cultural differences. Definite cultural differences existed also among the Baltic countries. Yet the chief difference, according to the creators of Soviet rituals, was related to religion prevailing in each of them. In Lithuania, the bulk of population belonged to the Roman Catholic Church while the residents of Latvia and Estonia were predominantly Evangelic Lutherans. This circumstance, to a degree, offered different chances for the formation of new civil life cycle rituals. For example, even researchers into the creation of Soviet festive events had to recognise the fact that in the Catholic Lithuania, in contrast to Latvia and Estonia, an attempt to form a Festival of Coming of Age resulted in a failure: authorities failed to create new ritual symbols or to gear old ones to a new ritual (Pečiūra 1980: 45)[3]. Religious differences were stressed as far back as in the period of elaboration of this particular Soviet ritual. According to A. Serdant, in Lutheran Latvia, compared to Catholic Lithuania, there was no necessity to modify the already "dying" religious calendar festivals (except the Catholic regions of Latvia), thus, new civil life cycle rituals, performed among Lutherans in a relatively

modest way, came into the focus of attention, yet it was underlined that the rituals were "festive events able to touch the deepest human feelings" (Pečiūra, Serdant 1960: 23). On the other hand, L.V. Terent'eva argues that baptism, as an act intrinsically related to the religious feeling of its performers, was necessary only in the "Catholic" part of east Latvia (Terent'eva 1961: 28). Thus, the specific character of name-giving development was determined by the differences between the Catholic and the Lutheran part of Latvia. We shall try to give an answer to the question how specific confessional characteristics influenced name-giving customs practised in Lithuania and Latvia by making a comparison between the formation and the enforcement of name-giving ceremony in both countries.

The history of a Lithuanian name-giving ceremony is very simple. In 1962 the first model name-giving event was organised at Kaunas district "Aušra" Collective Farm culture house. At the request of Culture Department of Lithuanian SSR, the ceremony was filed officially to provide a methodological aid for culture and education workers authorised to organise such festivities in their local residential districts. It is noticed in *Lithuanian Family Traditions*, a study issued by Vyšniauskaitė in 1967, that as early as in the 1st half of 1963 name-giving measures were introduced in many Lithuanian regions at the suggestion of residential district authorities. By 1965 "name-giving tradition had become universally present in towns and collectivised villages of Soviet Lithuania" (Vyšniauskaitė 1967: 57–58). In this way a Decree on Further Elaboration of Measures for the Formation of Civil Registry Acts in the Republic adopted in 1963 by Lithuanian Communist Party Central Committee and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic Council of Ministers was put into practice (LTSR… 1979: 5–6). However, in the opinion of official authorities, the high tide was followed by a relative recession period 1969–1971. According to the then Minister of Culture, the signs of recession were reflected in the fact that name-giving ceremonies used to involve as many as 10 or even 20 children at a time (LTSR… 1979: 11–12). Yet, in spite of authorities' efforts to improve the situation, it had to be stated in 1974 that only 50% of name-giving events were held solemnly, that is with the due application of ceremony recommended by Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic Folk Tradition Council (LTSR… 1979: 8). In 1982 this rate reached 73,4% (Imbrasienė 1983: 110). However the above-mentioned rates were possibly overestimated. Actually, Lithuanian name-giving ceremony was actually regarded a model one on a Soviet Union scale. "Modern Festivals and Rituals of USSR Nations" published by Tul'tseva in Moscow in 1985 paid serious attention to the Lithuanian name-giving ceremony, also stressing the specific national character of Latvian and Estonian "childhood festivals" (Tul'tseva 1985: 129–140).

However the first name-giving ceremony took place much earlier – in 1954 – at Valmiera (Zavarina 1970: 197). We have to admit that the promotion of the event at that particular place was more problematic, compared to Lithuania: organisers encountered the problem of ill-accommodated premises and of parents' unwillingness to bring their babies into an inadequately adapted environment, etc. On the other hand, such problems must not have been decisive. There is sufficient evidence to prove that in Catholic Latgale name-giving festivities used to be successfully held at new-born's parents' place (Rēzekne) or in special rooms accommodated for this particular purpose (Krāslava) (Zavarina 1970: 204–205). Following the encounter with a number of difficulties in the introduction of civil name-giving ceremony all over Latvia, an attempt

Photograph 1. A symbol of a stork in one of the last name-giving ceremony. 1986.07.26.
Trumplaukė Soviet Farm. Skuodas District.
Lithuania (IIES 1248:1).

was made to substitute the traditional baptism with a new-type ritual called Childhood Festival in 1960s. This festival was held only once a year, and it involved a big number of children. For the first time it was mentioned as early as in 1960 by "New life, New traditions (some experience gained in the course of introduction of new traditions in the Lithuanian and Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic)". This source specified that the ceremony was participated by pre-schoolers in the first year of festival's performance, and later – only by the generation of children born in the course of that particular year (Pečiūra, Serdant 1960: 25). As is evident from this 1961 source, the name-giving day (vārdu došanas diena) and the childhood festival (bērnības svētki) are already used as synonyms; besides, the source stresses that the festival is held once a year, and that a simultaneous solemn birth registration ceremony may be performed only if the child's date of birth is chronologically near to the date of this particular annual festival (Terent'eva 1961: 30–31). Later, the age qualification was even more restricted, and the civil ritual of childhood festival lost its direct link with the legitimisation of child's birth (name-giving). It evolved into a separate family event, similar in its character to a calendar holiday. Yet, as is indicated by the first comprehensive work on Latvian ethnology, name-giving ceremonies, too, were held from time to time. A. Brēde and V. Greble in publication in "Latvian Ethnography" (*Latviešu etnogrāfija*), 1967, provides evidence of a special attempt to solemnise the awarding of birth certificates. To achieve this goal not only parents but also parents' close friends and colleagues at work used to be invited to the ceremony. The source shows that in some residential districts birth certificates used to be presented at parents' place of residence, and that the "name-mother" (*goda kūma*)

used to demonstrate the child to guests calling it by its name. The festive event would be ended with a small party (Brēde, Greble 1969: 531). This case might indicate the evident links with traditional baptism rites. However the above-mentioned source gives a more exhaustive discussion of the so-called childhood festival, organised for 2–3-year olds on June 1, the International Children's Protection Day[4], at a club, culture house, school or elsewhere. Godparents used to be invited to the festival. Honorary diplomas, salutes given by members of Young Pioneer League, shows offered by art companies, or children swung on the swings decorated with flowers, or collective or individual planting of trees contributed to the festive and solemn atmosphere of the ceremony (Brēde, Greble 1969: 531). Thus, it is possible to see also in this festival the particular symbols of a name-giving ritual.

An analogous Lithuanian publication titled "Patterns of Lithuanian Ethnography" provides a concise scenario of a name-giving ceremony, yet it does not even mention a childhood festival (Vyšniauskaitė 1964: 475). This festival was described only in the 2nd Lithuanian edition of "Civil Rituals" published in 1979 (*Civilinės apeigos* 1979: 37–51; First edition 1969 (*Civilinės apeigos* 1969)). In Lithuania, however, the festival of childhood was targeted at 6–7-year olds (*Civilinės apeigos* 1979: 38), whereas name-giving ceremonies were held every week, or once in two weeks, or once a month (*Civilinės apeigos* 1969: 7). It was recommended to organise them no later than within six months of the child's birth (*Civilinės apeigos* 1979: 9)[5].

These circumstances indicate definite differences in the creation of life cycle rituals in Latvia and Lithuania.

On the other hand, Ustinova's investigation carried out in the towns of Ludza (Latgale) and Kuldīga (Kurzeme) indicates successful distribution of the name-giving ceremony both in east and west Latvia. Though the confessional situation in both towns was clearly different (in Ludza 47.2% of respondents stated that they were Catholics; in Kuldīga 43.2% insisted that they were Lutherans, other confessions were represented by a small fraction of respondents living in both towns), Ustinova insisted that she had failed to notice any essential differences in these places. Ustinova's research carried out in Ludza town proved that in 1940–1959 the name-giving ritual was performed by 25.1% of respondents, and even by 59.1% in 1960–1971 (compared to the religious baptism rate of 77.4% and 34.9% respectively). According to Ustinova, in Kuldīga town, from 1940 till 1959 the name-giving ritual was practised by 14.8% of respondents, and by 54.1% in 1960–1971 (compared to the religious baptism rate of 43.2% and 0% respectively) (Ustinova 1980: 67). Thus, major differences may be revealed only through the comparison of residents' attitude to baptism rituals in both towns. Consequently, it is possible to suppose that the process of secularisation was more intensive in west Latvia.

On the other hand, my field research data show a bit different name giving situation in the 2nd half of 20th c. At that time the name-giving ritual covered just 28.3% of children in South-east Latvia, and 25.7% of children in north-east Lithuania. In Latgale, however, name giving was mostly solemnised in the 1970s while in Northeast Lithuania – in the 1980s (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2002: 61–62). Surely, in the period of Soviet rule the number of name-giving events tended to be overestimated. Present-day respondents, on the other hand, may also conceal the fact of name-giving solemnisation. Yet my data strongly support a marked degree of name-giving ritual distribution among Latvian and Lithuanian residents. My field research carried out in 1999 in Liepāja District not

too far from Kuldīga contradict Ustinova's data even to a greater degree: not a single respondent out of 15 surveyed ones (born in 1937–1975) mentioned a name-giving ceremony (two respondents provided a narrative of childhood festival) (IIES 2123, 2124). It is true that in Latvia the name-giving ritual is quite often linked to the childhood festival, thus, it is quite possible that Ustinova included in her statistics both holidays (which is very likely because she failed to provide a thorough description of name-giving ceremony, though offered a detailed account of baptism rites). Respondents who participated in my field research, too, used to mix up the two procedures quite often.

All above-mentioned facts allow of a supposition that Lutheran culture was more favourable to the creation of a "childhood festival" while Catholic culture – to the creation of a "name giving" ceremony. Although Latgale is regarded by all above-mentioned sources as a Catholic area, its population includes quite a big number of Russian Old Believers. On the other hand, post-war migration should not be neglected, either. As many as 400,000 people, mostly Russians and Belarusians (including their subsequently born children) settled in Latvia in 1945–1959, not to mention other periods of migration (Bleiere 2005: 390). In 1989 the biggest number of Russian and Belarusian population was concentrated in Latgale territory, namely in the Districts of Daugavpils and Krāslava. There ethnic Latvians accounted for 35.9% and 43.2% of population respectively. The Town of Daugavpils had only 13%, and Rēzekne 37.3% ethnic Latvian residents (Butkus 1995: 69–72). It is quite possible that immigrants newly settled in a new cultural environment found it easier to adopt newly formed Soviet traditions. In Lithuania, however, the level of immigration was far lower (Butkus 1995: 62). On the other hand, it would be wrong to insist that the rest of Latvian population was Lutheran in the period of Soviet rule. The Evangelic Lutheran faith has been experiencing a critical period lately. If in the inter-war period Lutherans dramatically outnumbered Catholics, 1994 statistical data showed that Latvia had 500,000 Catholic and only 300,000 Lutheran residents (Butkus 1995: 88). We cannot disregard a far higher level of secularisation in Latvia (except Latgale), compared to Lithuania. This level was determined by a number of historical circumstances (German culture was more influential in Latvia just like Polish culture – in Lithuania), a wider range of modern culture elements in everyday life, more intensive agriculture, more rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and many other elements of culture.

However, name giving festivities vanished with the restitution of independence both in Lithuania and in Latvia. Not a single respondent from Northeast Lithuania or Latgale (and also from Kurzeme) remembered this particular holiday held after 1991 (in Lithuania the survey covered also the officers employed at the Register Office).

Thus, the tradition created in the course of several decades fell into decay in the first years of independent Lithuania and Latvia.

SYMBOLS OF NAME-GIVING AND BAPTISM

As may be expected, another question arises: why did the much promoted name-giving ceremony fail to oust the baptism rite? A sharper analysis of name-giving ritual in Catholic areas of Lithuania and Latvia may give an answer to the question. The introduction and acceptance of new baptism rituals depend on a number of conditions. By

forming new rituals and socialist traditions the Soviet rule first of all tried to connect "old and new". This goal had to be achieved by copying definite elements of baptism holiday and filling them later with new "socialist content".

As mentioned Colin Heywood, on the eve of the First World War, baptism remained the norm for children in the West, though it was perhaps more formality than it had been in the past for many people (Heywood 2001: 55). In Southeast Latvia and Northeast Lithuania the power of baptism was preserved for a longer time. Traditionally, both the Lithuanian and the Latvian baptism ritual consist of three parts: 1. seeing off to baptism; 2. baptism at church; and 3. party at home after baptism. Apart from baptism ritual carried out at church definite ritual acts were performed before and, which is more usual, after baptism at church. Chief baptism ritual characters included the godparents, the midwife, and the child's parents. The newly acquired social status of the child was consolidated at home during a baptism party with the help of relations and village community (Paukštytė 1999: 100–122; Ustinova 1980: 60–63). A similar baptism model was applied in the 2nd half of 20th c. It survived in baptism customs practised in Southeast Latvia and Northeast Lithuania (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2002: 66–69). A similar attitude towards baptism existed in both countries. An absolute majority of respond-

Photograph 2. "Name-parents" with an old-fashioned feather, in the light of candles celebrating the birth of a new citizen. 1979. Skuodas District.
Lithuania (IIES 1248:5).

ents regarded baptism as a Christian necessity (or – significantly less frequently – as a family tradition, or – sporadically – as an act of submission to pressure from parents or grandparents) (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2002: 59–60).

On the other hand, the culture of the 2nd half of 20th c. heading steadily for modernisation implied innovations in baptism customs (for example, the institution of midwife passed out of sight; the date of baptism was moved to some later time). Theoretically, a chance to shape the ritual of name giving more freely appeared. As is indicated by fieldwork material, the newly created ritual, according to respondents, had definite advantages. Firstly, it used to bring together many people; secondly, the child and his parents were given special attention: elaborate invitation cards were handed in before the name-giving event, a special show was given during the ceremony, gifts were presented, and pictures were taken, etc. In almost half of respondents' opinion, the event was beautiful, merry, and memorable. According to certain respondents, name-giving solemnisation had come into fashion by 1970s (Latgale) or 1980s (Northeast Lithuania) (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2002: 62). Thus, when creating the ritual, authorities tended to supply it with power, and it seemed, at first sight, that they had succeeded. In definite cases the name-giving event provided an excellent chance to invite those family friends or relations who, due to their position held at work (for example, a teacher) or because of their beliefs, could not take part in a baptism ritual (IIES 2073: 30 Ilūkste, Daugavpils district).

Why, then, the ceremony was commonly repeated in the form of a regular church baptism ritual? Although the name-giving ceremony succeeded in forming a "traditional" circle of people brought together for the legitimisation of child's social status (the roles of god/name-parents, child's parents, local/professional community members, or – in Lithuania – of midwife/child's grandmother were clearly defined) it was impossible to find the "clergyman's" equivalent. Civil registry officer or some other representative of local government (even if he or she gave expensive gifts to the child) could not incorporate the symbolic power provided by a ritual or to secure a definite emotional state, characteristic of baptism at church, or an idea able to satisfy a human. Name-giving ceremony was just an entertainment and nothing more, to quote a definite part of respondents who agreed to give their answers to the question about emotions provoked in them by the event. Even the most spacious culture house or some other premises chosen for the performance of a name giving ceremony, too, simply could not incorporate the sacral quality characteristic of the church. It was there that all life cycle rituals had been performed of old.

When creating a civil ritual an attempt was made to rely on the traditional heritage of folk culture. Special attention was given to "future builders of communism", that is to children. Yet children as name-giving ceremony participants or artistic show creators, or the "stork" (in many places of Lithuania children are commonly informed that brothers or sisters are brought to them by the stork) accompanying name-giving ceremony guests were able to provide only entertainment. In traditional culture children used to perform only an auxiliary role in baptism ritual, they did not represent the source of a higher social status (Hoebel 1966: 312; Paukštytė 1999: 112).

Civil name-giving ceremony also lacked folk magic actions allegedly able to determine the child's future life and to secure its safety after baptism. The analysis of modern baptism customs allows us only to repeat after Mircea Eliade that a non-religious hu-

man, in his or her pure form, is a rare phenomenon even in the most desacralised society of today (Eliade 1997: 145). Even at the end of 20th century a number of respondents insisted that babies used to sleep more soundly after baptism. They allegedly became more protected from evil forces and more resistant to diseases. Many mothers also asserted that baptised babies, if they happened to die, were not doomed to wondering about the "dark wilderness" of the next world. Mothers believed that they were morally responsible for the baby who failed to be baptised in time. For example, a respondent from Daugavpils District remembered the burial of her non-baptised three-day-old baby. The woman sprinkled the child's grave with holy water, and she asked a priest to hallow the grave, yet in spite of all that she regretted bitterly that her child had not received the ceremony of baptism before its death (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2002: 60–61)[6]. Such faith was missing in the civil ritual.

Authorities attempted to empower the name-giving ritual by introducing into it definite symbolic objects, for example, a cradle or a candle. The former was supposed to remind the childhood of one's parents or grandparents, and the latter – the ceremony of baptism at church. In other words, such objects had to provoke specific feelings. Yet, according to respondents, a folk-type cradle used during the ceremony did not impart any deeper feelings to them. The same can be said about a candle burnt during the Latvian name-giving ceremony and subsequently given to the child as a gift. According to a respondent, the candle was not able to substitute the power of a sacramental object as is evident during baptism (IIES 2067: 47 Šedere, Daugpilio r.) whereas the baptism sacrament existing in Christian tradition and related baptism customs had a motivated stable ritual. It satisfied human feelings and religious beliefs.

However, efforts were made, in certain cases, at substituting "national feelings" for religious ones. Folk dress, woven sashes, traditional towels and other attributes had to stress the specific national character of the festivity. For example, during the name-giving ceremony children used to keep sashes raised to allow parents, godparents, and guests pass under the canopy of sashes (Dundulienė 1982: 256; *Kriaunų Ragana* 2005: 106).

A try at ousting Christian symbols and placing ancient pre-Christian rituals in their position was also undertaken. For example, an effort was made to introduce a tradition of planting trees (an oak or a maple for a boy, and a lime or a spruce for a girl). However trees are planted only in a definite season while name giving ceremonies take place in every season of the year (*Civilinės apeigos* 1979: 15).

The same can be said also about the custom of drinking baby's health. Ritual drinking as a "rite of incorporation" (Gennep 1960: 29) has always been a traditionally important element of Lithuanian life cycle rites. In a number of cases it has functioned as a consolidating force necessary to confirm preceding ritual operations (Šaknys 1996: 96–97, 137). Traditionally, the custom of drinking baby's health was performed at an inn or at home after baptism at church. Thus, an attempt was made to transfer the drinking custom to the official part of name giving ceremony. Yet eventually it turned out that the greater part of newly introduced customs failed to take root. On the other hand, official authorities sought steadily to elaborate the ceremony which resulted in its continuous change.

The most stable custom represents a name giving party held at home. During the

party the child's birth was consolidated socially. Usually the party was equivalent to a regular baptism party with its prevailing traditional Christian ceremony.

Though the civil ritual was mostly performed on a volunteer basis and recommended as a correct and suitable course of action (yet in certain cases children's birth certificates were not issued to persons who had declined the civil ritual, or moral pressure would be put on those who occupied higher official positions) a regular tradition to be handed down from generation to generation failed to be created.

Catholics believe that it is through baptism that a baby is liberated from its in-born sin and accepted as a Christian community member. The newly invented name-giving ritual, too, was designed for baby's "introduction" into a community of citizens of a socialist republic. Yet this novel and politically tinted idea was hardly able to trigger emotions subordinate only to the long-standing appeal from baptism. The ritual of name-giving disappeared with the demise of the socialist republic.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE FORMATION OF A CIVIL RITUAL

From the point of view of Lithuanian and Latvian legislation, the ritual of name-giving is possible also in our days. However, it has been out of favour for the past ten years. Baptism at church (practised in some cases even by agnostics) prevails as a "family tradition", or is practised by individuals seeking "to act" like Christians, or not to stand

Photograph 3. Name-giving. Ritual drinking. Photo by Angelė Vyšniauskaitė.
1965.07.25. Prienai Culture House.
Lithuania (EPA neg. 23034).

out among the members of a local, professional or kin community, or just to hold a festival. In this respect, the situation in Lithuania is similar to the situation in Latvia.

Nevertheless it should be noted that a demand for civil birth certification rituals has been growing lately in some West European countries, for example, in Holland. As is known, a natural need for the filling of a ritual lacuna arises wherever a religious ritual is rejected. Thus, among other things it is recommended in Holland to plant a tree (a pear tree for a girl, and an apple or a nut tree for a boy), or to place a sign in the form of a stork with a baby in front of the new parents' house (Lukken 2001: 554–555). Not long ago identical symbols were used on such occasions also in Lithuania and Latvia. This indicates that definite symbols of civil birth act certification, just like the symbols of baptism, are also characteristic of other European countries (Gratsianskaya, Kozhanovskij 1999: 515).

To create a new soviet ritual of name giving, joint forces of ethnologists, sociologists, researchers into religion, culture and other areas of knowledge were pooled together several decades ago. Scholars provided their recommendations, yet it was the representatives of Communist Party authorities who were "in charge" of their implementation. The following question arises: Is it possible to use today the soviet experience for the creation of a new civil ritual absolutely free from communist ideology? Research by Žilvytis Šaknys shows that the religious feeling of young Lithuanians has been declining rapidly in recent years (Šaknys 2003: 16). This particular circumstance does not allow me to reject a chance of civil ritual rebirth. During my field research I asked my respondents whether they would like to have a civil name giving ceremony offered

Photograph 4. "Name-parents" planting an oak. 1982.03.06. Pilaitė Collective Farm. Tauragė district. Lithuania (IIES 1138).

merely as an alternative to a baptism ritual at church. A small portion of respondents appreciated the idea stating that they would not be against the name-giving ceremony should it be held today.

Thus a rebirth of a name giving ritual is possible, yet its representations, as is indicated by my research, may be very diverse even within a single country. One simply has to agree with Gerald Lukken who asserts that a ritual, unless enculturated, is linked with the total symbolic order of a culture (Lukken 2001: 572). So, ritual is a real agent of power, yet it acts in a number of different ways. It has not been always possible to modify and manipulate it for ideological purposes in order to change man and his culture in several decades. Authorities may use their power to promote or to eliminate definite rituals. However, authorities cannot control the power hidden in the ritual if the ritual overpowers a human with its contents.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Perpetually created in the course of soviet era, the ritual of name-giving may be viewed not only as a life cycle ritual but also as a political one. It had to acquire an ideological power for the formation of a new communist culture.

2. Following the devaluation of church-operated baptism, Soviet authorities, in an attempt to oust the ancient traditions of baptism, sought to create an alternative ritual. Though in doing it they relied on symbols and artefacts of religious baptism both in Lithuania and Latvia, the histories of introduction of the newly created civil name-giving ritual differ in the two countries.

3. The ideologists and the researchers of soviet rituals were aware of the significance of cultural and, especially, confessional differences in the construction of new Soviet life cycle rituals. The differences accounted for the different structure of civil rituals in Lithuania and Latvia, and, to a degree, even in the Catholic and the Lutheran part of Latvia.

4. Though the first name giving ceremony was held in Latvia 8 years before it was held in Lithuania (in 1954 and 1962 respectively), the process of its elaboration was more successful in Lithuania. In Latvia, the so-called childhood festival, a ceremony having nothing to do with baby's civil registration, gained more popularity.

5. Drawing on my field research data gathered in the Catholic Latgale (Southeast Latvia) and in the neighbouring Northeast Lithuania, I may argue that respondents' attitude to baptism and to a civil name giving ceremony was similar. Customs related to both festivals differed insignificantly. However, the Soviet regime failed to empower the newly created ritual of name-giving even though it used in it definite borrowings from the ritual of baptism. Babies were commonly carried to church for a ritual of baptism either before or after the civil ceremony of name giving. With the demise of soviet regime the name-giving ritual disappeared.

6. Theoretically, the ritual of name giving is also possible in our days, yet it has never been practised in the past decade. Baptism at church (practised in some cases even by agnostics) prevails as a "family tradition", it is practised by individuals seeking "to act" like Christians, and also by those who do not wish to stand out among the members of a local, professional or kin community, or by those who just wish to have a festival.

However in definite West European countries a demand for a civil birth certification ritual is growing, thus, theoretically, a chance of its appearance in Lithuania and Latvia is possible.

7. A ritual, a real agent of power, acts in a number of different ways. It has not been always possible to modify and manipulate it for ideological purposes in order to change man and his culture in several decades. Authorities may use their power to promote or to eliminate definite rituals. However, authorities cannot control the power hidden in the ritual if the ritual overpowers a human with its contents.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1 Respondents, predominantly women, were born in 1922–1979. In Latvia (Districts of Daugavpils, Krāslava and Jēkabpils) the survey covered 15 ethnic Lithuanians, 7 Latvians, 3 Russians, 1 Belarusian, and 1 Pole; in Lithuania (Districts of Rokiškis, Zarasai, Ignalina, Švenčionys, and Anykščiai) – 36 ethnic Lithuanians, 3 Poles, 2 Russians, and 1 Belarusian/. In terms of confession, Catholics prevailed overwhelmingly in both countries, with only several representatives of Russian Old-believers' Church, Russian Orthodox Church, Evangelic Lutheran, and Evangelic Reformed Church. Respondents were surveyed by a special "Baptism and Name-giving" questionnaire (IIES 2067, 2073, 2122).

2 By "name-giving" (vardynos, vārda došana) we mean a civil festival held to mark the fact of awarding a name to a baby.

3 Although professional promoters of civil rituals in Belarusia insisted that the festive event was characteristic of all Soviet Baltic republics, and that the religious ritual of confirmation (admittance into adulthood) – of both the Catholic and the Lutheran Church (Gur'kov, Dubovnik 1978: 10–11), the 20th c. Confirmation Sacrament had nothing to do with a person's coming of age because the ceremony usually involved 7–14-year olds or sometimes even younger children (Šaknys 1996: 153).

4 In definite areas of Latvia this festival was celebrated on a New Year Day, International Women's Day, etc. (Pečiūra, Serdant 1960: 25).

5 By the way, the recommendation was not always followed, as is indicated by field research data.

6 Similar beliefs exist not only within rural culture. They are widely distributed even in cities. This fact is supported by author's research data obtained in Vilnius where investigation into recent Lithuanian and Polish baptism customs was carried out (Šaknienė 2004: 110–111).