

BEITRÄGE

A Shift in Ethics. The Serb/Albanian conflict in the vernacular discourse of a conjurer from Kosovo¹

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1. A visit to the Vitina Enclave: socio-political context and research purpose

Until 1999, Vitina municipality in Kosovo was comprised of Albanian, Serbian, Croatian, and ethnically mixed villages, along with a few Roma settlements². Following the NATO bombing, most of the Serbs living in Vitina municipality either left or were under pressure to leave ethnically mixed communities, and remained only in those areas where they comprised a significant majority³. The present Serbian enclave of Vitina is composed of a cluster of villages in close proximity – Klokot, Mogila, Vrbovac, Grnčar and Binač⁴. I visited the small town of Vitina and its neighbouring village Vrbovac on July 10 2003, after it had already effectively been turned into a Serbian enclave⁵.

The main purpose of the fieldwork was to record Serbian vernaculars and to collect data related to Serbian folklore and traditional culture⁶. Since the fieldwork was carried out in a conflict-ridden and segregated society in the “disputed territory”⁷ of

¹ This paper is part of the project *Ethnic and Social Stratification of the Balkans* (no. 148011), financed by the Ministry of Science and Ecology of the Republic of Serbia.

² For key data on minority ethnic groups in Kosovo see *Kosovo Atlas 2*. Undoubtedly, the minority map has changed since then.

³ According to ethnologist Sanja ZLATANOVIĆ (2004, 2005a), after 1999, the municipality of Vitina was mainly abandoned by those Serbian families who were colonised in Kosovo after 1918, as a part of the agrarian reform and the Serbian national strategy. Most of the “indigenous” Serbian inhabitants chose to stay, however.

⁴ Anthro-geographical accounts of the region are presented in UROŠEVIĆ 1935.

⁵ At that time, the enclave population of Vitina was about 3500 but the number fluctuated. Serbs were a minority in Vitina town and in the villages of Binač and Mogila. The villages of Klokot, Vrbovac and Grnčar were inhabited by Serbs and by a few Roma families. See *Документи о Косову и Метохији* (Координациони центар Србије и Црне Горе и Републике Србије за Косово и Метохију). See also ZLATANOVIĆ 2005, 2005a.

⁶ This fieldwork was part of a larger research project “Research of Slavic Vernaculars in Kosovo and Metohija” supported by UNESCO and carried out by The Institute of Serbian Language (Belgrade) in 2003.

⁷ A “disputed territory” is an area over which two or more entities (states or ethnic groups) claim sovereignty, see WOLFF 2004. Regarding the province of Kosovo BENDER 1984 suggested the term “crisis region” (*die Krisenprovinz*), whereas DUIJZINGS 2000 applied the term “frontier region”: “Instead of two ‘ethnic’ societies I prefer to speak here of one single ‘frontier society’, in which periods of confrontation alternate with periods of contact”.

Kosovo, it was, and still is, difficult to obtain reliable statistical data. Therefore, personal impressions and participants' observation may provide an empirical insight into the socio-political context, at least from one side involved in the conflict.

During the trip, which I made at my own risk without the escort of UNMIK officers⁸, I accompanied a Serbian woman – refugee Ž.Z. – who had been living in Vitina until the UN protectorate was established in 1999. Ž.Z. (43) was a housewife who had lived in a patriarchal extended family. The family was engaged in agriculture and cattle breeding. After the arrival of NATO troops, the whole family fled Kosovo and settled in central Serbia. She took a pragmatic approach to the situation in Kosovo: she did not see a future for her there anymore and wanted to get the best selling price for the family property⁹.

By the time I visited Vitina, several Serbian families were still living there. Increasingly isolated, and sometimes even in hiding, all of them had bargained with local Albanians over the price of their houses. The Orthodox church of Vitina was protected day and night by an UNMIK armoured contingent and a minibus shuttled passengers daily from Vitina to the neighbouring Serbian villages. Life in Vitina, without any doubt, appeared to be extremely difficult for the Serbs who continued to live there.

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured, chiefly focusing on ethnolinguistic data. Social, political and biographical topics in the interviews were more or less regarded as discursive digressions. While conversations about the recent past and current living-conditions of my interviewees inevitably evoked extreme emotions, topics recalling their traditional life style provided a sort of escapism. The majority of my interviewees were grateful for having someone interested in their culture, so the idea of “reciprocity” was already present during the fieldwork¹⁰.

⁸ According to the Serb inhabitants of Vitina, there were several phases in the inter-ethnic relations after the bombing. 1999–2000 is considered to be the most difficult period, with daily murders and kidnappings resulting in a flow of refugees into Serbia. Between 2001 and 2002 the situation calmed down and the traffic increased. The 2003–2004 period is regarded as the most peaceful one, bringing a partial restoration of inter-ethnic relations. Finally, the situation became aggravated after the Albanian riots in March 2004: 10 Serbian houses were burnt down in Vitina, the parish hall and offices destroyed, while the number of Vitina Serbs decreased by 50. See ZLATANOVIĆ (2005, 2005a).

⁹ Usually, in patriarchal societies the man/husband is expected to handle financial affairs. It was significant, however, that it was she who felt safer to travel to Kosovo and bargain over the selling price rather than her husband. She kept returning to Vitina for two main reasons: to visit the local cemetery (where members of her family were buried) and to bargain with the Albanian family who had moved into her house. It was impossible to set any market-approved price on a house and she was therefore completely dependent on arrangements with the Albanian family with whom she was on friendly terms and who had promised to pay. At that time, the fact that none of the Albanian newcomers had seized her house brought her some relief, as if this had been the case, no payment could be expected. She obviously made a great distinction between the old Albanian inhabitants and the newcomers. The Albanians too clearly distinguished the old Serbian inhabitants from the newcomers who arrived after 1918.

¹⁰ The notion of reciprocity is fundamental to the relationship between the fieldworker and the informant or subject. See RUSSELL 2006. The term “linguistic gratuity principle” can also be

2. Vrbovac village: social context and speech situation

In 2003 there was still no significant migration from Vrbovac village or the few surrounding villages, at least not among the older generations. Nevertheless, almost all activities of the Serbian peasants were confined to the village area, though for safety reasons many of them were not able to cultivate their land¹¹. My prevailing impression was that the Serbs in the village were still tensely awaiting a political solution, although several years had already passed since the UN protectorate had been established.

The rural population of the village is conservative, still maintaining traditional folklore and ritual practices. Village traditions and folklore reflect the overlapping influence of both Orthodox Christianity and a pagan legacy. Therefore, folklore culture still encompasses archaic magical practices such as folk incantation. As a specific form of a magical way of thinking and ritual behaviour, folk incantation is based upon the idea that the prime movers of all sickness and other misfortunes are demonic beings that can be expelled by certain ritual acts and incantations¹². The process can involve many other healing practices, but water and herbs have a special importance. The central figure of the communicative act of the incantation is the conjurer (Serbian *bajalica*)¹³. In Vrbovac village, there were a few conjurers, among whom Vera JOVANOVIĆ was the best known. I was introduced to her as a person coming “from Serbia, collecting stories about the old Serbian customs”. Because of my ethnic background and gender identity I was recognised as an insider¹⁴. However, my cultural/urban and generational identity allotted me the position of researcher-outsider.

At the time of our meeting, Vera Jovanović was searching for her missing 22-year old son Goran whom, she believed, had been kidnapped by Albanians. During our interview, an official from the Kosovo administration visited the Jovanović home in order to examine the latest photos that had come into the family’s possession. It was

used to refer to the ways in which researchers might constructively share their expertise and knowledge with their host research communities. See WOLFRAM 1998.

¹¹ This made life extremely difficult for peasants as their subsistence was entirely dependent on agricultural production. Their safety was particularly precarious in the fields on the edge of the village, where a few murders had been committed. Crop cultivation was also risky due to cluster bombs, left behind the NATO bombing in 1999. Men gathered in groups when going out into the fields, while agriculture was reduced to family needs. In any case, there were some signs of improvement in trade between Serbs and Albanians since 2001. For more on this see ZLATANOVIĆ 2005, 2005a.

¹² SM s.v. *бајања*.

¹³ SIMPSON (1996: 5) argues that there are many partly overlapping terms in English such as *witch/wizard/warlock/sorcerer/magician/conjurer/cunning man or woman* – all of them used for a specialist practicing traditional magic either for helpful or harmful purposes. For the Serbian and Bulgarian term see RADENKOVIĆ 1996 (*bajalica*), respectively BNM s.v. *баячка*.

¹⁴ As NAUMOVIĆ 1998 describes it, the “double insider syndrome” is featured in the scientific discourse of humanities in the Balkans. The researchers are often members of the group which they explore and therefore also “advocates” who present the group’s case in the “scientific” court.

believed that the photos showed the corpse of the missing young man. During this event, the speech situation encompassed the evocation of a personal trauma, which was reflected in the communicative act¹⁵.

3. The informant: Vera Jovanović

Since the informant-researcher relationship always challenges the communicative roles acquired by the participants in the communicative act, I will try to point out some aspects of the communicative role and gender identity of my interviewee. Conjuror Vera Jovanović (1934) was born in Vrbovac village, where she attended elementary school for three years. She married a man from Vrbovac, with whom she had eight children and lived in a patriarchal extended family, typical of a Balkan rural environment, with her husband, children, mother-in-law and father-in-law. In everyday life Vera was immediately subordinated to the older family members and her husband. Thus, her gender identity can be seen as being entirely based upon a patriarchal pattern¹⁶.

The issue of gender identity and gender roles in Balkan traditional communities is not always as simple as it may appear at first glance. Frequently, there are unobtrusive social and family structures which reveal a pattern of female gender identification that is often concealed¹⁷. Along with the gender roles of wife, mother, etc., Vera Jovanović also identified herself as a conjurer, in other words a professional in a rural environment. Within the patriarchal society of Vrbovac, her role as conjurer could have undermined the dignity of her husband who would have normally been supposed to be the bread-winner in the family. In fact, as Vera's story [1] indicates, it was rumoured that she conjured in order to earn some money for the family because her husband was incapable of doing so:

- [1] (Is it true that it is considered a sin to prevent a gifted person from helping others?) I was forbidden to do it by my husband. Once he went to the grocery, and people told him, it was a long time ago, and he said: "Woman, people are laughing at me. They say: 'His wife conjures to put food on the table. They have a horde of children, her husband is a drunk, so she lies to people to support the family'. And my husband stopped me doing it. I cried and cried and said: "Please, don't stand in my way, I beg you, I have to work. It's my duty to work." But no, no way. I was forbidden to conjure for six months by my husband. But then I swore to him: "God will send you a disease and it will make you sick.

¹⁵ According to HYMES 1974, a speech situation may be found by identifying the times when people talk or when they do not. The speech situation creates a context for the communicative act – a term used for the action taking place when particular words are used.

¹⁶ ZLATANOVIĆ (2005, 2005a) argues that the gender identity of Kosovo women is predominantly based upon the values of the patriarchal society. Women are traditionally confined to the private domain and to the strictly bounded gender roles of mother (preferably of male children), sister, housewife, etc. Additionally, their education is not a priority. Concerning Balkan female identities and patriarchal society see for instance SCHUBERT 1994.

¹⁷ SVETIEVA 2001 argues that there are many hidden, unofficial social and family patterns that promote the role of women in traditional Balkan communities.

The time will come for me to cure you and then you will let me work.” And that’s how it was.¹⁸

Being “the bearers of the folk religion”, conjurers acquired an ambiguous status within traditional society. On the one hand, they were easy targets of criticism from the Church and often accused of cheating by the local community (see [1] his wife conjures, the wife lies to other people)¹⁹. On the other hand, they were often approached by people from all educational and professional backgrounds in search of help. This kind of publicity gained Vera social reputation and acceptance in local society:

- [2] They used to come from America to me, looking for help. I gave to everyone, I didn’t spare my soul. But I was rewarded. When I help them, they reward me, afterwards. Yes.²⁰
- [3] I worked for everyone, for judges, for doctors, for everyone. Thank God, and for the police, everyone.²¹

4. Folk incantation: topicality

In South-Slav ethnographic records from the end of the 19th century, as TODOROVA-PIRGOVA (2003: 11) noted, there were not many accounts of archaic magical practices. Only in the second half of the 20th century, when the dominant folklore system began to fade, did it become more convenient to collect evidence of the actual magical practices²². The case is much the same with ethnographic records from Kosovo – accounts of incantations were rare and, if given, they captured a mainly negative image in local society (VUKANOVIĆ 1986)²³. There are possibly two reasons for this dearth of evidence: first, the normative rule of secrecy surrounding the practice of incantation and second, the negative attitude of the Church towards the practice of magic in general²⁴.

¹⁸ [(A je l istina da kada neko ima taj dar da pomaže, da ako mu neko brani da radi da je to greh?) Zabranio mi muž mene. Bio u prodavnicu, pa rekli su mu ljudi, ranije to bilo, kaže: „Ženo, smeju mi se ljudi, kaže. Viko: ‘Vraža mu, kaže, žena da ga rane, mogo deca, muž pijanica, pa l’že žena ljudi, kaže da ga rani’“. I on mene zabranio, muž. Ja plačem u najveće. I mu kažem: „Nemo da me diraš, molim te ko Boga, ja moram da radim. Dužnos mi je da radim.“ Ne može i ne može. I ja, čero, pest meseci, ni mi muž davaa da radim, ali onda ga Bog, zarekla sam mu: „Ima da ti pušti Bog neku muku da se razboliš, da dođe vreme ja da te lečim i da mi dozvoliš da radim.“ I tako je bilo.]

¹⁹ As RADENKOVIĆ (1996: 15) puts it, many conjurers in Croatia were burnt due to such accusations.

²⁰ [Iz Amerike mi dođovali za pomoć. Ja sam pružala svima, nisam moju dušu žalila. Ali nagrađena sam. Kad imu pomoć, oni posle me nagradu. Da.]

²¹ [Ja sam svima radila, i na sudije, i na doktori i na svi sam radila. Bogu fala, i na miliciju, i svi.]

²² See TODOROVA-PIRGOVA (2003: 11).

²³ VUKANOVIĆ (1986: 43) noted that women in Kosovo who were using magic for medical purposes were often shunned, whereas women who were using herbs for the same purposes were generally highly valued.

²⁴ Throughout medieval and early modern Europe, women and men accused of magic and witchcraft were traditionally persecuted by the secular courts as well as by all Christian churches. In most cases the accused were women. An overview of the literature of witchcraft in Europe can be found in SIMPSON 1996.

The topicality of this subject should be recognised in terms of its local and global dimension, as the majority of my interviewees believed in the archaic world of magic, while still embracing the advancements of global civilization²⁵. On this topic especially, my perspective and that of my informants often differed fundamentally²⁶. The comparative paradigm of Vera Jovanović illustrates her discursive strategy of making the subject more reasonable – these are all phrases, comparisons and metaphors of contemporary vocabulary, which are, from Vera's perspective, believed to be more accessible to me as her interviewer²⁷:

- [4] I can't cure leukaemia, cancer, the kidneys, the heart – these are not mine – diabetes. Those five diseases are not mine, those are the doctor's.²⁸
- [5] Herbs are like playing a game of chess, the figures, and then they tell me. And, in this way, when I see what a person needs, I give help.²⁹
- [6] Because for me to know what a person suffers from, all the people, it's as if you had a university degree, but I'm not educated. I have only three years of schooling. I didn't even finish the fourth, but as for problems and troubles, it's as if I had a degree. It has to be that way.³⁰

5. Folk incantation: a narrative

Vera Jovanović proved to be an excellent informant³¹ covering a wide range of topics related to traditional life and folklore culture. As evidenced by her discourse, she took on many life roles, such as wife, mother, upholder of tradition, conjurer etc., all of which shaped her complex gender identity. In the incantation discourse, Vera's

²⁵ According to recent research of Slavic traditional culture in Kosovo (see for example collections *Izbešličko Kosovo* 2004 and *Život u enklavi* 2005), rural culture in Kosovo can be described as a paradoxical mixture of local features (including features of traditional culture) and global ones (mobile telephones, satellite TV, modern outlook of young people, treatment in modern medical hospitals, etc.).

²⁶ Incompatibility between informant and researcher can jeopardise informant-researcher confidentiality and the scholarly interpretation of cultural beliefs. Various anthropological studies were produced on the cultural centrism of researchers, especially those concerning the traditional "magical mind". See for instance FAVRET-SAADA 1980, MENCEJ 2004.

²⁷ The lexicon, comparisons and metaphors of contemporary civilization are constantly applied in traditional folk narratives. These narrative techniques were defined as an actualisation strategy by SIKIMIĆ (2004: 46).

²⁸ [Ne mogu da lečim levukemiju, raka, bubreze, srce – to nije moje – šećerni boles. To je pet bolesti nisu moje, to je lekarsko.]

²⁹ [To mi su travke kao kad igraš šah, figurice, i mene to povara i ja znam što vara. I po to kad vidim ja što fale, ja pružim pomoć.]

³⁰ [Jer ceo narod da znaš kome što fali, to je ceo fakultet, a ja nemam školu. Tri godine imam osnovnu školu. Nemam ni pune četiri, ali od problema od muke kao kad imam fakultet i studiju. Mora tako da bude.]

³¹ An informant is a person who originates from a local community and who speaks a local idiom. In contrast to ethnologists and linguists who focus on cultural heritage or language, both subjects – language and cultural heritage – attract the attention of the ethnolinguists. See for instance SIKIMIĆ 2002.

individual personality hid behind the general image of a conjurer, and her identity conformed to the particular social pattern of a conjurer³². She was the first to speak on the subject of herself as a conjurer while responding to my question regarding communication with local Albanians³³:

- [7] (Do you speak some Albanian?) Well, child, when I did this job, when there was no war here, Albanian women used to come to me, and then I used to work, to conjure, to help people. I used to know a little, at least some of it then.³⁴

Folk incantation is mainly the domain of women and it is based upon occult, specialist knowledge³⁵. Therefore, Vera's incantation discourse can be understood as a narrative structured around commonplaces (topoi):

– knowledge is acquired through a mystical mode³⁶

- [8] (Who did you learn it from?) God gave it to me, a gift from God. I didn't inherit it, I didn't buy it, I didn't steal it, this work of mine. I was sick and it was God who gave it to me. I give help to others, because there is no way back. (Did somebody come to you in a dream to show you?) It is God's will. God's will, I am not allowed to tell anything. And I work, I work, child. It's been twenty and eight years that I've been doing this job.³⁷

– female line of transmission³⁸

- [9] You see, now this knowledge is mine, no one has taught me it. If I, for example, pass it on to someone – that means if it comes naturally – it will be accepted. If it doesn't – it will

³² TODOROVA-PIRGOVA (2003: 50) argues that all informants usually match a particular social pattern.

³³ In interviews with the Serbs in Kosovo I used the term *Šiptar/ka* ("Albanian") which is commonly used in their vernaculars. According to ethnologist Sanja ZLATANOVIĆ (2005a: 88) the term *Šiptar* in Serbian Vitina vernaculars means either an "Albanian" in general, or more specifically "Albanian Muslim" (whereas the term *Latin* (or *Rimokatolik*) is reserved for "Albanian Catholic"). However, the term *Šiptar* is perceived as offensive and politically incorrect by Albanians. They generally prefer to use the term *Albanians* for themselves. See ZDRAVKOVIĆ (2005: 230).

³⁴ [(A vi je l znate malo šiptarski?) Pa, dete moje, kad sam radila poso ovaj dok ni' bilo 'vo ratno vreme, kad su mi išle i Šiptarke ovde, ja sam radila, bajem, pomagam narod, radim. I tad sam malo znala znaš, bar u pola.]

³⁵ Regarding the South-Slavic tradition, conjurers are usually older women. Magic acts are seldom performed by male conjurers. See RADENKOVIĆ (1996: 16).

³⁶ Knowledge is acquired under specific conditions, e.g. during "serious illness" or in "a dream"; it is considered to be a commonplace of incantation. See TODOROVA-PIRGOVA (2003: 56–57). This is also confirmed by RADENKOVIĆ (1996: 20–22), who additionally noted that these narratives were most frequent in the Eastern and Southern part of Serbia.

³⁷ [(A od koga ste vi to naučili?) Bog mi to darovaja, darova mi od Boga. Nisam ga nasledila, nisam pozajmila, nisam ga ukrala, nisam ga kupila, taj poso. Bila sam bolesna i tako mi Bog darovaja. Što kome pružim pomoć, nazad nema. (Je l vam došo neko u san da vam to pokaže?) Bož'a volja. To je Bož'a volja, ne smem kome što da kažem. A radim, radim, dete moje. Radim, dvaest i osma godina, taj poso radim.]

³⁸ The transmission of knowledge from conjurer to her/his relative is a typical way of transmission. See TODOROVA-PIRGOVA (2003: 53); for transmission along the "female line", see RADENKOVIĆ (1996: 16).

not. I have a daughter. She lives in the village of Gotovuša by Štrpci, the village of Gotovuša. I was three months pregnant with her, pardon the expression [when the gift came to me]. Now, she is interested in the work I do. That means she is going to inherit it. She had a dream twice in which she was told to carry on this job. (Who told her so?) Well, God's will, in the dream, she dreamt of someone there, who told her: "Bilja", her name is Biljana, "Bilja, you are the chosen one. The girl who came to you had epilepsy, and you need to cure her."³⁹

– initiation⁴⁰ and transmission⁴¹

[10] "Bilja", her name is Biljana, "Bilja, you are the chosen one. The girl who came to you had epilepsy, and you need to cure her." She said: "Mother I helped her and now I have to work. But not before you die. I don't want to disturb you. [Then] I will take the wedding ring off your hand." That means it will then come naturally to her. Other children have also asked me to pass it on to them, but I won't, because it's enough for one to know and that's for remembrance. Yes. That's it, my child.⁴²

– speech taboo⁴³

The speech taboo in the discourse of Vera Jovanović is either explicated (see [8], [12]), designated by indefinite phrases (see [9]), or by phrases referring to a supreme force (see [8], [11])⁴⁴:

³⁹ [Vidi, sada je to moje znanje, mene niko ne mi ga kazaja. Ja, na primer, da ga kažem, ako mu ide od ruku tome, 'nači ako mu ide od ruku, on će ga prehvate, ako ne – neće. A imam ja ćerku. Ona mi živi u selu Gotovuše kod Štrpce, selo Gotovuša. A ona, ja sam bila bremena, da me izvinite, na nju bremena tri meseca. E sad ona se interesuje za ovaj posao što radim ja. Znači, ona će ga nasledi. I njojzi gu došlo u san dvaputa da mora da radi taj poso. (A ko je došao?) A pa, Bož'a volja, u san, sanjala nekoga tamo i rekli gu: „Biljo“, Biljana se zove, „Biljo, ti si određena, kaže. Ova devojka došla, ima padaći boles, ti da gu lečiš.“]

⁴⁰ It is believed that the power would be lost if transmitted during the life-time of a conjurer, so it is best to have it transmitted just before the death of a conjurer; this is also considered to be a commonplace of incantation. See TODOROVA-PIRGOVA (2003: 11, 54); also RADENKOVIĆ (1996: 19).

⁴¹ The wedding and the incantation are symbolically equivalent as "rites de passage". Therefore, the wedding ring is used to fasten the knowledge of an old conjurer to a new one. See RADENKOVIĆ (1996: 17).

⁴² [„Biljo“, Biljana se zove, „Biljo, ti si određena, kaže. Ova devojka došla, ima padaći boles, ti da gu lečiš.“ Kaže: „Majko, ja sam je pružila pomoć, kaže, i sad moram, kaže, kad ti budeš omrela. Neću da te smetam. Imam da te uzmem prsten od ruku.“ Znači da gu ide od ruku njoze to što će radi. A ove druge deca i one tražu da gi pokažem, ali neću njima da pokažem, jer jedan nek zna i toliko za uspomenu. Da. Tako, dete moje.]

⁴³ As BANDIĆ (1980: 383) put it, traditional taboos are based upon the idea that the domain of supernatural beings should not be disturbed by ordinary people. As a special mode of communication with the supernatural, the folk incantation practice encompasses a considerable number of speech and behavioural taboos. See TODOROVA-PIRGOVA (2003: 11).

⁴⁴ Bulgarian conjurers also claim the authority from God for what they do: "They, God watch over me!" "My grandmother was the one who taught me. But the real force is with God." See TODOROVA-PIRGOVA (2003: 58). The authority from God was also referred to among Byelorussian conjurers: "It is not me who speaks, but God Almighty." See RADENKOVIĆ (1996a: 29).

- [11] (What are the herbs you work with?) I have my herbs, which are meant for that. (It shouldn't be revealed what those herbs are.) No, no. I collect them in autumn. In autumn for the winter. Those are my herbs and I pick them as I ought to. That is it, my child. (Did anyone show you what herbs to pick?) No, it's God's will. It is decided by God and at God's request because I have to be God's servant.⁴⁵
- [12] (Well, how do you conjure for food, to bring breast-milk back?) Well that's my work, no one is supposed to know that. I do it fine.⁴⁶

– taboo activities and taboo days

Christian religious holidays and the family feast *slava* are distinguished as taboo days⁴⁷.

- [13] (Is there any day when you don't work? Any holiday?) On feast days. For instance, today is a holiday, for instance tomorrow is a holiday, I won't say: "Come on that day". That means I don't work. If you came unexpectedly, I would work. And for example, if I know it's going to be a feast day, I shouldn't invite you: "Come on that day" That means it was not meant to be. (And Fridays, Wednesdays?) I work on Fridays, Wednesdays, I work all days, my child, when you come unexpectedly, I have to work. A woman came to me, she lost her breast-milk, pardon the expression. And it was the feast day of my family's patron saint, Saint Nicolas, in the summer. She was a Hungarian, from Skopje and she'd lost her breast-milk, no milk to feed the child, and she had to work: "Mother, what am I to do?" I told her: "My child, God has sent you on this holiday. My patron saint, please forgive me! I have to work because that child needs food!"⁴⁸

– ban on incantation as taboo

- [14] And my husband stopped me doing it. I cried and cried and said: "Please, don't stand in my way, I beg you, I have to work. It's my duty to work." But no, no way. I was forbidden to conjure for six months by my husband. But then I swore to him: "God will send

⁴⁵ [(A s koje travke radite?) A pa imam moje travke, koje su određene. (Ne sme da se kaže koje su.) Ne, ne. Ja gi berem. Berem u jesen za zimu. Berem kako treba, jer to su moje travke. Tako dete. (Pa kako, niko vam to nije pokazao, koje su to travke?) Ne, Bož'a volja. To je od Boga određeno i ja Bož'e zahtev mora da sam Bož'a sluga.]

⁴⁶ [(Ovaj, a kako se baje to za hranu, da se vrati hrana?) A to je mo'a posla, to niko ne može da zna. Niko ne može da zna. Lepo ja oradim.]

⁴⁷ The *Slava* is a family festivity dedicated to a saint – the patron and protector of the family, village, or church, a tradition that is widespread among Serbs, SM s.v. *slava*. An account of taboo days in incantation practice can be found in TODOROVA-PIRGOVA (2003: 46–47).

⁴⁸ [(A je l imate neki dan kada ne radite? Ili neki praznik?) Kad su praznici. E sad, na primer, kao danas je praznik, kao sutra što je praznik, ne mogu da te preporučim: „Dodi toga dana.“ Znači ne radim. Kad, na primer, dođe iznenade, radim. A, na primer, ja da mu rekнем: „Dodi toga dana“, a praznik je, ni ga preporučujem. Nači ni mi određeno. (A petak, sreda?) Radim petak, sredu, sve danovi radim, dete moje, kad dođeš 'znenade, mora da se radi. Je došla mi žena, da mi izvinete, ne ostala gu hrana za dete. A bilo mi dan, slava moja, sveti Nikola lećan. A ona bila od Mađzare, od Skople. I došla, seknula dušo, nema da doje dete, a rade na posao: „Majko, šta će radim?“ Ja gu kažem: „Dete moje, Bog te pratia na moju slavu. Slavo moja, oprosti me, moram da radim, jer na to dete mora hrana!“]

you a disease and it will make you sick. The time will come for me to cure you and then you will let me work." And that's how it was.⁴⁹

– charge for incantation⁵⁰

[15] (Do you accept money?) Oh, child, what one gives, on the ground. A gift, money, whatever they bring, they should put it on the ground and say to me: "Blessed!" And then I say: "Blessed help!" So it is, my child.⁵¹

6. Folk Incantation: pragmatic interpretation

The discursive strategy of Vera Jovanović involves a pragmatic interpretation of the incantation – examples are numerous⁵². In making comparisons, by using lexical synonyms and meta-narrative comments, she defines herself and her practice on many partly synonymous levels.

She perceives herself as a professional within her rural community, although she does not officially charge for the incantations. This self-perception is especially noticeable [16], when she compares herself to a professional physician, presenting herself as an even more important figure:

[16] A doctor from Štrpce told me, when I was having therapy for my leg: "Tell me, mother, do you work anywhere at all?" – "Please, son, give me the therapy quickly. My patients are waiting for me; I have more of them than you do here". And he laughed, yes. I like to help, son, it's generosity.⁵³

She also describes her work as an existential necessity [17]⁵⁴, being conducted by a supreme force [18]:

[17] In my youth I didn't work. But I had to accept this work later on. Either death or the work. And I accepted it. Thank God, now I've been doing it for twenty-eight years. But there was no turning back, so far. Thank God.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ [I on mene zabranio, muž. Ja plačem u najveće. I mu kažem: „Nemo da me diraš, molim te ko Boga, ja moram da radim. Dužnos mi je da radim.“ Ne može i ne može. I ja, čero, pet meseci, ni mi muž davaa da radim, ali onda ga Bog, zarekla sam mu: „Ima da ti pušti Bog neku muku da se razboliš, da dođe vreme ja da te lečim i da mi dozvoliš da radim.“ I tako je bilo.]

⁵⁰ Conjurers are not allowed to charge for their work, so they have to earn their living as other common people do. Putting a present on the ground is regarded to be commonplace in incantation. See RADENKOVIĆ (1996: 13).

⁵¹ [(A je l primite pare?) O, dete, što koji pruže na zemlju. Poklon, pare, što donesu ima da pušte na zemlju i da mi kaže: „Sas alal!“ I ja kažem: „Sas alal pomoć!“ Tako, dete moje.]

⁵² MOROZ 2004 suggested the term *interpretation of an ethnographic fact*, while TOLSTOJA (1992) proposed another term – a *pragmatic interpretation of ritual fact*. Both terms refer to the informants' explanations of ethnographic facts.

⁵³ [Vika mi jedan doktor u Štrpce, tamo sam bila na tarapiju za nogu, kaže: „Je li bre, majko, ti radiš neki poso?“ – „Molim te, sine, daj uključi mi brzo tu tarapiju. Mene čeku pacenti, poviše imam ja tamo kući ne' to ovde.“ I on se smeje, da. Volim da pomognem, sine, eto sevap.]

⁵⁴ The existential choice of "either death or the work" is registered as a commonplace of incantation discourse. See TODOROVA-PIRGOVA (2003: 56–57).

[18] No, it's God's will. It's decided by God and at God's request because I have to be God's servant. And it's not an easy job, son⁵⁶. It is not, child.⁵⁷

In a constant effort to explain the nature of incantation to me, Vera applies a variety of synonyms to her magical healing practice in order to illustrate all of its aspects. These synonymous terms also reveal her different views on incantation. As a result, they provide a complex image of the conjurer's vocation, transmitting the pragmatic (*work, job, cure, medicine, knowledge*), the ethical (*help, generosity*), and the sacral-mystical (*a gift from God, power*) dimensions of the folk art of incantation.

All of Vera's meta-narrative comments on incantation reveal an ethical judgement of it (*I helped him, I don't do evil, I drive evil away*) and also point to a spiritual source of the incantation (*a gift from God, I am God's servant, it is God's will*):

[19] And other things, my child, I give my help to everyone who is in trouble. I don't ask anything in return.⁵⁸

[20] Because I want to work, to help anyone who God sends, not to do evil. I don't do evil. I drive it away, drive it away. Because I don't need it, daughter, I need to die, to bring my soul to God, child ... Well God knows it, God knows, it is said: "Don't think badly of your neighbour, it will come back to you", "Don't think badly of my calf⁵⁹, it will come back to your child". That's it, child. That means, don't think badly of your neighbour.⁶⁰

[21] God gave it to me, a gift from God. I didn't inherit it, I didn't buy it, and I didn't steal it, this work of mine. I was sick and it was God who gave it to me.⁶¹

[22] It is God's will, I'm not allowed to tell anything. And I work, I work, my child. It's been twenty and eight years that I've been doing this job.⁶²

A firm ethical code can be identified in the incantation narrative of Vera Jovanović. It is considered ethically taboo to refuse any person asking for help. Vera believes that

⁵⁵ [A u mlado vreme nisam radila. Jer morala sam posle da prekvatim taj poso. Je li smrt ili poso. I ja sam ga prekvatila. I fala Bogu sad ga radim dvaest i osma godina. Ali nazad nije bilo dosad, Bogu fala.]

⁵⁶ During the conversation Vera used traditional terms when addressing me like: "my son", "my daughter", "my child", "sweetheart" etc. When she quoted someone addressing her, she used the term "mother". These terms fitted in the traditional etiquette used between older and younger participants in a conversation. See ŠAMRAJ 2003.

⁵⁷ [Ne, Bož'a volja. To je od Boga određeno i ja Bož'e zahtev mora da sam Bož'a sluga. A nije laki to poso, sine. Nije, dete moje.]

⁵⁸ [A ovo drugo, dete moje, sve ko ima muku, pružam pomoć, ne tražim nikome ništa.]

⁵⁹ This is a traditional proverb which is used because "calf" in Serbian (tele, gen. teletu) rhymes with "child" (dete, gen. detetu).

⁶⁰ [Ja oću da radim, da ga pomognem koga Bog prate, a ne ja da pravim zlo na ljudi. Ja ne pravim zlo. Ne, ja makinjem zlo, makinjem. Jer nije potrebno da pravim, ćero, trebam da umrem, da nosim dušu pred Boga, dete moje ... E pa to Bog znaje, Bog znaje, sine, što kažu: „Ne misli zlo na komšiju, vraća ti se u šiju“, „Ne misli, kaže, mome teletu, videćeš tvome detetu“. E to je, dete moje. Znači da ne misli zlo na komšiju.]

⁶¹ [Bog mi to darovaja, darova mi od Boga. Nisam ga nasledila, nisam pozajmila, nisam ga ukrala, nisam ga kupila, taj poso. Bila sam bolesna i tako mi Bog darovaja.]

⁶² [To je Bož'a volja, ne smem kome što da kažem. A radim, radim, dete moje. Radim, dvaest i osma godina, taj poso radim.]

every person that comes to her is led by the “supreme force” to which she feels obligated (see [13])⁶³.

However, the “concept of soul” proved to be fundamental to an understanding of her ethics and mystique⁶⁴. The belief that in the magical procedure the conjurer falls into a trance while her soul wrests with the daemon of the illness⁶⁵ is implied by Vera’s remarks: *I was giving to everyone, I didn’t spare my soul* [2]; *I need to bring my soul to God, child* [20]. Within the domain of her incantation practice, the Serb/Albanian conflict is also reflected in the conflict between two concepts – the ethical and the “soul concept”.

7. The Serb/Albanian conflict in the discourse of the conjurer from Vrbovac

At the time I visited the Serb enclave, the intractability of the Serb/Albanian *ethno-political conflict*⁶⁶ could be observed in various aspects of everyday life. The existential situation of Vera Jovanović could be viewed as “a life in an enclave”, which is often likened to living in a ghetto⁶⁷. Added to that was the emotional distress of post-war life for Vera, due to the loss of her son. Fearing that extreme emotions on the part of my interviewee might freeze the conversation, I deliberately avoided speaking of the Serb/Albanian conflict. Furthermore, I wanted to escape from an ideological and politicised discourse.

In the incantation narrative there were digressions regarding the conflict issue⁶⁸, each one of them important as a biographical record and as an indicator of Vera’s discursive strategy.

The first one – [23] – came in response to the question *Do you speak some Albanian?* She responded shortly and immediately switched the conversation to another

⁶³ This belief is based upon the concept of “theophany” which is defined as the presentation of the deity to people *in persona*. See ČAJKANOVIĆ (1994: 146).

⁶⁴ The “soul concept” conforms to the traditional concept of “the free soul” (*Freiseele* – “a soul that can on some occasions leave the body for a while”). See WUNDT 1920, KULMAR 1997.

⁶⁵ See SM s.v. *бајања*.

⁶⁶ Many scholars maintain that Kosovo is a region of intractable conflict. On the contrary, Dujzings argues that such an image of Kosovo is a simplistic one. Having been a frontier region for centuries, Kosovo was multiethnic with fairly fluid boundaries between ethnic groups, whose identities were not strictly homogenised. Therefore, in the past, periods of high conflict can be distinguished from peaceful periods. In the light of conflict typology, the second half of the 20th century can be considered as a period of conflict, being marked by power disbalance, forced separation between ethnic groups, extreme emotions, daily trauma, as well as victimization on both sides. For more see ZDRAVKOVIĆ (2005: 13–27).

⁶⁷ In Serbian current discourse about Kosovo, the metaphor of a prison is often used when describing the enclave life. See for example ZDRAVKOVIĆ (2005: 166), ZLATANOVIĆ (2005, 2005a); ZHELYAZKOVA 2004: 103–107.

⁶⁸ There were only a few discursive digressions and all of them were biographical. MILOSAVLJEVIĆ (2004: 142) also argues that the most frequent digressions when interviewing persons from Kosovo and Metohija are biographical ones. On the structure and content of discursive digressions of a refugee woman from Kosovo. See ĆIRKOVIĆ 2004.

subject – incantation. As a biographical record, the digression implies the following conclusions:

The discursive relationship: “Albanian women – me as a conjurer” shows that this type of inter-religious contact was common. Furthermore, “Albanian women” (*Šiptarke*) conform to the broader concept – “people” (*narod*): *When I did this job, when there was no war here, Albanian women used to come to me, and then I used to work, to conjure, to help people*. Obviously, both Albanian and Serbian were used for communication between them – *I used to know a little [Albanian], at least some of it then*. This remark once more highlights the image of ethno-religious syncretism where borders are fluid between ethnic and religious communities in Kosovo⁶⁹.

The Serb/Albanian conflict and her personal trauma caused a break in her communication with local Albanians and a shift in Vera’s ethical outlook. She now refuses to conjure/help Albanians and to speak Albanian – *I gave it up, when they took my son, I gave it up. I gave it up then, child. Now I don’t like their language, because I don’t want to work for them anymore*. The distance is emphasised by using the third person plural when speaking of Albanians – *their language, for them*. Moreover, the Albanians are clearly erased from the “people” while the “us/them” relation is emphasised – *I help our people, but I can’t help them*.

The theory of conflict highlights the fact that erasure of the “Other” from the humanity concept often comes as a result of extreme emotions⁷⁰. On the one hand, in what concerns the ethics of folk incantation, this shift can be regarded as a failure of ethics. On the other hand, the loss of her son damaged Vera’s “soul concept” (*They burnt my soul*), and in that way it damaged the concept of incantation and its inherent ethics. By this claim Vera explains the shift in her ethics:

[23] (Do you speak some Albanian?) Well, child, when I did this job, when there was no war here, Albanian women used to come to me, and then I used to work, to conjure, to help people. I used to know a little, at least some of it then. I gave it up when they took my son. I gave it up then, child. Now I don’t like their language, because I don’t want to work for them anymore. Now, when they show up I say: “Tell them she quit the job, she doesn’t work anymore”. I help our people, but I can’t help them, they took my son. They burnt my soul. (What do you conjure away?) Everything, my child.⁷¹

During the interview, an official (a Serbian woman) happened to visit the conjurer’s house, being sent by the Kosovo authorities. She came in order to investigate the loss of Vera’s son. This occurrence within the communicative situation imposed some short, extremely emotional digressions – [24], [25].

⁶⁹ This was especially common in the domain of popular religions, which were not so strictly supervised by the official religions. See DUIJZINGS 2000.

⁷⁰ See ZDRAVKOVIĆ 2005: 21.

⁷¹ [(A vi je l znate malo šiptarski?) Pa, dete moje, kad sam radila poso ovaj dok ni’ bilo ’vo ratno vreme, kad su mi išle i Šiptarke ovde, ja sam radila, bajem, pomagam narod, radim. I tad sam malo znala znaš, bar u pola. Kako napuštala sam, k’o mi sina uzedoše i ja napušti, i ja napušti, dete moje. Sad gi taj nija govor, ne ga obožavam, jer neču njima da radim. Sad kad dođu da gi pomagam ja kažem: „Kažite ju, otkazala od poso, ne radi.“ Ja na našem gi pomagam, a na nji ne mogu, uzeli mi sina. Dušu mi izgoreli. (A od čega bajate?) S’e moguće, sine.]

Looking at these three digressions, [23], [24], [25], it is clear that both I as an interviewer and Vera as an interviewee, tried to skip the traumatic topic and go back to the safer subject of incantation (*What do you conjure away?* [23]; *What else do you cure children of?* [24]; *Well, how do you conjure to bring breast-milk back?* [25]). The discursive strategy used in her response can be regarded as escapist:

[24] And thank God, I give help all the same ... [An official enters. Vera introduces herself] Good afternoon son, I'm Vera. I'm old, I have to straighten up a bit ... So, my children, the photos. Because it is also, as they say, God's help. Generosity, generosity, my sweet child. Oh dear, oh dear! (What else do you cure children of, what diseases?) Everything. (What else?) It depends on the child, because I can see what a child needs.⁷²

[25] And I helped her, the mother. She went to Janković, on her way to Skopje. In Janković, she got her breast-milk back. Her breast-milk returned. [Aside:] Probably they came to see the photos of my Goran. (Those are the most recent ones, the last ones, newly taken?) Those photos that they gave us, those are so, uh! Now she does this, my son shows them to her and now she looks at the photos. (Is she some kind of official?) [Aside:] She's an official. She helps find those who are missing, but I don't believe they're alive, daughter. I just have no place to go and nothing to do. He was a young boy, unmarried still; twenty-two he was, uh! So it is, my child. (Well, how do you conjure for food, to bring breast-milk back?) Well that's my work, no one is supposed to know that. I do it fine.⁷³

Studies on the conflict highlight the fact that discourse has a fundamental role in "making" and reproducing ideology, as every member of a speech community is at the same time a member of an ideological community, who tries to achieve a certain ideological (political) discursive goal⁷⁴. This is the reason why discourse on the subject of conflict is chiefly ideological and stereotypical. Then again, some spontaneous digressions being less intentional may provide a better look behind "the ideological curtains". Such digressions can thus more clearly show how the political Serb/Albanian conflict influences the process of ethnic and religious convergence and divergence in daily life.

⁷² [I, fala Bogu, i to pružam pomoć, isto ... [Ulazi službenica. Vera se pozdravlja.] Dobar dan, zdravo, sine, ja sam Vera. Stara sam, malo da se podignem ... Tako, deca moja, slike. Jer i to je što kažu, pomoć, Boža pomoć. Da, da, sevap, sevap, dete moje slatko. O kuku mene! (A od čega još lečite decu, od kojih jošolesti?) Sve moguće. (Koje još?) Koje, od koje dete dođe, jer ja vidim što mu fali.]

⁷³ [I ja lepo njojze pružim pomoć, na tu majku. Otišla ona do Janković, za Skople da ide. U Janković, stigla hrana na dete. Stigla hrana. [tiho] To slike da vide sigurno, mojega Gorana. (To sad nešto, to su sad te najnovije slike što su snimljene?) Te slike što ni dade, što su uh! E sad ona to obavlja, moj sin gu kazaja i sad ona da gi vide te slike. (Ona je službenik neki?) [tiho] Službenik je ona. Ona radi ove, brže da gi odberemo negde gde su. Ne verujem da su živi, bre čerko. Samo nemam 'de i nemam što. Momak mi bio neoženjen, dvaeset i dve godine imaja, jaa! Tako, dete moje slatko. (Ovaj, a kako se baje to za hranu, da se vrati hrana?) A to je mo'a posla, to niko ne može da znaje. Niko ne može da znaje. Lepo ja oradim.]

⁷⁴ See ZDRAVKOVIĆ (2005: 140–141).

The Serbian transcript

372-K-VITINA-11-MI; the interview was conducted on 10.07.2003 with Vera JOVANOVIĆ (1934), maiden name STANOJEVIĆ, from Vrbovac, married in Vrbovac.

(A vi je l znate malo šiptarski?) Pa, dete moje, kad sam radila poso ovaj dok ni' bilo 'vo ratno vreme, kad su mi išle i Šiptarke ovde, ja sam radila, bajem, pomagam narod, radim. I tad sam malo znala znaš, bar u pola. Kako napuštala sam, k'o mi sina uzedoše i ja napušti, i ja napušti, dete moje. Sad gi taj nija govor, ne ga obožavam, jer neću njima da radim. Sad kad dođu da gi pomagam ja kažem: „Kažite ju, otkazala od poso, ne radi.“ Ja na našem gi pomagam, a na nji ne mogu, uzeli mi sina. Dušu mi izgoreli. (A od čega bajate?) S'e moguće, sine. Ne mogu da lečim levukemiju, raka, bubreze, srce – to nije moje – šećerni boles. To je pet bolesta nisu moje, to je lekarsko. A ovo drugo, dete moje, sve ko ima muku, pružam pomoć, ne tražim nikome ništa ... Radim, čere moje, koje nemaju deca, koje žene nemaju deca uopšte. To mi treba i muž i žena na lečenje. Kupi katanče, zatvori ono da bude, javu se kodi mene. Ja gi otključim, po naše starački. Fala Bogu, da gi Bog decu. Devojke koje se ne odaju, momci koje se ne oženu, isto katanče donesu. A ovo drugo bez razlike lečim kuj za što je, jer ja vidim kuj kakvu muku ima, takav pomoć mu pružam. Ja sam i zahvalena i bila sam i preko televizor i svuda, što kažu, eto volim da pomognem, dete moje. (A od koga ste vi to naučili?) Bog mi to darovaja, darova mi od Boga. Nisam ga nasledila, nisam pozajmila, nisam ga ukrala, nisam ga kupila, taj poso. Bila sam bolesna i tako mi Bog darovaja. Što kome pružim pomoć, nazad nema. (Je l vam došo neko u san da vam to pokaže?) Bož'a volja. To je Bož'a volja, ne smem kome što da kažem. A radim, radim, dete moje. Radim, dvaest i osma godina, taj poso radim. Išli svuda. Drugi put su sada Amerikanci došli mi o'de u selo, a tad nisu bili o'de, dete moje. Iz Amerike mi dođovali za pomoć. Ja sam pružala svima, nisam moju dušu žalila. Ali nagrađena sam. Kad imu pomoć, oni posle me nagradu. Da. (A je l primete pare?) O, dete, što koji pruže na zemlju. Poklon, pare, što donesu ima da pušte na zemlju i da mi kaže: „Sas alal!“ I ja kažem: „Sas alal pomoć!“ Tako, dete moje. (A je l gledate vi u nešto? Na primer u ono ugljevlje, olovo?) Da, da, da, da. Tanjirče imam moje. U tanjirče voda, ugljovi, mislim travke imam, olovo topim, živu pojurim. Sve moguće, eto sevap, volim da pomognu svaku dušu što mogu. (A šta može da se vidi ugljevlje kad se gasi? Šta tu može da se vidi?) Pa, čere, zavisi kuj za što je. Ja pušćem onaj beleg. Od čoveka uzmem belegu i lepo pustim u vodu i ja kontrolišem sas oni ugljovi. Sad trave većina upotrebljavam, ugljovi slabo gi gasim sad. E sad sas travke. To mi su travke kao kad igraš šah, figurice, i mene to povara i ja znam što vara. I po to kad vidim ja što fale, ja pružim pomoć. Dam gi vodu, umivu se tamo, radu što radu, prospu u reku. Bogu fala, kad će dođe kao od majko rođen. (A s koje travke radite?) A pa imam moje travke, koje su određene. (Ne sme da se kaže koje su.) Ne, ne. Ja gi berem. Berem u jesen za zimu. Berem kako treba, jer to su moje travke. Tako dete. (Pa kako, niko vam to nije pokazao, koje su to travke?) Ne, Bož'a volja. To je od Boga određeno i ja Bož'e zahtev mora da sam Bož'a sluga. A nije laki to poso, sine. Nije, dete moje. Jer ceo narod da znaš kome što fali, to je ceo fakultet, a ja nemam školu. Tri godine imam osnovnu školu. Nemam ni pune četiri, ali od problema od muke kao kad imam fakultet i studiju. Mora tako da bude. (A je l bajete od uroci?) Da, da, da, da. (I kako vidite da je neko?) Pa ima tu beleženo, da. Koje su blagokrvna

deca, koje deca izmodru. Imu pene na usta, izmodre ono dete, pene na usta. To ubiva decu. To se kaže granja bolest ga kažemo glagol krvno dete. I, fala Bogu, i to pružam pomoć, isto ... [Ulazi službenica. Vera se pozdravlja.] Dobar dan, zdravo, sine, ja sam Vera. Stara sam, malo da se podignem ... Tako, deca moja, slike. Jer i to je što kažu, pomoć, Boža pomoć. Da, da, sevap, sevap, dete moje slatko. O kuku mene! (A od čega još lečite decu, od kojih još bolesti?) Sve moguće. (Koje još?) Koje, od koje dete dođe, jer ja vidim što mu fali. Ja to znam koji mu je boles, e tako. Koje se ne slažaju u braku, i to doterujem. Samo pijane ne mogu da radim. Kažu mi neke: „Majko, muž mi pije, sin mi pije. Pomogni mi za rakiju“. Kad bi mogla, sine, i moj'ga muža bi smirila i moj'ga sina, na primer, da ne pije, ali to nije moj poso. Ne radim ja za pare: „Daj mi toliko, daj voliko“, da ga lažim. „Dodi, će ti pomognem.“ Za lagu ne radim. Ne tražim nikome ništa, što mu pomognem, za pijane ne radim. Ne mož da gi pomognem, ni mi je to određeno od Boga. Tako, dete moje. (A je l istina da kada neko ima taj dar da pomaže, da ako mu neko brani da radi da je to greh?) Zabranio mi muž mene. Bio u prodavnicu, pa rekli su mu ljudi, ranije to bilo, kaže: „Ženo, smeju mi se ljudi, kaže. Viko: 'Vraža mu, kaže, žena da ga rane, mogo deca, muž pijanica, pa l'že žena ljudi, kaže da ga rani'“. I on mene zabranio, muž. Ja plaćem u najveće. I mu kažem: „Nemo da me diraš, molim te ko Boga, ja moram da radim. Dužnos mi je da radim“. Ne može i ne može. I ja, čero, pet meseci, ni mi muž davaa da radim, ali onda ga Bog, zarekla sam mu: „Ima da ti pušti Bog neku muku da se razboliš, da dođe vreme ja da te lečim i da mi dozvoliš da radim.“ I tako je bilo. I njemu, izašli mu neke vrge tamo, što kažu koprivnica boles. Lekari ne mogli to da leču. Teško se leči. Od bivu mu hranu, gore-dole. Ja, dete moje, u lonče lepo skuvam vodu njemu. Leka bilo, ona dršku, tri leke vodu njemu na glavu. Ujutru čoveka od majko rođen, nema vrga, nema ništa. I tad mi dozvoleo da radim. A zabranio mi jeno vreme. Ja sam svima radila, i na sudije, i na doktori i na svi sam radila. Bogu fala, i na miliciju, i svi. Mene ne sprečava niko, da. (A je l imate neki dan kada ne radite? Ili neki praznik?) Kad su praznici. E sad, na primer, kao danas je praznik, kao sutra što je praznik, ne mogu da te preporučim: „Dodi toga dana.“ Znači ne radim. Kad, na primer, dođe iznenade, radim. A, na primer, ja da mu rekнем: „Dodi toga dana“, a praznik je, ni ga preporučujem. 'Nači ni mi određeno. (A petak, sreda?) Radim petak, sredu, sve danovi radim, dete moje, kad dođeš 'znenade, mora da se radi. Je došla mi žena, da mi izvinete, ne ostala gu hrana za dete. A bilo mi dan, slava moja, sveti Nikola lećan. A ona bila od Madžare, od Skople. I došla, seknula dušo, nema da doje dete, a rade na posao: „Majko, šta će radim?“ Ja gu kažem: „Dete moje, Bog te pratia na moju slavu. Slavo moja, oprosti me, moram da radim, jer na to dete mora hrana!“ Dete da plače bez mleko, a ja du gu vratim, to je Bogu žalosno. I ja lepo njojze pružim pomoć, na tu majku. Otišla ona do Jankovič, za Skople da ide. U Jankovič, stigla hrana na dete. Stigla hrana. [tiho] To slike da vide sigurno, mojega Gorana. (To sad nešto, to su sad te najnovije slike što su snimljene?) Te slike što ni dade, što su uh! E sad ona to obavlja, moj sin gu kazaja i sad ona da gi vide te slike. (Ona je službenik neki?) [tiho] Službenik je ona. Ona radi ove, brže da gi odberemo negde gde su. Ne verujem da su živi, bre čerko. Samo nemam 'de i nemam što. Momak mi bio neoženjen, dvaeset i dve godine imaja, jaa! Tako, dete moje slatko. (Ovaj, a kako se baje to za hranu, da se vrati hrana?) A to je mo'a posla, to niko ne može da znaje. Niko ne može da znaje. Lepo ja oradim. Na primer, i stoka kad sekne, krava, sekne neka krava, nema mleko

... (A očete vi to nekome da ostavite, to vaše znanje?) Vidi, sada je to moje znanje, mene niko ne mi ga kazaja. Ja, na primer, da ga kažem, ako mu ide od ruku tome, 'nači ako mu ide od ruku, on će ga prehvate, ako ne – neće. A imam ja ćerku. Ona mi živi u selu Gotovuše kod Štrpce, selo Gotovuša. A ona, ja sam bila bremena, da me izvinete, na nju bremena tri meseca. E sad ona se interesuje za ovaj posao što radim ja. Znači, ona će ga nasledi. I njojzi gu došlo u san dvaputa da mora da radi taj poso. (A ko je došao?) A pa, Bož'a volja, u san, sanjala nekoga tamo i rekli gu: „Biljo“, Biljana se zove, „Biljo, ti si određena, kaže. Ova devojka došla, ima padaći boles, ti da gu lečiš.“ Kaže: „Majko, ja sam je pružila pomoć, kaže, i sad moram, kaže, kad ti budeš omrela. Neću da te smetam. Imam da te uzmem prsten od ruku.“ Znači da gu ide od ruku njoze to što će radi. A ove druge deca i one tražu da gi pokažem, ali neću njima da pokažem, jer jedan nek zna i toliko za uspomenu. Da. Tako, dete moje. (Pa, važno to da se prenese.) Da, pa mora nešto da ide od koleno na koleno. A mene, to mi darba od [tiho] Boga. Niko ne mi kazaja, da. (A jeste taj dar od Boga dobili pre udaje ili posle?) Ne, ne, ne. Posle udaje, dete moje. Imala sam: Zlata jedno, Sveta dve, Živko i Živojin četiri, Slavica pet. Pet deteta sam imala, e posle pet deteta, na šesta mi je ta ćerka što kažem Bilja, na nju sam bila u drugo stanje. E tad, ćero moja, tad sam dobila to znanje. A u mlado vreme nisam radila. Jer morala sam posle da prekvatim taj poso. Je li smrt ili poso. I ja sam ga prekvatila. I fala Bogu sad ga radim dvaest i osma godina. Ali nazad nije bilo dosad, Bogu fala ... (A kad je najbolje da se beru biljke?) Vidi, jer ja berem biljke, milsim u početku, kad dođe proleće, prva nedelja kad dođu, kad zapostimo, za pročku kad pravimo. Tad ja idem, namerno neku travčicu uzmem. I posle godišno da mogu da berem te travke. Godišno berem i skuplam te travke i lepo osušim da mi se nađu za zimu kad ima sneg. Da i bosiljak upotrebljavam. 'Nači kad nemam travu, sas bosiljak radim. (A je l berete pre sunca kad idete da berete?) Ne, ne, ne. Imamo travu koju beremo, namera se zove ta. Ta trava, ne sme se rukom da se uzme, nogo nož. Uzmemo nož i iskopamo onaj koren. Uzmemo parče leba i pare i so, znači platimo na to mesto 'de smo uzeli travu. I tu travu čuvamo za boles. Ima vrste bolesti koje su, da i ono lišće od tu travu pomogne ga, pomogni ga. Tako, dete moje, sevap ... Imam ćerku u Gotovuše. Imam dve ćerke u Makedoniju, u Skople. De idem u koju ćerku, kao sad ti si došla u mene, ljudi doznaju 'de si došla i ide narod, brate mili, nema odmor na poso. Nema, života mi, da, da. Vika mi jedan doktor u Štrpce, tamo sam bila na tarapiju za nogu, kaže: „Je li bre, majko, ti radiš neki poso?“ – „Molim te, sine, daj uključi mi brzo tu tarapiju. Mene čekuju pacenti, poviše imam ja tamo kući ne' to ovde.“ I on se smeje, da. Volim da pomognem, sine, eto sevap ... (A šta je za vas, šta je najteže da se, za šta je najteže da se leči, da se?) Naj mi je teže mene koje gi nosu bartovce, te lude. E dokle ga prehvatom prvi put u ruke da ga lečim, tad mi najteže. Jer jurišaju na mene. I ja, fala Bogu, kad ga ja pomognem, posle smo prijatelji ... Ja oću da radim, da ga pomognem koga Bog prate, a ne ja da pravim zlo na ljudi. Ja ne pravim zlo. Ne, ja makinjem zlo, makinjem. Jer nije potrebno da pravim, ćero, trebam da umrem, da nosim dušu pred Boga, dete moje. (A ima žena koje prave zlo?) Ima, ima gi ima. Ali nije dobro to. (To će se vrati.) Njima Bog vraća. (A kako se vraća?) E pa to Bog znaje, Bog znaje, sine, što kažu: „Ne misli zlo na komšiju, vraća ti se u šiju“, „Ne misli, kaže, mome teletu, videćeš tvome detetu.“ E to je, dete moje. Znači da ne misli zlo na komšiju.

Transcript – English translation

(Do you speak some Albanian?) Well, child, when I did this job, when there was no war here, Albanian women used to come to me, and then I used to work, to conjure, to help people. I used to know a little, at least some of it then. I gave it up when they took my son. I gave it up, I gave it up then child. Now I don't like their language, because I don't want to work for them anymore. Now, when they show up I say: "Tell them she quit the job, she doesn't work anymore." I help our people, but I can't help them, they took my son. They burnt my soul. (What do you conjure away?) Everything, my child. I can't cure leukaemia, cancer, the kidneys, the heart – these are not mine – diabetes. Those five diseases are not mine, those are the doctor's. And other things, my child, I give my help to everyone who is in trouble. I don't ask anything in return ... I work for people who can't have children, the women who can't have children at all, my daughter. For that I need the wife and the husband to cure. They need to buy a padlock, then lock it and come to me. I unlock it, as it used to be done in the old times. Thank God, God gives them children. Girls who can't marry, boys also, they also should bring a padlock. And other people, I cure, I make no difference. Because I see what kind of trouble someone is in, and due to that I give help. I was rewarded, I was on TV and everywhere, because I like to help, my child. (Who did you learn it from?) God gave it to me, a gift from God. I didn't inherit it, I didn't buy it, and I didn't steal it, this work of mine. I was sick and it was God who gave it to me. I give help to others, because there is no way back. (Did somebody come to you in a dream to show you?) It is God's will. God's will, I'm not allowed to tell anything. And I work, I work, child. It's been twenty and eight years that I've been doing this job. They came from everywhere. Once some Americans came over here to my village, but then they were not [stationed] here, my child. They used to come from America to me, looking for help. I gave to everyone, I didn't spare my soul. But I was rewarded. When I help them, they reward me, afterwards. Yes. (Do you accept money?) Oh, child, what one gives, on the ground. A gift, money, whatever they bring, they should put it on the ground and say to me: "Blessed!" And then I say: "Blessed help!" So it is, my child. (Do you use something to divine from? For instance coals, lead?) Yes, yes, yes, yes. I have my plate. In the plate I put water, coal, herbs. Also, I melt lead. Everything, it is generosity, I like to help every soul, whomever I can. (What can one see when the coal is being extinguished? What can one see there?) Well, daughter, it depends on what they need. I put a personal item [such as a piece of hair or clothing]. I take a personal item from a person and I put it into water and then I look at the coals. Now I use herbs. Herbs are like playing a game of chess, the figures, and then they tell me. And, in this way, when I see what a person needs, I give help. I give them water, they wash their faces, they do what they do, pour it into the river. Thank God, afterwards one is like a new-born child. (What are the herbs you work with?) I have my herbs, which are meant for that. (It shouldn't be revealed what those herbs are.) No, no. I collect them in autumn. In autumn for the winter. Those are my herbs and I pick them as I ought to. That is it, child. (Did anyone show you what herbs to pick?) No, it's God's will. It's decided by God and at God's request because I have to be God's servant. And it's not an easy job, son. It is not, child. Because for me to know what a person suffers from, all the people, it's

as if you had a university degree, but I'm not educated. I have only three years of schooling. I didn't even finish the fourth, but as for problems and troubles it's as if I had a degree. It has to be that way. (Do you cast spells out?) Yes, yes, yes, yes. (How can you see if someone is [under a spell]?) It is marked, yes. Children who have "weak" blood, who get blue in the face... They have foam at their mouths, the child gets blue, and foams at the mouth. That kills children. That is being called *granja* disease. And thank God, I give help all the same... [An official enters. Vera introduces herself] Good afternoon son, I'm Vera. I'm old, I have to straighten up a bit ... So my children, the photos. Because it is also, as they say, God's help. Generosity, generosity, my sweet child. Oh dear, oh dear! (What else do you cure children of, what diseases?) Everything. (What else?) It depends on the child, because I can see what a child needs. I know what disease a child is suffering from, well yes. Married couples that quarrel, I fix that, I just can't help drunks, drunks I can't cure. There were some [women] telling me: "O mother, my husband is drinking, my son is drinking. Help them leave the brandy!" If I could do that I would have cured my husband and my son, for example, I would help them not to drink, but this is not my job. I don't work for money: [I could say]: "Give me this much, give me that much." I can lie to him and say: "Come, I will help you." But I don't work to lie. I don't want anything from anybody. I help with what I am capable of, but for drunks I don't work. I can't help them. It was God's will, so it is my child. (Is it true, that it is considered a sin to prevent a gifted person from helping others?) I was forbidden to do it by my husband. Once he went to the grocery, and people told him, it was a long time ago, and he said: "Woman, people are laughing at me. They say: 'His wife conjures to put food on the table. They have a horde of children, her husband is a drunk, so she lies to people to support the family.'" And my husband stopped me doing it. I cried and cried and said: "Please, don't stand in my way, I beg you, I have to work. It's my duty to work." But no, no way. I was forbidden to conjure for six months by my husband. But then I swore to him: "God will send you a disease and it will make you sick. The time will come for me to cure you and then you will let me work." And that's how it was. He got pimples, they call it *koprivnica* disease. Doctors couldn't cure it. It is hard to cure. He was forbidden to eat certain food. I boiled the water for him in my pot, my child. Just a little bit, three spoons of water [I poured] over his head. In the morning he was like a newborn, no pimples, there was nothing. Only then was I permitted to work. Yes, he tried to forbid me for a time. I worked for everyone, for judges, for doctors, for everyone. Thank God, and for the police, everyone. (Is there any day when you don't work? Any holiday?) On feast days. For instance, today is a holiday, for instance tomorrow is a holiday, I won't say: "Come on that day." That means, I don't work. If you came unexpectedly, I would work. And for example, if I know it's going to be a feast day, I shouldn't invite you: "Come on that day." That means, it was not meant to be. (And Fridays, Wednesdays?) I work on Fridays, Wednesdays, I work all days, my child, when you come unexpectedly, I have to work. A woman came to me, she lost her breast-milk, pardon the expression. And it was the feast day of my family's patron saint, Saint Nicolas, in the summer. She was a Hungarian, from Skopje and she'd lost her breast-milk, no milk to feed the child, and she had to work: "Mother, what am I to do?" I told her: "My child, God has sent you on this holiday. My patron saint, please forgive me! I have to

work because that child needs food!” To leave a child crying without breast-milk and to send her back, it would make God sad. And I helped her, the mother. She went to Jankovič, on her way to Skopje. In Jankovič she got her breast-milk back. Her breast-milk returned. [Aside:] Probably they came to see the photos of my Goran. (Those are the most recent ones, the last ones, newly taken?) Those photos that they gave us, those are so, uh! Now she does this, my son shows them to her and now she looks at the photos. (Is she some kind of official?) [Aside:] She’s an official. She helps find those who are missing, but I don’t believe they are alive, daughter. I just have no place to go and nothing to do. He was a young boy, unmarried still; twenty-two he was, uh! So it is, my child. (Well, how do you conjure for food, to bring breast-milk back?) Well, that’s my work no one is supposed to know that. I do it fine. For instance when cattle lose milk, a cow loses her milk, it has no milk ... (Are you going to hand the knowledge down to someone?) You see, now this knowledge is mine, no one taught me it. If I, for example, pass it on to someone – that means if it comes naturally – it will be accepted. If it doesn’t – it will not. I have a daughter. She lives in the village of Gotovuša by Štrpci, the village of Gotovuša. I was three months pregnant with her, pardon the expression [when the gift came to me]. Now, she is interested in the work I do. That means she is going to inherit it. She had a dream twice in which she was told to carry on this job. (Who told her so?) Well, God’s will, in the dream, she dreamt of someone there, who told her: “Bilja”, her name is Biljana, “Bilja, you are the chosen one. The girl who came to you had epilepsy, and you need to cure her. You need to cure her.” She said: “Mother I helped her and now I have to work. But not before you die. I don’t want to disturb you. [Then] I will take the wedding ring off your hand.” That means, it will then come naturally to her. Other children have also asked me to pass it on to them, but I won’t, because it’s enough for one to know and that’s for remembrance. Yes. That’s it, my child. (It is important to have it passed on to someone.) Yes, it should be passed on from one generation to another. This is a gift to me from [quietly] God. No one instructed me in that. (Did you get the gift before your marriage or after?) No, no, no. After my marriage, my child, I had: Zlata one, Sveta two, Živko three and Živojin four, Slavica – five children. Five children I had, after the fifth child, the sixth was that daughter of mine who I called Bilja. I was pregnant with her at the time. And then, my child, I got the knowledge. In my youth I didn’t work. But I had to accept this work later on. Either death or the work. And I accepted it. Thank God, I’ve been doing it for twenty-eight years. But there was no turning back, so far. Thank God ... (When is the best time to collect the herbs?) See, I collect the herbs at the beginning of spring. In the first week of Lent I go out on purpose to collect the herbs. Then I am free to collect the herbs all year long. All year long I collect the herbs and dry them so I can use them during the winter when there is snow. I use sweet basil. So when I don’t have the herbs, I work with sweet basil. (Do you collect them before sunrise?) No, no, no. We have a plant called *namera*. That plant must not be touched by hand but with a knife. We take a knife and pull it out by the roots. We put a piece of bread and some money and salt down there. That means we pay the place where the plant was taken from. This plant we keep in case someone gets sick. There are some diseases that can be cured with the plant’s leaves. That is so my child, it is generosity ... I have a daughter in Gotovuše. I have two daughters in Macedonia, in Skopje. When I go to visit one of

my daughters, as you came to see me now, people find out that I've arrived, and they keep coming. There is no break in this job, my brother, there is none. I swear to you, yes, yes. A doctor from Štrpce told me, when I was having therapy for my leg: "Tell me, mother, do you work anywhere at all?" – "Please, son, give me the therapy quickly. My patients are waiting for me; I have more of them than you do here." And he laughed, yes. I like to help, son, it's generosity ... (What for you, what is the most difficult, the most difficult thing to cure?) The hardest thing for me is when they bring *bartovci*, these "mad-men" to me. When I meet him for the first time and start to cure him, it is the most difficult. Because they attack me. Thank God, when I help him, afterwards, we are friends ... Because, I want to work, to help anyone who God sends, not to do evil. I don't do evil. I drive it away, drive it away. Because I don't need it, daughter, I need to die, to bring my soul to God, child. (There are women who cast evil?) There are, there are. But it is not good. (It will come back to them.) God send it back to them. (How is it sent back?) Well God knows it, God knows, it is said: "Don't think badly of your neighbour, it will come back to you", "Don't think badly of my calf it will come back to your child." That's it, child. That means, don't think badly of your neighbour.

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