FOLK RELIGION IN DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT
'Folk religion' is a contested category within the study of religions, with scholars increasingly advocating its abandonment. This paper encourages a new critical engagement with 'folk religion' as both a category of analysis and as a field of practice. I argue for a renewed attentiveness to the ideological dimensions of categories deployed by scholars and to the relationship they bear to the field of practice they seek to signify. Firstly, I explore the discursive nature of the construction of 'folk religion' as a category of analysis and how its semantic loading functions to 'pick up' distinctive practices from the religious field. Secondly, drawing on the work of Bourdieu and Riesebrodt, I characterise the 'folk religious field of practice' as relational, a shifting site of competing agencies. My argument is illustrated with empirical examples drawn from ethnographic research in Romania and Moldova.

KEYWORDS: folk religion • vernacular religion • Romania • Bourdieu • Riesebrodt

CASE A. FROM THE 'FOLK RELIGIOUS FIELD OF PRACTICE'

Aunt Katalin, as she was affectionately known, was one of the noted folk singers of the village of Pusztina (Pustiana), a Csángó-Hungarian Catholic village in Romania.[1] She could not read or write but despite this, or perhaps as a consequence of this, she was credited with having the greatest *népi tudás*, or folk knowledge, in the village. She was the best singer and she also had the widest knowledge of local traditions of prayer. She attended all the wakes and vigils where the old Hungarian songs and prayers for the dead were performed. Because of her knowledge and expertise she was well known and was one of the favourite informants of many folklorists and ethnographers and a number of CDs were released with her songs and prayers on them. Prior to her passing, she recorded her repertoire of prayers onto a cassette and requested that upon her death her children should play this recording rather than performing the officially sanctioned Romanian prayers. When Aunt Katalin died on the 9th of July 2005, her children called the *kántor*, or choir master, as was customary in the village, who recited the Psalms in Romanian. However, before the Psalms were sung Aunt Katalin's recordings of Hungarian of prayers for the dead were played. For three days, at noon and in the evening, the village people prayed next to the open coffin of the deceased in her home. The funeral was held on 13th July 2005. For the funeral, the body was taken into the Church where a mass was said for the deceased. During the sermon the village

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priest proceeded to defame Aunt Katalin in front of the village congregation. The principal accusation made by the priest referred to the cassette she had left for her children to play at her wake. He also accused her of having wished that "the devil take the Romanian priest!" The funeral ended in scandal with people quarrelling and shouting as the body was accompanied to the cemetery.

Following these events, Aunt Katalin's son László Demeter launched a civil action against the priest. A local NGO took up the case and brought it before the National Council against Discrimination set up by the Romanian Parliament. The National Council heard the case and judged that the Bishopric of Iaşi, of which the priest was a representative, had violated Romanian anti-discrimination law and was duly fined. The bishopric appealed against the decision but the original verdict was upheld.

These events, which were recounted to me in the village of Pusztina in 2008 by Tinka Nyisztor, and to which I shall return at the end of this article, were one of the principal inspirations for my reflections on the discourse on and the field of practice of 'folk religion' that follow.

'Folk religion' is a contested category within the study of religions with scholars increasingly advocating its abandonment in favour of a less loaded, more considered lexicon. Since Don Yoder's classic attempt to define 'folk religion' substantively (Yoder 1974) and Leonard Primiano's call for the abandonment of the term in favour of 'vernacular religion' (Primiano 1995), scholars of religion have begun to deploy alternatives. Marion Bowman, who in the early nineties advocated the rehabilitation of 'folk religion' as a descriptive term rather than a pejorative one (Bowman 1992), has since retreated from this stance, nailing her colours to the term "vernacular religion" (Bowman 2004: 6)[ii] Increasingly scholarly publications, research projects and conferences are taking on this new classificatory schema overwriting the category of 'folk religion'. The term has also found favour amongst some theologians who in their pastoral or missiological work seek a "more value-free approach" when dealing with contextual challenges to the gospel (see Monteith 2006). It is not my aim to critique this recent discursive move on the part of some religions and folklore scholars, rather, this paper is concerned with encouraging a new critical engagement with 'folk religion' as both a category of analysis and as a field of practice. I argue here for a renewed attentiveness to the ideological dimensions of categories and terms deployed by scholars and to the relationship these categories bear to the field of practice they seek to signify. The recent valuable and welcome focus on the particular uses and qualities of the term 'vernacular religion' has prompted me to highlight distinctive associations and semantic loading that follow the term 'folk religion' and explain the usefulness of this term as a signifier for a particular set of religious practices that are embedded within a contested field practice.

In my view, scholarship on the problem of 'folk religion' is important because the term 'folk religion', and the field of practice that it has been used to signify, is a site of struggle for legitimacy in religious life that is both political and gendered, as my opening narrative serves to illustrate. 'Folk religion', even in the classic usage of the term, has been deployed by various actors to refer to aspects of religious life where communication with the divine or metaphysical is contested and where access to spiritual

and practical resources for the resolution of this-worldly troubles and the assurance of other-worldly futures is disputed. What is at stake in this struggle is the difference between approval and repression, between power and weakness, wealth and poverty and, in some extreme cases, life and death.

In what follows, I will firstly address the issue of the signifier of 'folk religion' from a social constructionist perspective, then, drawing on characterisations of the religious field by both Pierre Bourdieu (1991) and Martin Riesebrodt (2003; 2008; 2010), I shall outline what may be considered to constitute a distinct 'folk religious field of practice'. This, I argue, is the product of attempts to regulate and mould the religious field by a range of actors, represented prominently (but by no means exclusively) by clerical elites, national and political ideologues and scholars of folklore and religions. I then explain why 'folk religion' is an appropriate signifier for this power-laden site of religious struggle. I shall illustrate this section with examples drawn from my research and fieldwork in Romania and Moldova. Finally, I draw some broader conclusions regarding the ideological context and connotations of categories within the scholarly field.

Although my conclusions regarding the structure of the discourses on 'folk religion' and the nature of the 'folk religious field' may have analytical value when applied outside Europe, the conversation I am joining here is concerned primarily with scholarship on the European context and historical experience. The category 'folk religion' I am speaking about is the product of the European experience of religion as a discursive field dominated by Christian Churches, nation states, the ideology of romantic nationalism (which is currently resurgent across much of Europe), and Enlightenment and secularist thought. In this regard, 'folk religion' only becomes meaningful in the context of European modernity when 'folk' and 'religion' acquire their respective semantic loadings and meanings.

My discussions on what may be usefully signified by the term 'folk religion' in contemporary scholarship in Europe grow out of my field research amongst marginalised and minority peoples in Hungary, Moldova and Romania. In this regard, the post-socialist context is significant. The religious field in much of Central and Eastern Europe has undergone a radical transformation that has involved the renegotiation of the relationship between the public and private spheres; the socialist period saw a significant 'domestification' of religion in many countries which resulted in power and agency in the religious field being re-distributed in diverse ways. In the post-socialist era, with increased access to and freedom within both physical and discursive space, resurgent clerical influence and power in local communities and in public discourse combined with new state legal and social frameworks that facilitate the proliferation of "differentiating practices of the self" (Asad 2003: 5), have tended to intensify struggles for legitimacy in the religious field. This intensification has served to bring into much sharper relief aspects of the 'folk religious field of practice' described and discussed below. The micro-politics of these sites of religious contestation, however, are not unique to Central and Eastern Europe, they merely manifest in greater frequency and intensity. My recent fieldwork experiences in Ireland have strengthened my conviction of the applicability of this conceptualisation of the 'folk religious field' in the broader European context.

Had I engaged in field research in the American West or amongst African tribal peoples my perspective would, no doubt, have evolved in different directions. This may seem like a very obvious point but I believe it is worth making; as scholars of

religion our perspectives on our field of study and the categories we deploy are very largely determined by our educational, ideological, and field experiences. That we are compelled, and have a duty, to write these experiences into our texts on religion is not at issue but rather that we also ensure the language and categories we chose to deploy speak clearly of the political nature of that experience.

METHODOLOGY VERSUS TERMINOLOGY

Scholars have approached the problem of 'folk religion' from the perspective of both methodology and terminology. The methodological issues relate to attempts by scholars of religion to overcome the bias towards scriptural, hierarchical and institutional forms of the so-called Great Traditions. The principle methodological step that Marion Bowman, Leonard N. Primiano and others have advocated is ethnographic fieldwork and a focus on religion as lived (Bowman 1992; Primiano 1995). Drawing on the experience and insights of folklorists, this represented an important contribution to the debate in the 1990s as they recognised that the decisions of the scholar in designing a research project and the methods she or he employs in the field largely determine how the researcher comes to represent religious traditions, communities and lives. So in terms of methodology, scholars began to emphasise the encounter between the researcher and the researched in the field, as well as the triangulation of data resulting from an awareness of the *equal significance* in studies of religions of individuals, communities or social groups, institutions and texts (see in particular Bowman 2004). Empathetic perception and understanding was advocated as a methodological tool in order to ensure that the scholar's interpretations are "meaningful to their informants" and do not impose a "two-tiered" model of religion (Primiano 1995: 40). In this way, the object of study of religions scholars was to be broadened to include and take seriously the religion of the 'folk'.

The problem of terminology, on the other hand, stems from the recognition that the *category* 'folk religion' implies an a priori distinction between two discrete spheres of religious activity, often shorthanded as the folk/elite or popular/elite distinction. These two spheres underline distinctions that are drawn between textual and oral, great and small traditions, institution and community, orthodoxy and superstition and so on. The implication drawn from the term 'folk religion' is that there exists some pristine phenomenon called 'religion'. In this way, 'folk religion' comes to stand in a bipolar position in relation to 'religion' as represented by the institutions of 'official' religious bodies. 'Folk religion', of course, has often been targeted by such 'official' bodies as being the deposit of anachronistic, superstitious, heterodox, and syncretistic practices or simply the result of a deficit in terms of doctrine and narrative.[2] The institutional bias of academic disciplines such as sociology and the study of religions have helped to reinforce such conceptualisations and reify "the authenticity of religious institutions as the exemplar of human religiosity" (Primiano 1995: 39).

In addition to the hierarchical distinction, between high 'official' and low 'folk', the term also appears to impose another dichotomy on phenomena identified as 'folk religious' which stems from the term's composite nature: on the one hand 'folk religion' is considered proper to the 'folk', the ethnos or the nation, and therefore consonant with secular, albeit highly 'sacralised', romantic nationalist ideology.[3] The objects identified

under this category could be and were put to work for national ideological purposes, for example, in the symbolic and cultural struggles against imperial and colonial powers. Aspects of culture that are designated as 'folk' must belong to a specific 'folk', and reflect the 'essence' of that 'folk' to the wider nation or ethnic community in order for them to be considered legitimate representations of their unique consciousness. 'Folk' resonates 'authenticity', and only acquires a pejorative meaning for certain audiences in certain contexts (Appadurai 1988: 37).

On the other hand, the category 'folk religion', in the European context, is also contingent on a competing ideological system represented by Christian Churches, with their doctrines, hierarchies and dogmas. 'Folk religion' represents the mistaken beliefs and harmful practices of the less educated and less powerful that require correction or elimination through effective mission, pastoral instruction and repressive sanction. In terms of the doctrine and teachings of Christian Churches, 'folk religion' belongs under the jurisdiction and oversight of Church institutions. The two ideological systems, national romantic and clerical, exist in tension. In many cases, what is valorised and sponsored by the nation and its secular elite is disparaged, discouraged or suppressed by Church and clergy. This ideological struggle has given rise to all the conceptualisations of 'folk religion' that are familiar to us such as pagan survival, Catholic superstition, dual belief, syncretistic admixture of religious traditions and so on.

These competing religious and secular national discourses impose a dichotomy on phenomena that locates 'true' religious beliefs and practices within the realm of the universal or transcendent and 'folk' religious beliefs within the realm of the material, the local and the national. One outcome of this, especially in the context of the ethnically-structured states of Eastern Europe, is that scholarship on 'folk religion' has tended to sacralise the nation through the myths and symbols of popular belief, valorising narratives and practices that in effect have the potential to weaken or undermine the universal message of Christian Churches. Related to this problem is the association of material and this-worldly concerns with the category of magic and acts of coercion, and transcendent and other-worldly concerns with religion proper. In this way 'folk religion' should be viewed not simply as a "residualistic" or "derogatory" term, as Primiano (1995: 39–40) suggests, but rather as a site of contested meanings with multiple chains of associations, some of which valorise and others of which devalue its object depending on the context.

We can see, therefore, that studies that go under the name of 'folk religion' are the site of conflicting interests, ideologies and identities. These find expression in bipolar categories and dichotomies such as magic vs. religion, prayer vs. incantation, faith vs. superstition and so on. The scholar of religion, educated in the Western tradition, reproduces these bipolar categorisations as he or she apprehends objects of religious practice and religious ideas in the field and locates them according to an inherited 'map' of the terrain determined by the discursive field. These bipolar categories are impossible to avoid and they are part of the structuring of knowledge that has shaped the lenses through which we view the world. And what is more, these objects continue to be subject to the direct application of coercive power and repressive sanction by various actors in the religious field.

All of this would seem to suggest that the category of 'folk religion' does just as Primiano and others suggest; it imposes a dichotomy on religion and religious lives and consequently should be abandoned. Primiano (1995: 38) asserts that "[c]hanges in the choice of terminology reflect substantive shifts in our perceptions of human realities" and he may not be wrong. By examining the problem from a social constructionist perspective, however, and by taking on board the conclusions that scholars have reached with regard to the debates that surround the category 'religion' – and indeed also the terms 'folklore' and 'folk' – we may arrive at alternative solutions to the problem. The term itself does not impose a dichotomy, rather the dichotomy is the result of a history of competing discursive practices that actually structure the 'field of practice' itself. The term I argue, just like any other, constitutes an empty signifier, but it has descriptive value in the sense that its 'chains of associations' can communicate something of the political nature and the power-knowledge relations that shape the religious field of practice.

Scholars have called for the abandonment of the term 'religion' on ideologically similar grounds to the call to dispense with 'folk religion'. Substantively the arguments differ but they have their origins in the same theoretical tradition that cites the dominance of Christian (and colonial) values and agendas in shaping the concept of 'religion'. This is not the place to rehearse the arguments for and against the term 'religion', however, a strong defence of the term has been mounted by Craig Martin, who argues on the basis of some basic social constructionist assumptions, namely: "Words are tools that humans use to delimit from the stuff of the world what is of interest to them, the uses of words are variable, and variable uses are all we have" (Martin 2009: 158). A similar crisis of terminology (and identity) also beset the field of folklore. The problematic nature of the term 'folklore', and indeed the category of the 'folk', was considered by some to be the cause of the disciplines failure to flourish (see Harlow 1998), however, as Ben-Amos and others have powerfully asserted "a name change is not a substantive resolution" (ibid.: 233). Instead, scholars of folklore have largely voted with their feet and continue to formulate new directions and explore synergies with other disciplines under the name 'folklore'.

The category 'folk religion' 'picks up' or 'cuts out' from reality certain things in a given context or discursive arena; in Ireland, where I currently live and work, the term picks up things that it would not in Moldova or Hungary. The following example, relating to traditions of 'folk prayer', or *halk duaları*, amongst the Gagauz, a Turkish speaking Orthodox Christian minority living in Moldova, may serve to illustrate this point. A local folklorist, in one of my preliminary discussions with her regarding folk religious phenomena, stated that the Gagauz have no prayer traditions of their own, that is to say no form of 'folk prayer'. On reflection, I judged this statement to have been the product of her particular ideological understanding of the nature of folklore and its relationship to religious phenomena, the result of a disciplinary training influenced by the Soviet-Marxist model. The term 'folk religion' for her picks up from reality things that display certain characteristics that could be defined as primordial, pre-Christian, expressed through the local Gagauz idiom, transmitted orally, and demonstrably *not* inherited from the traditions and beliefs of the neighbouring peoples. This observation was in stark contrast to my own 'experience' of 'folk prayer' amongst the Gagauz. I was

able to 'identify', using my own 'folk religious lenses' (the result of my own training and ideological assumptions) a whole range of prayers and practices with apocryphal elements, canonical prayers with alternative functions, Romanian prayers translated orally into Gagauz and so on that were 'picked up' from reality according to my own criteria (Kapaló 2011: 259–293). We were clearly not talking about precisely the same thing when we discussed 'folk religion'. This experience highlights not only the ideologically structured nature of etic categorisation frameworks but also the problematic nature of the ideal-typological tradition of genre construction within folklore, justly criticised by Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk (2012: 6) and to which I shall return below.

The conclusion I draw from the above is that the term 'folk religion' functions to 'pick up' aspects of reality and what it picks up is dependent on the perspective, or the lenses, of the definer, the person who has the scholarly means and privilege to categorise reality. The concepts and conceptual schemes vary from one context to another and the scholar engages in discursive practices that "form the objects of which they speak" (Martin 2009: 158).

The issue of the definition and categorisation of 'folk religion' is embedded within the discursive field of competing ideological systems briefly outlined above. There is no one reality of 'folk religion' out there to be 'picked up', because, as Craig Martin points out in relation to the term 'religion', what counts as a particular phenomena or falls within a particular categorisation depends on the specific use one is making of a term (ibid.: 170–171). Attempts to offer 'catch all categories' that pick out all the phenomena considered to come under the umbrella of a new objective term, that would include beliefs, ideas and practices currently listed under 'folk religion' but leave behind the negative 'chains of associations', are, I maintain, mistaken. And so for instance, replacing 'folk religion' with 'vernacular religion', not necessarily Primiano's primary intention but nevertheless an outcome of his argumentation, simply results in the scholar picking up a different selection of things from the world. Objects of discourse cannot be 'liberated' by scholars of religion from the deeply rooted categories that others use to describe them. They remain subject to the interests and within the orbit of power of these actors and tied to a web of associations and meanings. In this sense, on a discursive level, 'folk religion' signifies a site of linguistic struggle, held in place by a range of competing discursive practices and relations.

With the adoption of alternative terms to 'folk religion' scholars consciously, or inadvertently, alter their 'instruments of analysis' in order to highlight certain aspects of the religious field of practice. In this sense, the term 'vernacular religion', for example, opens up new and perfectly valid chains of associations that connect its object with new scholarly concerns such as the creative and generative power of local religion and the significance of indigeneity or innovations such as ecological religions, the globalisation of religious ideas and the emergence of 'open spiritualities'. Therefore, I am not arguing here against innovation in relation to our scholarly lexicon and neither do I wish to undermine the analytical potential of terms such as 'vernacular religion' to contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of the religious field. Much closer attention, however, needs to be paid to the chains of associations attached to existing terms and their potential significance for our explanatory endeavours as academics. Replacing the term 'folk religion' with an alternative, may inadvertently help to divorce the object of study from issues of national ideology, political and ecclesial power and the concerns of mar-

ginalised social, economic or ethno-linguistic groups. These concerns may have receded into the background for some scholars working in certain contexts, however, as my introductory narrative serves to illustrate, religion lived out at the intersection of this particular set of powerful ideological forces is not confined to Europe's historical past.

The attempt here by scholars to apply a more objective lexicon in one context, in my view, may potentially mask the political nature of the object of study and obscure the power-laden nature of a distinctive dimension of the 'religious field' in other contexts. Where links with national ideology, political and ecclesial power have become attenuated in the religious field this may be both justified and necessary. But when deployed appropriately, this would not mean the replacement of the term 'folk religion' but would instead supply us with an additional and supplementary analytical category. The semantic message of the term 'folk religion' serves the function of orientating us towards a set of signifiers. The agendas and ideological stances are made explicit precisely because of the juxtaposition of competing ideological systems indicated by the words 'folk' and 'religion'.

One of the principal contributions of Michel Foucault (1989) was to draw attention to the very concrete dependence that exists between the production of knowledge through discursive practices of scholars and the institutionalisation of systems of power. Indeed, as "discourses are themselves practices that influence non-discursive elements" (von Stuckrad 2010: 159) the scholar of religion or the folklorist does not stand outside the power relations that define the field. Controlling the discourse means having the power to categorise, label and organise knowledge and therefore the scholar plays as active a role structuring the 'folk religious field' as the theologian, the cleric or the national ideologue. As I have illustrated above, the fieldworker has her or his own lenses that identify and objectify religious practices, behaviours and beliefs. The encounter that takes place in the field of practice, by which I mean the practice of religion and its juncture with the discursive practices of the scholar, is essentially an encounter that is both power-laden and politically charged. The debate that was opened up by Primiano in regard to 'folk religion' highlights the need for scholars to be attentive to all the ideological connotations and semantic trails of the terms they use and ensure that crucial political aspects, such as gender, class and race are picked out and not masked by classificatory systems.

THE FOLK RELIGIOUS FIELD OF PRACTICE

Having discussed some of the issues relating to the discursive construction of the category of 'folk religion', I will now turn my attention to what the term 'folk religion' may usefully signify. This is what I term the 'folk religious field of practice'. It could be argued that what I have described above relates only to the discursive level and that the 'practices of the people' deserve to be considered and handled simply as the natural expression of religious impulses and that it is the role of the scholar to ensure that the people are liberated from hegemonic discourses, thus freeing their practices and beliefs from dichotomising categories. In my view, however, this approach fails to give sufficient attention to the fact that the 'folk religious field of practice' remains a site characterised by the exercise of coercive power, repressive sanctions, punitive regimes, acts of stigmatisation and processes of marginalisation and is witness to systematic acts of violence and resultant acts of resistance and defiance.

My use of the term 'field' is derived from Pierre Bourdieu who defines 'field' as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu, Wacquant 2007: 97). Therefore, "[t]o think in terms of field is to think relationally" (ibid.: 96). Its meaning in a given context comes from the particular system of relations that are at play. The given 'field' imposes certain positions on agents or institutions through the structure and distribution of power. The various forms or 'species' of power, commonly referred to as 'capital' by Bourdieu, determine access to desired 'profit' or gain. In my description of the 'folk religious field' below, I aim to highlight how aspects of this 'power play' operate in relation to the key actors whose interests intersect within the field.

Pierre Bourdieu (1991), building on Max Weber's ideas (Weber 1965: 20–31), characterises the religious field as the site of struggle between the body of priests or religious specialists, who seek to monopolise the means of salvation by maintaining control of secret religious knowledge, and those excluded from such knowledge. The creation of religious institutions gives rise to an uneven distribution of religious knowledge and the accumulation of religious capital in the hands of religious elites. Bourdieu takes Weber's distinction between the priest and the prophet and casts it in relational terms (Engler 2003: 446). According to Bourdieu (1991: 22–23), the priest and prophet compete for religious capital, with Weber's notion of the "routinization of charisma" representing the consolidation by the prophet of religious capital resulting in the transformation of the prophet into the role and function of priest.

This characterisation, however, captures only one mechanism at play in the struggle for monopoly of the religious field. The monopolising tendencies of religious elites are also responsible for defining objects that are to be excluded from the religious system of capital; 'black market goods' that are then forced underground. Where the laity has carved out such an autonomous religious space and initiated innovations or has appropriated and adapted existing practices once controlled by religious elites, sanctions are introduced by clerical elites to prevent their use or application. In this way, charms and suspect forms of prayer (such as the prayers of Aunt Katalin referred to in the opening narrative of this paper) are defined as profane, illegitimate, harmful and sinful, theologically absurd or wishy-washy and those who practice them are condemned, excluded from the community, punished and, or in extreme case scenarios, killed. According to this schema, the power to categorise and apply sanctions aims at preventing the erosion of religious capital in the hands of the priestly elite. The 'mediated' aspects of religious practice controlled by the clerical hierarchy take on the character of legitimate religious action and 'unmediated' relations with the divine or supernatural powers are labelled coercion, magic and superstition. In this understanding, these processes give rise to a field of practice that is constituted primarily through the competition to establish genuine and effective means of communication or relations with the divine and results in the production of 'black market' religious goods or currency.

What I term the 'folk religious field of practice', therefore, is characterised by the laity's attempts to undermine clerical monopoly, not through the production of "new improved spiritual products that devalue the old ones of the traditional Church" (Urban 2003: 262) as Bourdieu (1991: 22–25) suggests is the case with the emergence of new religious leaders and new religious movements, but rather through the strategies of appropriation, sublimation and transference that succeed in 'consecrating' the

religious being and practices of agents (these transactions can of course function in multiple directions). Bourdieu has been critiqued elsewhere for his rigid categorical differentiation between the producers of religion and the passive consumers. Michelle Dillon (2001) has argued persuasively that the laity has the power to produce alternative interpretations, divergent meanings and varied applications of the religious goods produced by the religious elite. What Dillon refers to as the "collective subversion" of Bourdieu's rather mechanistic notion of religious production, his principle of "collective misrecognition", allows for "reinterpreted scripts and cognitive schemas" (Dillon 2001: 413–414). In the context of the 'folk religious field', these take on the character of 'hidden transcripts', to borrow a term from James Scott (1990), of spiritual or religious resistance to domination. The following example aims to illustrate this point.

CASE B. FROM THE 'FOLK RELIGIOUS FIELD OF PRACTICE'[4]

Varvara bulü is a famous healer from the village of Kopkoy in southern Moldova and a member of the Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christian minority. After the premature death of her husband she spent many years as a single mother working on the local state farm bringing up her eight children. When she reached pensionable age she started helping neighbours as a midwife and it was then, aged 50, that she had a vision of the Mother of God who instructed her to begin healing people.

> *Panaiya* [the Mother of God] came to me and said that I should heal. "Wherever you place your hand, there should be a sign that that person will be cured, that person will rise up. Maybe they will mock you, they will beat you, but you shouldn't ever stop." She said: "God will send you a piece of iron, with that iron you will cure."

A few days later *Varvara bulü* was visited by a local priest who gave her a broken piece of chandelier from the local church that had been blessed.

> And then it came to me in a dream that I should heal people with this piece of chandelier. There is also a piece of cloth with which I also heal. Great things have come from this! And then the children found a horseshoe. I took it to church at Easter and had it blessed, but I hid it in my bag so that no one could see. I also cure people with that. So many have been cured by me, so many!

Varvara bulü heals using the items she described whilst also chanting an *okumak* or charm. Similarly to the way she received both her instruction to heal and the implements she uses, she ascribes the words with which she heals directly to *Panaiya*. "Nobody taught me, I can't read, not a single letter! And I don't know any Russian or Romanian, nothing! […]. The prayer comes from *Allah*, from me myself and from *Allah*."

Varvara bulü also recounted some instances when her cures had been successful. Amongst her patients had been a nun from a local convent who had been suffering from arthritis; after she had visited her three times and massaged her and 'read' for her a charm, she was soon able to walk again. A local priest, having seen how miraculously the nun had recovered enquired how she had been cured. The priest, who had spent twelve years in a concentration camp and had given up searching

> for relief from the pain of the injuries which afflicted him, then too visited *Varvara bulü*. In *Varvara bulü*'s words, after having been treated by her, he exclaimed, *"Tä, düştän Allahın lafı sana geldi! Brakılmayasınız hiç!"* – The words of God have come to you in a dream! Don't ever give up [healing]! This same priest, Father Nikolai, according to *Varvara bulü*, was also renowned for his healing activities and healed people in the Church in Bolgrad, "in exactly the same way I do!"

The key point I am making with this illustration is that resistance in the 'folk religious field of practice' rarely seeks to overturn the prevailing religious order or initiate reform, it rather works to recapture a vital, or 'spiritually necessary', share of religious capital and produce or transfer (out of the hands of the priestly class) some 'salvation goods'. *Varvara bulü* does not aim to undermine the clergy but creatively, through the objects she uses and the narrative she weaves, she is able to loosen the monopoly of the local priesthood and capture a share of the capital. *Varvara bulü'*s practices appropriate or transfer sacred capital into her hands. It is because she is able to do this that she also remains subject to the power and injunctions of the local clergy. *Varvara bulü'*s 'hidden economy' is based on the same currency as that of the clergy, each reinforcing the validity of the other whilst also competing for a share of the capital.

The most appropriate means to apprehend the workings of the 'folk religious field' is through a focus on everyday religious practice, such as the case above. In recent decades scholars of religion have advocated just such a methodological priority for practice (Bell 1992; 1997; Riesebrodt 2003; 2008; 2010). By shifting the primary methodological perspective to the sphere of practice and away from belief and experience, Martin Riesebrodt suggests scholars can liberate representations of religious practice from the hegemony of officially sanctioned discourses on textual interpretation and doctrinal debates and from top-down models of ideological production. Riesebrodt (2003: 100) delineates the sphere of religious practice on the basis of three central assumptions:

> There exist superhuman, extraordinary, 'amazing', in modern Western terms generally 'supernatural' personal or impersonal powers; (2) these powers control dimensions of human/social life that normal social actors cannot control directly by their own power; and (3) social actors are able to gain access to these powers.

According to this model, there exists no categorical distinction on the basis of official institutional status between social actors; all have the potential to access superhuman powers through a combination of "practical mastery" and "reflexive engagement" with the religious field of practice (Dillon 2001: 421–422). The religious field of practice relies entirely on the assumption that superhuman powers exist and the ability of some or all to gain access to them. Accordingly, practices or actions can be considered religious if they are based on what Riesebrodt (2010: 74) refers to as the "religious premise" that superhuman powers have the ability to influence and control aspects of human existence. What this premise ensures is that the authority of religious institutions is ultimately located in the metaphysical realm not within the institutions themselves. This in turn ensures that communication or intercourse with the metaphysical realm can never be entirely monopolised by religious institutions no matter how they might try to secure such a monopoly. All religious knowledge generated by elites and specialists, through the participation of the laity in the field of practice, has the potential to be contested (Dillon 2001: 422).

Amongst the various types of practices we find in religious systems, Riesebrodt (2003: 30; 2010: 75) identifies a set of practices he refers to as "interventive" (2003) or "interventionist" (2010) practices, principle amongst which are practices such prayers, spells, sacrifices, chants, vows, amulets and so on. These form the central platform of religious traditions as they represent the logical precondition of the other two categories of practice he identifies: "regulatory practices", in the form of morals and taboos, and "discursive practices" that speak *of* superhuman powers, their nature, status and will, such as the practice of theology (Riesebrodt 2010: 75–76). According to Riesebrodt's model, all other forms of practice have their basis in "interventionist practices". For those who struggle for religious capital, that is to say the goods of salvation, interventionist practices are the most valuable currency. It is no coincidence that the content of Riesebrodt's inventory of interventionist practices is also the classic stuff of 'folk religion', the practices that the category of 'folk religion' has most commonly 'picked up' from the religious field. Interventionist practices are the principle site of struggle over the means of salvation as these constitute the most basic and essential 'goods' required by the laity or the 'folk' for unmediated access to and communication with the metaphysical realm. The practical mastery and deployment of interventionist practices by the laity ensure the contested nature of this type of religious knowledge. It is here, in the struggle to access, produce and maintain a share of interventionist practices, I believe, we can identify the 'nucleus' of the 'folk religious field of practice'. Lay agents do not seek to redefine doctrines or articulate core beliefs, Riesebrodt's "discursive practices", nor do they generally attempt to alter 'regulatory regimes' or moral codes; the agency and creativity of the laity is engaged in circumventing and subverting attempts to monopolise access to the divine in relation to areas of life (and death) that affect people most immediately.

Aunt Katalin's prayers in the opening narrative of this article, besides representing an example of Riesebrodt's "interventive practices", also neatly illustrate the Bourdieuan assessment of the religious field as a struggle between the clergy and the laity to maintain control over 'salvation goods'. The 'spiritual weapon of the weak' deployed by Aunt Katalin proved a powerful means of resistance to the religious and linguistic monopoly imposed by the local Catholic Church. Her prayers not only acted as a form of spiritual resistance to ecclesiastical monopoly but were also the vehicle for ethnic resistance to linguistic assimilation and national domination. Aunt Katalin's Hungarian 'folk prayers' represent a form of 'hidden transcript' of the critique of power that would normally take place 'offstage' and which power-holders would normally not be party to. In the case of Aunt Katalin's funeral, the 'transcript' turned public and challenged the relations between the 'oppressor' and the 'dominated'. Characteristically, these processes of religious domination and resistance have aspects that are often not seen or heard in the public domain. Just as is the case with regimes of political domination, in order to study the systems at play in the religious sphere, careful attention needs to be paid to what goes on behind closed doors. In public, those who are oppressed often accept their situation, but offstage they always question their domination. The fact that religious domination and political domination often go hand in hand only strengthens the case when I argue that the 'folk religious field of practice' – the meeting place of various agentive forces; clerical and national ideological, secularising and scholarly, and the lay actors, often from amongst the most economically, politically

and socially marginalised – can best be defined by discursive contestation and acts of suppression by religious elites and acts of resistance by the laity. Aunt Katalin's prayers and *Varvara bulü*'s healings are both poignant examples of this struggle.

CONCLUSION

The above discussions and examples stem from my experience in the field in post-socialist and post-colonial Eastern Europe, which is characterised by a blend of resurgent religion, national re-awakening and new 'individualising' practices. 'Folk religion' as a category was, and still is, an important component of the national ethnological approach to identity prevalent in Central and Eastern European scholarship (Pusztai 2005: 119) and as such is inherently political. 'Folk religion' of course can and should be studied as an ideological category specific to a certain time and place and not as a universal or cross-cultural phenomenon. The particular chains of associations described above, however, demonstrate the ability of the category 'folk religion' to point to an objective reality of intersecting agencies and interests within the religious field.

The characterisation of the 'folk religious field of practice' given above may, at first glance, appear to duplicate earlier substantive models based on objective distinctions between the practices of the clerical or institutional sphere and the practices of the folk, the old 'folk' versus 'official' religion dichotomy. However, building on Bourdieu's concept of 'field', what I present here is relational rather than an oppositional model. It refers to a site of intersecting interests, relations and agencies and aims to highlight the significance of the 'power play' in operation between key actors. No other 'field' need implicitly or explicitly stand on opposition to the 'folk religious field'. 'Field' signifies rather a shifting site or intersection where the interests of power holders and diverse agencies find expression in a multiplicity of discursive practices, actions and narratives. As such, the practices of the 'folk religious field' cannot simply be defined substantively as they are the product of particular agencies intersecting at particular junctures in time and place.

'Folk religion' as a category, I suggest, serves well to signify this 'site' of the interplay between national, ecclesial, secularising and scholarly discourses and the micro-episodes of local religious actors. The site of convergence of these forces and agencies gives rise to a struggle over the 'goods of salvation' brought about by the will to control and monopolise 'interventive practices'. It is my view that the deployment of new terminology and analytical categories may, in some cases (and I do not wish to overstate this aspect of my argument), mask the political nature of a field of practice thus defined. There exists no 'neutral' or 'objective' lexicon, there are merely signifiers that succeed to a greater or lesser extent in 'picking up' from reality those phenomena intended by the scholar.

In this article, I have explored the usefulness of the term 'folk religion' in the light of arguments put forward for an alternative, 'vernacular religion'. Both terms, I would argue, have analytical potential to contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of the religious field. However, in certain contexts and in relation to certain phenomena we are justified in championing one term over another. Both the choice to adopt new terminology or to champion existing terms demands attentiveness to their respective

ideological and semantic loading. Both these approaches potentially encourage awareness of the significance of scholarly terms and categories in shaping discursive relations and ideological forces 'on the ground'.

To borrow a thought from Kocku von Stuckrad, it is the *use* of the term 'folk religion' that is the responsibility of scholars to explain. 'Folk religion' and the engagement of scholars with the 'folk religious field of practice' are profoundly political in nature. There are important dimensions to the new discourse on 'vernacular religion' that deserve the attention of scholars. In my mind principal amongst these are the reassessment of the analytical value of studies of belief and its varied expressions in narratives, behaviours and material culture and the questioning of the ideal-typological approach to folklore texts and genres (Bowman, Valk 2012: 5–6). However, as Primiano (2012: 384) has himself pointed out, the birth of 'vernacular religion' as a field of study and an analytical category need not be tied to, nor result in, the death of 'folk religion'.

NOTES

1 Csángó-Hungarians are an ethno-linguistic and religious minority (Catholics in a majority Orthodox region) living in the eastern part of Romania. Their origins and identity are contested by Hungarian and Romanian scholars, who claim the Csángós as an integral part of their respective ethnic nations. From the end of the 19th century, the Catholic Church has played a role in restricting the use of the Hungarian language in Church life in support of the Romanian national discourse on the origins of the Csángós. In 2001, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe issued a position paper in support of the protection of the cultural traditions of this vulnerable and marginalised minority calling for the provision of education and the liturgy in their native language. Since the early 1990s, Csángó-Hungarian activists have appealed to both the local Church hierarchy and directly to the Vatican for the right to have Church services in the mother tongue; this campaign is on-going. For an account of the campaign for linguistic and religious rights see Pozsony 2006: 225–249.

2 This type of evaluation of the religion of the folk is not confined to some unenlightened past. Christian Churches and missions continue to campaign against "folk religion" using these same lines of argument. For a recent example see Hiebert et al. 2000. Graham W. Monteith too, despite advocating a less judgmental approach through the use of his preferred term 'vernacular religion' maintains that the role of theology remains to "capture the truth" and 'correct' examples of "scantily worked out religious sentiment" (2006: 426).

3 The US context presents a different configuration and understanding of 'folk religion' largely due to the "absence of nationalism as a component of folklore" in North America (Ben-Amos 1998: 259).

4 This is a slightly shortened version of the account previously published in Kapaló 2011: 176–178.

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