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**Olga IAKOVLIEVA (Odesa)**

Odesa National I. I.Mechnikov University, Ukraine

olga.yakovleva.1920@gmail.com

**Viktoriiia HRYHORASH (Odesa)**

Odesa National I. I.Mechnikov University, Ukraine

viktoriiagrygorash@gmail.com

**RITUALS ON CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS AS A GENDER-MARKED  
DISCOURSE IN TRADITIONAL UKRAINIAN CULTURE**

The article reveals one of the longstanding oppositions of the male and female principles, taking into account axiological characteristics. The reasons for the destruction of patriarchal gender stereotypes, which are preserved in the Ukrainian ceremonial discourse, in particular during the Christmas holidays, are considered. The manifestations of stereotypes of femininity and masculinity in rituals during the preparation and the holiday itself (Christmas) in different regions of Ukraine are analysed in detail. The authors have identified, described and explained regional „inconsistencies“ in the manifestations of traditional gender stereotypes, taking into account the peculiarities of the mythological outlook of our ancestors. In the entire Ukrainian ceremonial discourse and at Christmas as well, ritual actions were associated with imitative and protective magic. Such actions were usually performed only by women. Christmas was no exception in this regard, although in some regions men were involved in ritual acts of magic and even performed such acts on their own or with assistants (a son or a wife). Such destruction of gender stereotypes is explained neither by the substitution of the subject in Christmas rituals, nor by the masculine-centricity of Christmas in general, but by the fact that while celebrating the birth of the sun (during paganism) or Jesus Christ (after Christianity), men served as the spirit of God, the very deity, who was omnipresent and helpful to a man. Traditional gender stereotypes are preserved and presented in the Christmas rituals: a woman constructs and protects the family micro-world within her home, and a man, like the Highest, takes care of the macro world.

Keywords: *gender stereotype, femininity, masculinity, ritual discourse, ritual, Christmas, Holy Evening, symbolic actions*

## 1. Introduction

From the end of the last century to the present day, gender analysis in the language studies in Ukraine has been an integral part of such fields of knowledge as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, ethnolinguistics, linguocultural studies (Selivanova 2010: 335), as well as folkloristics (Ivanovska 2012), pedagogics (Vykhor 2017), ethnology, cultural studies (Kys 2012; Mayerchuk 2011), philosophy and psychology (Hapon 2002). Therefore, it is fair to say that since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not only linguistics but also other humanities have been experiencing a kind of „gender boom“ (Stavyczka 2003: 30). In the 2010s, the gender aspect of language policy, aimed at overcoming sexism in language, deserved special attention (Stavyczka 2010: 13).

The current state is characterized by an „explosion of scientific interest in the problem of gender and its modern transformations“ (Marchyshyna 2018: 9) both in our country and in other countries of the Slavic world, including Belarus (Kovalyova 2002; Kovalyova 2003), Russia (Uzenjova 2001; Uzenjova 2002), Montenegro (Bulatović & Čarapić 2018), etc.

In view of the above, gender multidisciplinary research in various aspects remains relevant.

N. Gocza (2013) writes about different approaches to gender issues in linguistics. The peculiarities of gender studies in Ukraine are characterized by Yu. Maslova (2015). The analysis of gender linguistic studies in Ukraine is carried out by O. Levchenko (2017). The research of L. Vasylyeva (2017) is devoted to the existence of gender asymmetry and gender stereotyping in different languages of the world. Gender identity on the material of English postmodern texts is investigated by A. Marchyshyna (2018).

Taking into consideration that, first, gender stereotypes generated by sexual dimorphism are being destroyed; second, the process of globalization is running parallel with the revival of national cultures; third, the passage from the patriarchal to the egalitarian system of social and sexual relations has not yet been completed (Marchyshyna 2018: 83; Vykhor 2017: 26), particular importance is given to the research of gender stereotypes in the traditional culture of different peoples, including the Ukrainians. The common beliefs of Slavic ancestors about the dual unity of men and women in the family also affect the gender culture of society as a whole.

The **aim** of the article is to describe the semantics of the gender-marked ritual actions on Christmas holidays of the Ukrainians. The **objectives** are to analyse ritual actions on Christmas holidays according to the folk ethnic calendar; describe the semantics of such ritual actions; identify gender stereotypes and „inconsistencies“ in feminine/masculine manifestations in the

ritual context before Christmas; compare the binary unity of masculine and feminine principles as one of the fundamental principles of the formation of the world with gender-marked ritual actions on Christmas Eve. The **object** of our research is a calendar ritual discourse (winter cycle) in the traditional culture of the Ukrainians. The **subject** is the semantics of gender-marked ritual actions of ceremonial discourse on Christmas holidays.

## 2. Results and Discussion

According to M. Gimbutas (2006), in the Neolithic era, there was no dichotomy between the sexes of men and women, but there was an idea that their fusion produces the energy necessary to increase the vital forces of the environment. In addition, the researcher dates back the indications for the existence of a sacred marriage, an image of embracing couples to the era of the early Neolithic.

M. Jeliade (1998) analyzed the mythological formulas of primary integrity, which consisted of all binary oppositions, including the opposition of male and female. The researcher wrote about bisexuality as a manifestation of the divine and that in all myths about divine androgyny and about a bisexual original man, the exemplary models of human behaviour were found. That is why androgyny is symbolically enlivened and reupdated through various rituals in many peoples of the world.

It is known that binary oppositions, including the opposition *male – female*, are one of the most ancient archetypal forms of cultural understanding of the world, based on balance and harmony, organic coexistence of everything in the world (Zykova 2011: 86–88). The notion that the masculine principle is complemented by the feminine one and they have opposite meanings (the masculine is positive whereas the feminine is negative) was formed and retained in the mythological consciousness of the ancestors (Iakovlyeva 2003).

The origin of the concept of binarity was analyzed by V. Taranets (Taranets 2008). The myths of different peoples clearly show the understanding of the origin of the world as something chaotic, whole and indivisible, which then breaks down into parts as two-part opposition. V. Taranets (ibid.: 104) proved this idea by examining the etymology of specific words, including the lexeme „man“, the splitting of which into two parts with the opposition *man/woman* is evident in Indo-European languages. The scholar notes that „in those ancient times the concept of „man“ did not have the generic meaning as in modern languages, but existed in specific varieties such as a mother, a hunter, a warrior and others... The cogitative splitting of the concept „man“ implied the birth of one of the members of the binary opposition. The observa-

tions of linguists show that in the contrast *man/woman*, the primary one was a woman as more significant for the age of the matriarchy in the family.

The creation of the universe in the representation of ancestors was the prototype of a human family. Therefore, in the celestial family, the „Sun“, the „Moon“, and „small stars“ (their children) were stood out (Nechui-Levitsky 2003: 13–14).

Analyzing the folklore texts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we noticed that the owner of the house more often appeared in the image of the moon, the wife – in the image of the sun, their children – in the image of the stars. The Sun-woman is an Indo-European image (known to the Slavs, Balts, Germans, Indians, and Hittites) (Dudko 2003: 52). In this regard, etymological studies of linguists which prove the secondariness of the name of the sun in the pair of the *moon/sun* are useful (Taranets 1999: 67–72). Such evidence suggests that the folklore texts in which the moon symbolizes the female principle in the creation of the universe (by analogy with the creation of a family) reflect the echo of ancient times of matriarchy, and this symbol is more ancient.

Over time, a different hierarchy of dependency is established, as reflected in the texts where the Moon symbolizes the male master in the family. This is the evidence of replacing of matriarchy by patriarchy.

In the ceremonial texts until now, there is no clear distinction that the Moon is a man and the Sun is a woman. For instance, in wedding songs the following fragments are preserved: ...*Young Marysya came to the table with her friends like the moon with the stars...* (Dolenha-Khodakovskiy 1974: 194). *A red raspberry grew ripe, standing in the meadow in the clear sun. Marisenko burst into tears, standing in front of her father* (Dolenha-Khodakovskiy 1974: 194–198).

Modern studies in the humanities have ascertained the destruction of the patriarchal stereotype: „a man is a breadwinner, a woman is a housekeeper“ (Marchyshyna 2018: 92). However, this stereotype, with all its variants and transformations, which, in our opinion, is engraved in multifaceted folk texts, is not the focus of scholars nowadays. A well-known Ukrainian folklorist M. Dmytrenko (2011: 286), describing carols, notes that „the central place in the rituals of caroling is taken by the songs addressed to the master and his family“, whereas the „there are not so many songs in honour of the mistress“ (ibid.: 290).

In the ethnocultural study by M. Mayerchyk (2011: 58), there is a section on gender distribution of functions and roles in the ritual, in which the author states the quantitative advantage of female actions in Ukrainian rituals of the family cycle in contrast to more labile and variable „male“ genres (fairy tales, anecdotes, etc.) in traditional culture.

The Ukrainian folklorist O. Ivanovskaya (2012: 141), considering the gender and age subjectivity in the festive reality of the Ukrainians, notes that folklorists do not often pay attention to the fact that gender and age factors play a decisive role in the creation of festive-playing habits. The researcher notes a clear regulation of the relations of age and gender groups in the context of Ukrainian national holidays and a prime example of such a regulation was calendar holidays, which subsequently gave way to family ones (Ivanovskaya 2012: 143).

Ritual discourse in the broad sense, including rituals on winter holidays, is understood as a text whose semantics of ritual symbolic actions embodies typical patriarchal gender stereotypes. In this study, the following definition is considered to be relevant: *gender stereotype* is a stable idea of gender roles and behaviours of men and women engraved in the traditional culture of the Ukrainians, in particular, in the rituals of the winter cycle.

Analysing such texts (Iakovlyeva 2014), we have repeatedly encountered the variability of ritual actions in different regions of our country, and the variability of the verbal part of the ceremonies. The ritual actions performed during the Christmas holidays are no exception in this regard. S. Kylymnyk (1964: 17), who elaborately described Ukrainian holidays, related to a calendar ritual, noticed differences in the celebration of winter holidays between the southern and northern regions of Ukraine.

It is also important for our research to focus on V. Propp's (2007: 48) remarks that, first, every calendar holiday must be studied taking into account the peculiarities of other holidays of the whole annual cycle; and ideally, taking into consideration the individual rituals of family cycle rites, that is, to analyse the ritual discourse as a communicative situation, the peculiarities of which are that the basis of communication is a system of syncretic symbols whose meaning has either been transformed or forgotten over time (Iakovlyeva 2014: 6, 72–74); secondly, calendar holidays are agrarian holidays related to farming (Propp 2007: 47).

Christmas has long been not only one of the biggest calendar holidays (Skurativskij 1994: 19) but also a family holiday in which all the family members participated. Women cleaned houses that had to be whitewashed twice, painted a stove or a chimney, and decorated images with garden and forest potions (Kylymnyk 1964: 17); everything had to be washed: windows, doors, benches, shelves (Skurativskij 1994: 23). The housewife bought new dishes in advance, sewed new linen for all the family members – everything had to be new before the birthday of the sun, which religion associated with the birth of Jesus Christ (Skurativskij 1994: 28).

Calendar and family rites are associated with the fundamental idea of life and death. They vividly illustrate the passage to either a new season or to another world, a passage to a different status. The process of passage is dangerous, and therefore requires certain protective actions that have been developed over the centuries (Iakovlyeva 2014: 75–79). Therefore, a clean house as a renovated dwelling, new dishes, new clothes, etc. before Christmas symbolized a new life in the family: more prosperous and happier.

It was forbidden to work on holidays, therefore, on the eve „men also did not rest“: dry firewood was prepared; barns, stables, pantries, yards were cleaned; sleighs were repaired, as well as the cart that had never been used for Christmas. Thus, everything was cleaned up in all sectors of the household (Kylymnyk 1964: 17).

„To clean up“ meant to join the highest order, the world harmony: „All the living and the dead in the household have to meet the solemn moment of Holy Evening in their places. Nothing can be out of the house this evening, in someone else’s hands, i.e. borrowed or left somewhere“ (Voropaj 1993: 46). Therefore, the everyday actions that were obligatory for women and men on the eve of Christmas are considered ritual and of symbolic importance: the organisation of the microcosm of a family by analogy with the macrocosm of the universe.

In the myths of the arrangement of the universe, „the creation of the cosmos from the chaos“ is purely masculine. Only women participated in the ritual recreation of new home space, the *reconstruction of a new cosmos*, i.e., cleaning up before Christmas (Mayerchyk 2011: 60). For this reason, the long-standing household chores were the duty of a woman, which is stated in folk proverbs: *In the house, a woman holds three corners whereas her husband the fourth one; the house is kept not on the ground but by a woman; where the working woman is, there is a clean room* (Mayerchyk 2011: 94–96).

M. Jeliade (2002: 49–50) notes that „The house is not just an object... it is a world that people build for themselves, imitating divine creation, cosmogony“; and a man himself is responsible for both the maintenance of his dwelling and its renovation.

However, there are „inconsistencies“ in the manifestation of traditional gender stereotypes in the rituals. S. Kylymnyk’s (1964: 18) study describes the household chores that were performed by „four hands“ on Christmas Eve, i.e., together, by a man and a woman. In particular, two or three days before the holiday, the master and his mistress made candles from the wax of their apiary, while uttering special „words“, later – the words of a prayer.

Traditionally, as stated in most sources, when preparing for the Holy Supper at dawn, the mistress produced new or live fire, burnt up „twelve logs,

which had been stocked and dried for twelve days of the last month, cooked twelve meals. Children helped the mistress, and especially, her eldest daughter“ (Voropaj 1993: 45). On the contrary, there is information that during „special ceremonies“ the wood was burnt in the oven by both the master and the mistress to prepare the necessary dishes; how they lit a stove *together* with the „live fire“, „put kutia and uzvar“ into the stove, kneaded dough for knyses, worked *together* and put them *together* in a stove (Kylymnyk 1964: 19).

The majority of ethnographic sources provide information on household chores, making a new fire, exclusively by the mistress. In our opinion, the involvement of a man in such work can be interpreted in different ways. Firstly, as an echo of the ritual androgynization, which M. Jeliade (1998; 2002) wrote about. The fusion of masculine and feminine means a violation of the cosmic order. In other words, it is a symbolic restoration of the Chaos that preceded the Creation. The pre-cosmogonic Chaos is an inexhaustible source of forces that existed before the creation of the world (i.e, before the establishment of a certain order), and through which cosmogony could be realized. Thus, the pagan holiday of the rising sun corresponds to the world at the time of its creation, which required the fusion of two principles – male and female. Secondly, after the adoption of Christianity, masculine-centrism reigned in a patriarchal family. Thus, our position on understanding the role of a man in the preparation of ritual dishes is based on the facts given by V. Skurativskij (1994: 29): „The master was considered the most respected person. He acted as an old priest and his words, advice or order were considered indisputable to be performed“. This information indicates that a man symbolized the presence of God or the Holy Spirit during sacred ritual actions on Christmas Eve, including the preparation of meals for the Holy Supper. The traditional role of a mistress in baking ceremonial bread (as well as in the preparation of other dishes) is presented in an ancient carol: *Is mistress at home? She's at home in a new chamber. What is she doing? – Knitting cakes* (Vojtovych 2005: 230).

The following episode reveals the fact that a man during the Christmas holidays played the role of a deity: the day before the father with his son was making two sheaves of hay on a threshing floor. After that, they went to the river with these sheaves, washed their faces with spring water, returned to their house and knocked on the door. The mistress, when hearing the knock, asked, „Who is knocking on the door?“ „The holy spirit with calaches (soft sweet bread) and holy water!“ answered the man. Then he walked through the door and said, „Generous and good evening to you!“ One of the sheaves was laid on the table, and it symbolised the crib where Jesus Christ was born. The other one was Didukh, the symbol of the passed away ancestors who looked after the future harvest (Skurativskij 1994: 33).

The Holy Evening on Christmas Eve (Holy Supper, Holy Evening, Rich Evening) is the holiday of „the birth of the light of Dazhbog“, i.e., the Sun (Vojtovych 2005: 465), and therefore the rebirth of the whole life after winter, which used to be associated with death. All the ritual actions during the day, such as cooking kutia, sowing grain, making Didukh, and others, were connected with the peasants' bakery activities, with the magic of creating a prototype of a rich harvest, a happy family life in peace and harmony. The Ukrainian farmers believed that by showing the gods (during paganism), or the saints, after the adoption of Christianity, wealth and prosperity in the family, it would be possible to expect even more protection and help, which would provide, among other things, a better harvest. This idea is reflected in the texts of Christmas carols: *Generous evening, good evening! At dawn, the plough is ploughing... And the mother of God is carrying food, and Saint Peter is following her. And she brought food and said, „Plough, kiddies, mountains, valleys and wide fields, we will sow rye, and wheat, and all kinds of pasture...“* (Dolenha-Khodakovskiy 1974: 124–125).

Nowadays almost all regions of Ukraine lost the rituals related to Didukh, which were called „Bring Christmas to the house“. However, a long time ago a father and his son brought it to the house, bowing to Didukh and sprinkling it with holy water. After praying the father said, „Let us bring Christmas to the house!“ (Kylymnyk 1964: 55).

O. Voropaj (1993: 46–47) presents another option of bringing Didukh to the house. This ritual was performed exclusively by the master himself. Stepping across the door, he removed his hat and greeted his mistress as if he had seen her for the first time. She asked, „What are you carrying?“ The man replied, „Gold to be wealthy all the year!“ Then the master congratulated the whole family on Holy Evening, and after that, lifted Didukh above the table and put in the special corner (pokut) under the icons.

*Gold* in this ritual had a symbolic meaning of both the sun on which the harvest depended and all the cereal plants whose symbolic meaning was Didukh. Only God was capable of sending the sun and a good harvest to the Earth, according to ancient ancestors' beliefs. Therefore, during the ritual of bringing Didukh into the house, a man was similar to a deity.

In the traditional culture, female behaviour was usually characterised by subordination to men in the family (a father, a brother, a husband, etc.). However, in the rituals and customs, the activity of a woman, both as a subject and as an object, was evident (Mayerchyk 2011: 58). Rituals on Christmas Eve demonstrate certain transformations in this regard, given that the man (master) has been assigned the role of a deity or the spirit of God. This idea is confirmed by the texts of Christmas carols, for instance: *The Lord has come*

*from the Heaven to the Earth ... And in that house, everything speaks like angels. In his yard, there is God's joy, in his stable God's grace... Be healthy, my master!* (Dolenha-Khodakovskiy 1974: 125).

Ritual discourse related to the birth of a child and, by analogy, the birth of the Sun and Jesus Christ, in folk beliefs, belongs to the rites of passage (Iakovlyeva 2004: 111–112). Ritual actions aimed at protecting individuals or families as a whole were extremely important in such ceremonies. Traditionally, they were performed by women. Before Christmas, to „close the mouth“ to her enemies, the mistress stuffed all the holes in benches with oakum (Voropaj 1993: 46). It could have been straw that was called Didukh. Who else but not the spirit of the ancestors could better protect the whole generation from hostile words and actions?

The magic protective effect was the following: the mistress tied as many knots on the rope as there were enemies. When everyone was having dinner, she sat on a rope, which meant that as a result of such imitative magic, she tied the mouth to all enemies, and they would remain silent throughout the year.

In another option of protective rituals, the master took part. He hammered holes in the benches (so that the evil was not hidden!), and the mistress „poured out these holes“ beforehand (Kylymnyk 1964: 26). It was the master who smoked the house and sprinkled it with holy water, „cut down“ the thresholds, so that no trouble came, fed cattle with the „Holy Supper“ (took a few spoons of kutia, a spoon of other dishes, mixed with flour), speaking to them. When he returned to the house, the mistress closed the door tightly, and the master sat in the corner, where Didukh stood, the symbol of the deity of the future harvest (ibid.: 24, 28). This night belonged to the spirits; therefore, the spirit of God came to dine with the man, and they closed doors and protected themselves from evils.

People believed that the ancestors' souls were also sitting at the table with the whole family that night, so before the mistress covered the benches, and before they sat down, everyone was blowing so as not to sit down on „souls“.

The master invited the Sun, the Moon, stars, rains, etc., as well as the deceased family members for supper. In the Transcarpathian region, the following protective magic actions were performed: the master and his son went around the house three times. They carried bread, kutia, coals, incense and a candle. Crosses were placed on the doorways and between the horns of the animals, casting spells on evil forces. The master closed the door and sprinkled with poppy seeds „from witches“; he placed garlic and an axe „from wolves“ near the threshold (Skurativskij 1994: 33–34; Kylymnyk 1964: 21).

This ritual used to have variants. V. Skurativskij (1994: 33) adds the following information to the aforementioned ritual: *when the sun was absent,*

*the master went around the house with his wife, who wore a man's hat.* O. Voropaj (1993: 47) notices: they went around the yard with „festive“ bread, honey and poppy seeds, the *master* and the *mistress*. „At the stable where cows were standing, the *mistress* densely sprinkled with the seeds of wild poppy, so that the witches, while picking them, could not come to cattle. ...Going around, the woman put on the man's hat on her head to walk bareheaded all year long“ (Skurativskyj 1994: 47).

V. Propp (2007: 50–59; 1995: 120–128) wrote about the exchange of various elements of clothing as a gender feature in order to make the participants of ritual actions laugh, analyzing specific rituals of family and calendar cycles. A. Van Gennep (2011: 50) noted that the replacement of clothing was an important element in the rites of passage.

M. Mayerchyk (2011: 202), a historian and an ethnographer, devoted a separate section of the monograph to the problem of clothing as a sign in the customs and rituals of the Ukrainians. The author considers that „the use of the clothing elements of the opposite sex is a poorly researched aspect of the rite“, despite some contributions to the development of this issue made by M. Sumtsov and Ye. Kaharov. The following ideas of the researcher are to be paid special attention: 1) in ancient times, clothing was considered not just a symbolic body; it created a new social body (ibid.: 145); 2) the significant elements of clothing are a headdress, a belt and shoes, which in folklore are associated with the top, the middle and the bottom in the creation of the universe (ibid.: 190); 3) the use of the elements of the gender-relevant clothing concerning another gender may not only cause humour and laughter in the ceremonial discourse but also acquire the value of sacredness (ibid.: 203).

The importance of headdresses in the traditional culture of different peoples is evidenced by a separate ritual in the wedding ceremony – covering the heads of a bride and a groom. The wreath has a symbolic meaning of maidenhood. The headdress of married women – a kerchief, an ochipok, a serpanok – besides symbolizing the passage of a girl to the social status of a wife, had an apotropaic (protective) function. The groom had to wear a hat during the wedding ceremony (Vojtovych 2005: 599).

The attitudes of women to their own headdress are evidenced by data provided by the Ukrainian ethnographer and anthropologist Hv. Vovk. When the researcher asked one of the women to bare her knee, it did not provoke any resistance. However, when he asked to take off her ochipok, he almost always heard indignation and protest (Vovk 1995: 127).

During the wedding ceremony of the Ukrainians, the groom put on his hat on the head of the bride, and the bride remained in it. In Chernihiv region, a mother-in-law put a groom's hat on the bride's head, with which she slept,

and this symbolized a young woman's adherence to her husband's family (Vojtovych 2005: 599). It is believed that at the wedding the theme of androgyny was unfolded symmetrically for both the bride and the groom (Mayerchuk 2011: 205).

The situation the day before Christmas Eve, when a wife put on her husband's hat, from our point of view, cannot be interpreted unequivocally. First, there are differences in the ritual itself: a woman in a man's hat went with a master to perform protective magical actions when a son was absent; secondly, she wore a man's hat when she was walking with her husband to stay bareheaded all year long. In our opinion, in the first case, this action had such a sacred meaning: in the absence of a son, in a man's hat, the woman could multiply the man's positive energy, which, on Christmas Eve, symbolized divine energy and promoted well-being. In the second variant, when the participation in this ritual allowed the woman to go bareheaded, i.e., with loose hair throughout the year, has a different meaning, which is related to the symbolism of hair in the traditional Slavic culture.

The attitude toward human hair in general, and women's hair in particular, was ambivalent in traditional ancestral culture. First of all, a plait is „virgin's beauty“; covering hair during a wedding ceremony symbolically deprived a young girl of beauty. During the ritual of taking hair out of braids, mourning songs were sung: *...I feel sorry for the fair hair, and the girlish beauty...* (Dolenha-Khodakovskiy 1974: 254).

Secondly, a girl's braid was also a symbol of will, i.e., the girl's free life at her parents' house and her pride. It should be noted that covering the head of a girl (woman) when the braid is not hidden, had a symbolic meaning of health, beauty, wealth and fertility. O. Potebnja (2007: 152) draws an analogy between the covering of trees with young leaves, which is a sign of revival and renewal, and the covering of the head of a young woman, which should be reborn in the form of a mistress, a mother and a defender of the family.

The researcher has combined all the ideas about hair: this is beauty, pride and will, confirming the beliefs of the Germans that long hair and a beard are the signs of a free and proud person. According to the scholar, covering hair deprived a woman (a girl) of mysterious power, the ability to divine and conjure. Such ceremonial actions were performed by women with their heads uncovered (Potebnja 2007: 151–152). It is known that, according to folk customs, women were letting their hair down as a sign of complaint (Zhajvoronok 2006: 488).

Thus, wearing a hat by a woman in the pre-Christmas Eve ritual in order to go bareheaded, from our point of view, may be related to the desire of the mistress to obtain the right to freely and independently participate in all

female magic rituals in the context of calendar and family rituals. Christmas ritual discourse in this respect was special: a woman had the right to put on a man's hat on the eve of the Holy Evening only once (Vojtovych 2005: 600), and only this evening could she receive divine energy as a result of androgyny. Christmas as the rite of passage was dangerous for its participants, and first and foremost for the master and the mistress. As liminal people, they needed protection. The woman was more vulnerable in this regard, since the female principle traditionally had a negative meaning. Thus, the hat on the head of the mistress could perform a purely protective function by analogy with the hat of invisibility, which protected the hero from enemies.

The main ceremonial food this evening was kutia or God's („divine“, sacrificial) food and uzvar („divine drink“). Hv. Vovk (1995: 188) describes these ancient dishes: „Boiled wheat or barley with honey and boiled dried vegetables in the water are reminiscent of the Neolithic era“. These dishes, including kutia, are associated with a special ritual on Christmas holidays, which is called: „Carry kutia to the corner (Nesty kutiu na pokutyu)“. In some regions, this was done by the youngest boy in the family, to whom his father had woven new woollen gloves the day before. The boy recited, „Nesu kutiu na pokutyu, on the green hay for bees (chickens) to sit down!“ (Skurativskij 1994: 30). Most likely, it was a teenager because only a child aged 12–14 could carry kutia in the hot pot.

In the south of our country, the mistress herself carried kutia, and then uzvar, performing acts of imitative magic: she ordered attendants to cluck in order to make chickens lay eggs better; she put dishes and pulled kids' wisps of hair to keep the chicks crested. In the Cherkasy and Chernihiv regions, the mistress imitated a sitting hen when she served kutia to eat (ibid).

S. Kylymnyk (1964: 25) described how the master and his mistress laid a table on Christmas Eve: in the middle of the table, he put knysh for holy spirits (knysh is ceremonial bread, which in the old days was made mostly on a funeral feast. On Generous and Hungry kutia such bread was also necessarily baked (Zhajvoronok 2006: 293), because before dinner ancestors were remembered). She put palyanytsya (the Ukrainian bread) on the table. Baking of ritual bread – knysh (masculine gender in Ukrainian) and palyanytsya (feminine gender in Ukrainian) – was a gender-marked ritual. The master put a bowl with pies on a table. Then he inserted a wax candle into palyanytsya, lighting it to burn all night, symbolizing the sun (Kylymnyk 1964: 25). Taking into account the fact that almost all the magic actions during the Christmas holidays were performed by a husband while his wife and his children only assisted him, it was the master who turned to burning candles: „*Shine, the holy sun, to holy souls and us alive...*“ (ibid.).

The master put kutia on the table and covered it with knysh, and the mistress – put uzvar and covered it with palyanytsya. At the same time, the children imitated the sounds of a brood hen and the hum of bees (Kylymnyk 1964: 26). We believe that the ritual when a man put kutia as „divine“ food on the table is more ancient because he was the embodiment of the „God’s spirit“ that night and laid the table. This ritual is presented in the carol: ...*The master is walking around the chamber, putting the tables in three rows, putting silk tablecloths, silver plates, steel knives, inviting God for supper...* (Voropaj 1993: 64).

In the ceremonial discourse on Christmas holidays, many different rituals were performed. They were important signs regarding the future harvest, cattle breed, weather, marriage etc. Such rituals were performed by men and women, young men and women and even children. A strikingly gender-marked ritual was (and it still is nowadays) greeting neighbours and relatives on Christmas Day. It is a firm belief that the first carollers should be male representatives who can provide welfare in the following year. A bad sign was the situation when firstly a woman came to the house on Christmas. Therefore, as a rule, girls did not participate in singing carols. They believed that the more boys came to the house, the richer the year would be for the family.

### **3. Conclusions and ideas for further research**

The description of the main rituals as gender-marked discourse on the Christmas holidays in the traditional culture of the Ukrainians allows us to draw the following conclusions: 1) calendar and family rituals have a vivid gender sign of femininity, due to the dominant role of women in them. The ritual discourse in some regions of Ukraine on Christmas Eve was an exception in this regard because most ritual actions aimed at the protection and welfare of the family were performed by men whereas women and children assisted them; in most territories, these rituals, like all others, were feminine-centred; 2) the masculine-centricity of the ritual discourse on Christmas holidays can be explained by the dominant role of a man in the patriarchal family, who before the birth of the God’s son was given magic power, i.e., was identified with the deity and, as a result, participated in the rituals; 3) in some rituals, which undoubtedly underwent certain transformations, the ancient information about the microworld of a family, which was taken care of by women, was preserved. Putting everything in order in the world is a function of God, therefore, outside the house, i.e., in the yard, in the barn, in the pantry, a man put everything in order; 4) wearing a man’s hat by a woman on the eve of the Holy Evening could have had several symbolic meanings: a) protecting

a woman as a liminal person from evil spirits; b) the meaning of androgyny: the fusion of two principles – male and female into a single deity at the beginning of the creation of the world, which a holiday of the birth of the Sun, or Christmas was considered; c) wearing a hat to go bareheaded throughout a year could mean getting by a woman the right to participate in all the purely feminine rituals of the calendar and family cycle, in which women often let their hair down; 5) a vivid gender-marked ritual after the Holy Supper was (in some regions it remains even nowadays) visiting relatives and neighbours to greet them with the holiday, give them dinner, sing carols. This ritual was performed until sunrise, „because on Christmas night good souls of spirits and the god of the harvest remained in the household until sunrise“ (Skurativskij 1994: 36). A boy or a male representative needed to come into the house first. If a woman came first, it was considered a misfortune. The male carollers were awaited impatiently because it was believed that the larger number of them came, the richer New Year would be.

These findings show the need to further research gender stereotypes in the ritual discourse of family holidays and other calendar rituals, as well as the analysis of symbolic meanings of the exchange of clothing among people of the opposite sex, in particular, during wedding ceremonies and in the ritual of birth.

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**Olga IAKOVLIEVA & Viktoriia HRYHORASH**

**RITUALI NA BOŽIĆNIM PRAZNICIMA KAO RODNO  
OBILJEŽENI DISKURS U TRADICIONALNOJ  
UKRAJINSKOJ KULTURI**

Rad otkriva jednu od dugotrajnih opozicija muškog i ženskog principa, uzimajući u obzir aksiološke karakteristike. Razmatraju se razlozi uništenja patrijarhalnih rodnih stereotipa koji su sačuvani u ukrajinskom ceremonijalnom diskursu, posebno tokom božićnih praznika. Detaljno se analiziraju manifestacije stereotipa o ženstvenosti i muškosti u ritualima tokom pripreme i trajanja samoga praznika (Božića) u različitim krajevima Ukrajine. Autori su identifikovali, opisali i objasnili regionalne „nedosljednosti“ u manifestacijama tradicionalnih rodnih stereotipa, uzimajući u obzir osobitosti mitoloških pogleda naših predaka. U cjelokupnom ukrajinskom ceremonijalnom diskursu, i na Božić takođe, obredne akcije povezane su s imitacijskom i zaštitničkom magijom. Takve radnje obično su izvodile samo žene. Božić u tom pogledu nije bio izuzetak, mada su u nekim krajevima muškarci bili uključeni u obredne magijske radnje, pa su takva djela izvršavali samostalno ili s pomoćnicima (sin ili žena). Takva destrukcija rodnih stereotipa ne objašnjava se zamjenom subjekta božićnih rituala, niti muškocentričnošću samoga Božića, već činjenicom da su, tokom slavljenja rođenja sunca (za vrijeme poganstva) ili Isusa Hrista (nakon hrišćanstva), ljudi služili Božjem duhu, samom božanstvu, koje je bilo sveprisutno i korisno čovjeku. Tradicionalni rodni stereotipi sačuvani su i predstavljeni u božićnim ritualima: žena izgrađuje i štiti porodični mikro svijet u svojem domu, a muškarac se, poput Najviših, brine o makro svijetu.

Ključne riječi: *rodni stereotip, ženstvenost, muškost, ritualni diskurs, ritual, Božić, Badnje večer, simboličke akcije*