

Foreigner-related omens and beliefs in the East Slavic folklore: determinants of regional destination attractiveness

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Abstract—Ethnic tourism is employed by a great number of countries to facilitate economic development, especially in remote and backward areas. Though a substantial literature is devoted to the impacts of ethnic tourism, little research has been done on examining the cultural issues associated with ethnic tourism. The paper focuses on folkloric tokens, presages and beliefs related to ethnic strangers or persons of another faith spread along the East Slavs. They are considered as factors which can negatively affect the destination attractiveness of the region. The urgency and novelty of the research is determined by the lack of knowledge of this topic both in Slavic and foreign studies. Based on the involvement of a wide range of sources and field research materials, the authors come to the conclusion that the analyzed omens and tokens are a linguistic declaration of taboos, permissions, warnings, advice, etc. in situations used by the tradition-bearers to establish proper relationship with foreigners.

Keywords—*ethnic tourism, destination attractiveness, folklore, traditions, omen, belief, ethnic stranger*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to World Travel & Tourism Council, in 2018, tourism generated 10.4% of global GDP and its total impact of 9.3% of world employment makes it the world's leading job sustainers with almost 219 million jobs created. Despite a considerable tourism potential of the East Slavic countries, its economic benefits are significantly lower. Tourism generated 3.47% of GDP in Russia, 1.92 % in Ukraine and 1.43 % in Belarus [1]. The increase of the destination attractiveness of these countries that possess a wide array of sites associated with the cultural or historical heritage of diverse ethnic groups is an effective tool to improve the economics of the state.

Though threatened by urbanization and globalization, the traditions have been carefully preserved throughout the world. And while some myths and legends, fairy tales and superstitions have proliferated in number of countries, others are geographically unique. The East Slavic countries offer the folklorist materials probably unparalleled in Europe for richness and diversity, not only much that has collected, but also a great deal more that exists alive and functional in the countryside itself. Many circumstances of the East Slav's history encouraged the development and survival of folk cultural elements not to be found elsewhere in such variety and quantity.

Definitions of folklore are as numberless and diverse as the interpretations of a popular tale. They result from the nature of folklore itself and are rooted in the historical development of the given concept. The earliest definition dated 1846 was used to replace the other terms, including popular antiquities and literature. W.J. Thoms was credited with inventing the term *folklore* (from Saxon word *lore of the people*) in his letter to Athenæum, a literary journal running in London from 1828 to 1921 [2, p. 327]. W.R. Bascom has formulated his definition, "folklore is a myth, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, verse and a variety of other forms of artistic expression whose medium is the spoken word" [3, p. 333]. According to French sociological anthropologist A. Varagnac, folklore represents a particular mode of collective and spontaneous thought, which does not imply any doctrine or theory [4, p. 18]. S. Thompson considers folklore to be a form of human communication aimed at handing something down from one individual to another and preserved either by customs or memory rather than written record [5, p. 4]. R. Lyell exemplifies folklore as the collective objectifications of basic emotions, such as awe, fear, hatred, reverence, and desire, on the part the social group [6, p. 5]. A prominent folklorist A.M. Espinosa clarifies folklore as popular knowledge, which mankind has experienced, learned, and practiced across the epochs, and draws a borderline between popular, naïve knowledge and scientific one [7, p. 4]. A. Dundes constructs folklore as a "mirror" of culture. He points out that at an ideational level the folklore is aggregated in fairy tales, legends, proverbs, and riddles, called him "folk ideas" [8, p. 17-18]. J. Mish declares that folklore is an entire body of ancient wide-spread beliefs, customs and traditions which have survived among the less educated social strata. The scholar delineated this body as fairy tales, myth and legends, superstitions, festival rites, traditional games, folk songs, popular sayings, arts, crafts, folk dances, and the like [9, p. 401].

As it was mentioned above, folklore exists in diverse forms, involving omens, tokens, and presages. The primary goal of this paper is to explicate the features and probable roots of the East Slavic omen lore referred to foreigners or people of a different religious background. Tokens and omens are verbal formulas manifesting, without doubt, the oldest beliefs. Indeed, the origin of most of them to be found in man's attempts to explain the phenomena of nature, and in an effort to propitiate an angry deity and to invite a better fortune. In Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, they gave birth

to mythology with its pagan rites and ceremonies. During the Dark and Middle Ages superstitions flourished with unprecedented vigor. They've all stood the test of time, since even nowadays tokens and *omens* prognosticate person's fate before his birth, accompany him through life and paradoxically arrange the events after he's gone. The only reason why superstitions have not yet died out is because they are contagious. Moreover, belief in omens and tokens can be viewed as a specific sort of religion, semisacred in its appeal, which has an immense impact on the human's consciousness. We are convinced that, alongside with proverbs and adages, tokens and omens are remarkable cultural patterns of archaic beliefs and traditions.

II. METHODOLOGY

To visualize the foreigner-related omen lore in the East Slavic countries, which can influence on their destination attractiveness, we employ printed works of Slavic folklore researchers and amateurs and the findings of our large-scale field research conducted in 2015-2018 in south regions of Belarus, northern and western parts of Ukraine and south-western regions of Russia. These regions are considered to be living ethnographic museum. In tiny villages, handcrafting of everyday necessities is still a way of life that includes home bread baking and brewing, weaving, embroidery, wood carving, ceramics and many other such activities. Birth of a child, weddings and funerals evoke age-old celebrations; agriculture and animal husbandry are often surrounded by ritual and ceremony; shepherds, hunters, and fishermen observe traditional customs. The methods of data collection and analysis include interviews, linguistic and structural analysis of local vocabulary, paremiology, and folklore texts that indicate the archaic notion of an ethnic stranger.

III. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

In XVIII – XX centuries, tokens, signs and omens played exceptionally significant role in the East Slavic culture. However, the first written notion of an omen dates back to 3rd millennium B.C. A cuneiform text from Ancient Mesopotamia announces an omen to be "a god's verdict against the interested parties on the basis of the elements in the omen" [10, p. 3]. These days an omen is interpreted as a deep-rooted connection between a sign (protasis) and its explication, a statement to predict the future (apodosis) [11, p. 121]. G. Bennett talks about omen as an external divination, signifying upcoming destined events [12, p. 126].

Omens are closely tied with superstitions, tokens, presages, dreams, and fortune-telling. J. Kupcevičová pays attention to utter impossibility to draw a distinction between omens and proverbs, since both of them are based on straightforward observance [13, p. 35]: rus. *Где два оленя прошло, там тунгусу большая дорога. Коли грек на правду пошел, держи ухо остро. Из старого цыгана кузнеца не выйдет*; ukr. *Лях тоді добрий, як спить, а пробудіцца, то біда. Ити до ляхів – не їсти пирогів*; bel. *Прыйшлы паляки: ані хліба, ні табакі. З маскалём знайся, да камінь за пазухой держи*. The latter was inspired by real historical events, occurred in Moscow State at the Time of Troubles. Though feasting with Muscovites, Poles literally kept cobble stones in their bosoms to attack in case of possible danger. Nowadays Ukrainian political leaders widely exploit this call-to-action proverb when discussing Russia-Ukraine relations. Nonetheless, the

majority of ethnic adages are viewed as neither omens nor tokens: rus. *Русский в словах горд, в делах тверд. Немец своим разумом доходит, а русский глазами перенимает. Цыган с Рождества шубу продает. Русак до читанья, хохол до спеванья, поляк до скаканья*; ukr. *Москаль як ворона, та хитріший чорта. Бють не ляхи, а наші гріхи. Ведмідь танцює, а циган гроші збирає*; bel. *Мудзёр лях на шкодзе. И дзеля аднаго жίδα кірмаш будзя. Няма на свеці горшай веры, як басурманы-татары*. It seems reasonable to insist that for East Slavs foreigner-related omens are common and stereotypical and set side by side with rituals, customs, and traditions.

There is a wide variety of foreigner-related omens in Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian traditions. Their amount denotes the significance of ethnic and cultural contacts between these neighbouring countries. It should be pointed out that tradition bearers' naïve consciousness considers "foreign" as magically harmful, sinful, extremely dangerous, and threatening. The personal experience incorporates these ideas in beliefs, omens and tokens. For instance, in western and northern parts of Ukraine, when seeing the first ladybug, children say the following rhyme, *Комашки, ховайте подушки, бо татари йдуть і все заберуть*, which refers to the times of the Mongol-Tatar yoke (XIII-XV century). In addition, representatives of other ethnic groups are regarded as an archetypal Evil or otherworldly humans [14]. Finno-Ugric peoples of Russian still believe that Finns and Lapps are the most powerful sorcerers and mystic masters. The about to be mentioned proverb specify the same beliefs: rus. *Первого черемиса леший родил; Бог создал Адама, а черт – молдавана; Зырянин рыж от Бога, татарин рыж от черта*; ukr. *Породила вівця німця, а пана кобила, а русина молодого дівка чорнобрива. Бог сотворив цапа, а чорт – кацана*. We explain it by fact that Devil is a folkloric forefather of some nations. For example, the Volyn legend highlights that Jews are Devil's nearest and dearest. Transcarpathian Rusyns consider Gypsies to be Archfiend's descendants [15, p. 230]. In the Belarusian narratives, depicting a blood agreement with Satan, the key figure is a Jew or pagan who makes dedicated Christian to commit the unpardonable sin. The mediator acts on the behalf of the Devil offering his victims everlasting wealth, power, or love.

In the East Slav's folklore, xenophobia is explicated in omens connected with meeting someone of a different race or religion, both in dreams and reality. Particularly, Western Belorussian villagers give credence to the omen predicting heavy rain and hail, if vagabond Gypsies move into the village against the wind, otherwise it forecast a prolonged drought. Belarusians and Hutsuls say if you are going hunting or fishing and the first person you see is a Jew you should certainly turn back else you'll have bad luck. Unlike Slavs, in Latgale (region north of the Daugava River) meeting a Jew early in the morning is a sign of good fortune. Notable in this respect is the Latgalian idiom *Žeida laime*, i.e. Jewish happiness, which means unexpected and easily-gained good fortune [16].

In Belarusian Polesie it is a bad omen to come across a Gypsy. Dreaming of a Gypsy is a sign that a person will be deceived soon. The concept of Gypsy's deception is fixed in adages as well: rus. *Цыгану без обману дня не прожить; Цыган ищет того, как бы обмануть кого*; ukr. *Циган*

хитрістю жити ухитряється. Обдури́в, як циган на ярмарку; бел. *Брэше як цыган на кірмаіі; Цыган цыганскую праўду гаворыць*, i.e. deceive. However, Belarusians have a naïve explanation why people dream of Gypsies: *Спаць, не павячэраўшы – цыганы будуць сніцца; Галодным цыганы сняцца*. In south-western region of Russia, seeing a Gypsy in a dream signifies severe frost or drought, depending on the time of dream, whether it is in winter or summer respectively.

K. Nath remarks, "environment, race, clan etc. are artificial division and they cannot take away man from his intrinsic friendliness" [17, p. 117]. Therefore, we can assume the ambivalence of an ethnic stranger in the East Slavic folklore. So, there is a wide array of tokens, omens, and rituals implying the necessity to interact with foreigners to gain good fortune, prosperity, abundance, health, etc.

The polaznik ritual is still a tradition celebrated on New Year's Day among the Slavs. It involves the first person to step into a household from the outside in a new year. In Carpathian area, a Gypsy or Jew is a harbinger of well-being in the coming year. It is worthy to mention the Hutsul dialect name of New Year's Day – *Цыганська слава*. In Transcarpathian Ukraine, many households to this day keep this tradition and carefully select who first enters the house. On Christmas morning a host tries to have a Jew around by uttering special inviting formula *За полазника поть до мене*. When entering, it is said to be obligatory to bless the house *Дай Боже!* Then the lady of the house serves the guest with a glass of vodka and treats or gives him money [18, p. 195]. It is an extremely bad omen if someone come into the house before polaznik, so there is banning proverb: *На Введення: перший полаз, до хати не лазь; на Різдво: другий полаз, до хати не лазь; на Благовіщення: третій полаз, до хати не лазь* [18, p. 234]. Besides, in Podolia, when singing carols on Christmas Eve, Orthodox Ukrainian youth visit catholic cathedral (kostel) to ask priest (ksiadz) for blessing, while Catholics seek for Orthodox clergymen.

The foreigner-related beliefs and omens represent the elaborate rites of the bygone days. They determine something primordial, yet fundamental instinct of self-preservation and a desire to be aware of the time to come.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the first time in literature authors made an attempt to bridge the gap between economics and folklore, showed that the bygone or mystical events have an impact on real economic sectors. Ethnic tourism in the East Slavic countries is still in its infancy. Increasing the destination attractiveness of some areas in this region can be a real challenge. One of the problems that could hamper the further development of ethnic tourism is the centuries-old prejudices against foreigners fixed in folklore. Omens, tokens, and signs referred to contacting with foreigners are obviously a specific folklore genre. They exist in form of foregrounding taboos, advice, warnings, permissions, admonitions, etc. and are widely exploited by East Slavs to build healthy and appropriate relations with people of different nation or religion. Though a lot of omens and beliefs are proliferated only in certain regions, they anchor the most crucial ethnic and confessional contacts, making up a robust framework to assess other ethnic groups. The East Slav foreigner-related

omens and signs originate in important historical events, mythical world-outlook, and Christian church doctrine.

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