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Hasidic Pilgrimage as a Cultural Performance: The Case of Contemporary Ukraine

Introduction

In this article, principal attention is paid to the study of the Hasidic pilgrimage in contemporary Ukraine using the examples of two settlements, Uman and Medzhybizh.¹ Hasidic pilgrimages remain ambiguous: on one hand, they are still unknown to many social scientists due to the specificity and closed nature of the Hasidic community; on the other hand, their scale has attracted attention in the media, which gives the opportunity to speculate about different aspects of the phenomenon. Thus, this research intends to shed light on the Hasidic pilgrimage through the lens of cultural sociology and the conception of “cultural performance”² as the most suitable theoretical and methodological tools in the analysis of this issue. In this fashion, the performative nature of the pilgrimage helps us understand its mechanisms and problematic spaces, and reveals typical and non-typical aspects of the performance and its context. The question concerns the possibilities of envisioning the Hasidic pilgrimage as a cultural performance presented both in arranged social environments and in the media.

The case of the Hasidic pilgrimage is intrinsic within scholarly research into Hasidism itself³ and demands an outline. Hasids, in contrast to other Jewish religious groups, believe in a mystic relationship with their leader, Tsadik or Rebbe, who is a me-

¹ I express my sincere gratitude to the Centre “Sefer” for being a participant of a Field Summer school on Hasidism in Medzhybizh in 2012 and Summer school on Jewish Studies in 2013. Besides, special thanks to the organizers of the 5th Social Science Summer School “Challenging Order in the Post-Soviet Space” in 2013 for the opportunity to present some project results and receive valuable feedback which helped emergence of this article.

² Jeffrey Charles Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, Jason Mast, eds., *Social performance: symbolic action, cultural pragmatics, and ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 32.

³ Gershom Scholem, *Major trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken books, 1946); Igor’ Turov, *Rannii Khasidizm: Istorija. Veroucheniie. Kontakty so slavianskim okruzeniem* (Kyiv: Duh i Litera, 2003).

diator between God and ordinary believers whose capacities are inherited. The Hasidic movement emerged in the 18th century as an instrument of religious revival in convergence with ordinary peoples' lives. Moreover, it became a response to the processes of social segregation in society with the potential to develop far from big centers (Jews used to be urban dwellers concentrated in the former territory of Rzeczpospolita due to historical reasons that go beyond the scope of this article) and with rather contradictory relations, historically, with the rest of the Jewish community.⁴

Hasidic pilgrims come to different places of Ukraine connected with tsadiks. However, the main point of attraction, and Breslav Hasids' pilgrimage world center, is located in Uman, previously a Jewish town located in the central part of Ukraine and inhabited by a population of 80,000.⁵ Another matter of importance concerns the place of Hasidism emergence, which is Medzhybizh, a village with a relatively modest number of inhabitants – less than 2,000 people. As the number of pilgrims has recently increased, the issue of their interactions with the locals – typically non-Jewish – rests on mutual cross-cultural tolerance. Scholars record the gradual decline in levels of tolerance in Ukrainian society using the Bogardus scale for the processes of international distance. According to this scale, Jews are regarded by the population of Ukraine as “ours,” taking fifth place after the Ukrainians, Russians, Belarusians and Polish people.⁶ It is worth noting that the index of national distancing is relatively stable for Jews since the beginning of the 2000s. During that time there was an “attitude leap” from 3.9 to 5.1 according to this 7-grade scale. Attitudes to the Jewish population in Ukraine are pre-determined by historical trauma, and many debates concerning Holocaust are still on the agenda in Ukraine.⁷ Nevertheless, the concept of “tolerance” does not suffice to cover the field of interactions due to the variability of actors in the performance that we will show below.

Methodology

Cultural sociology rooted in symbolic interactionism⁸ and elaborated by J. Alexander⁹ has been chosen as the most suitable theoretical and methodological framework. The latter helps identify the “symbolic loading” of social situations created and

⁴ Turov, *Rannii Khasidizm*, 59.

⁵ “Chysel’nist’ naselennia na 1 zhovtnia 2012 roku,” *Derzhstat Ukrainy, Holovne upravlinnia statystyky u Cherkas’kii oblasti* 281 (2012): 1, http://www.ck.ukrstat.gov.ua/source/arch/2012/epr_chn_1209.pdf.

⁶ Valerii Vorona, Mykola Shul’ha, eds, *Ukrains’ke suspil’stvo 1992–2012. Stan ta dynamika zmin. Sotsiologichnyi monitorynh* (Kyiv: IS NAN Ukrainy, 2012), 578.

⁷ Izabella Khruslins’ka, Petro Tyma, *Dialohy porozuminnia. Ukrains’ko-ievreis’ki vzaïemny* (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2011), 328; Anatolii Podol’s’kyi, “Pamiat’, iaka vona? (Rozdumy pro kul’turu pamiaty v Ukraini na prykladi stavlennia do istorii Holokostu),” *Historians.in.ua*, October 27, 2012, accessed September 22, 2013, <http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/istoriya-i-pamyat-vazhki-pitannya/427-anatolii-podolskyi-pamiat-iaka-vona-rozdumy-pro-kulturu-pamiaty-v-ukraini-na-prykladi-stavlennia-do-istorii-holokostu>.

⁸ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Anchor 1959).

⁹ Alexander, Giesen, and Mast, *Social performance*, 29–90.

maintained by groups with various cultural backgrounds as well as regarding social actions as peculiar performances. In other words, “Cultural performance is the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation.”¹⁰ This approach focuses on binary moral classifications as sacred (positive) or profane (negative) – assumptions regarding any situation – and offers six main components of any performance:¹¹ collective representations (as well as background symbols and scripts), actors, means of symbolic production, *mise-en-scene*, power and audiences. We will concentrate upon recognizing all the elements of the performance in cross dimensional time, and at the same time seeking an answer about whether or not the performance can be regarded as successful in the given space and time.

Qualitative research design not only helps identify, but also to construct and deconstruct the symbolic meanings in different social environments. To compare two cases (Uman and Medzhybizh), a strategy of binary comparison of different objects seems the most relevant.¹² Such a strategy is useful for finding common features – for instance, concerning cross-cultural interactions in a town and a village, where the latter is rather a transit point of the pilgrimage while the former is its final destination.

The project is based on qualitative methods with the statistical data and calculations of the quantitative part of the content analysis:

1) Visual observation (data collection about the activities of the Hasids and change of the urban space connected with the pilgrims conducted in 2010–2012);

2) Content and critical discourse analysis¹³ based on mass-media data about the Hasidic pilgrimage in Uman in 2009–2012¹⁴ and on the instruction for the pilgrims in 2012;¹⁵

3) Interviews with locals in Uman and Medzhybizh (data collection about perceptions of the pilgrims in the local communities¹⁶ through unstructured interviews in 2011–2012).

There were three types of samples culled from the research: 1) a sample of observation notes (during the main stream of pilgrimage on Rosh Hashanah celebrated between September 5 and October 5 yearly) in 2009–2012; 2) a sample of mass-media documents which consisted of all the articles and notes about the Hasidic pilgrims available in public space on a national level (although excluding local media due to the technical reasons) in 2009–2012; 3) a sample of interviews conducted with peo-

¹⁰ Ibid., 32.

¹¹ Ibid., 33–35.

¹² Mattei Dogan, “*Strategies in Comparative Sociology*,” *Comparative Sociology* 1, no. 1 (2002): 63–92.

¹³ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003), 21–61.

¹⁴ The total number of articles is 65, see Appendix 1.

¹⁵ See Appendix 2.

¹⁶ 24 interviews conducted in Medzhybizh in June 2012 and 10 interviews conducted in Uman in July 2012.

ple who communicate with the Hasids on the regular basis or occasionally, having different ages, sexes and professional backgrounds.¹⁷ Thereby, in the exposition of the main findings, we will rely upon all the evidence specifying the data source and methods where possible.

Components of the Performance

As mentioned earlier, any performance contains collective representations¹⁸ that can be, as in this case, located in the past. Rooted historical context determines the Hasidic pilgrimage; the main objects of pilgrimage are the graves of Hasidic tsadiks located in Ukraine (e.g. the grave of Hasidism founder Baal Shem Tov in Medzhybizh and his grandson Rabbi Nachman in Uman). In this way, Hasidism pays special attention to the role of famous personalities, starting from Baal Shem Tov and proceeding to numerous tsadiks, and emphasizing the role of prayer while living in the present tense (and not in an imagined future life) as a tool for salvation and complete life meaning.¹⁹

Hasidism is not a unified doctrine in Judaism. In the contemporary world, there are several types of Hasidism, the most known of which are Habad Hasidism, Carliner Hasidism and Breslav Hasidism.²⁰ Judaism as a whole covers 0.8% of the religious life in Ukraine,²¹ although the majority of Ukraine's guests who declare their purposes for visiting as religious are Jews. Moreover, Hasidic doctrine started prevailing over the reform wing of Judaism in CIS countries,²² as paying attention to emotions and ecstasy was considered more important than rationality. Pilgrims attending Uman and Medzhybozh mainly affiliate with Breslav Hasidism. Breslav Hasidism has varied from a marginal to a power-holding sect within Hasidism. Rabbi Nachman, who died in 1810 and is buried in Uman,²³ remains the only recognized spiritual leader of the Breslav Hasids. That Rabbi Nachman is still the spiritual leader is the reason the Breslav Hasids are called the "dead hasids". Rabbi Nachman had an eccentric personality. He was often criticized or even hated because he challenged the rules and norms of the estab-

¹⁷ For the convenience of a reader, each below citation from the interview is supplied by gender (F for female and M for male) and age of an informant.

¹⁸ Alexander, Giesen, and Mast, *Social performance*, 33.

¹⁹ Philip C. Almond, "Mysticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. by Martin Goodman, Jeremy Cohen and David Sorkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2:774.

²⁰ Viktoriia Androsova, "Khasyds'ki dynastii v konteksti vidrodzhennia iudaizmu v Ukraini," *Ukrains'ke relihiieznavstvo* 53 (2010): 92–105.

²¹ "Relihiia i vlada v Ukraini: problemy vzaiemovidnosyn," *Informatsiini materialy do Kruhloho stolu na temu: "Derzhavno-konfesiini vidnosyny v Ukraini stanom na 2013 rik: Rukh do partnerstva derzhavy i Tserkvy chy do kryzy vzaiemyn?"* 22 kvitnia 2013 r. (Kyiv: Tsentrazumkova, 2013), accessed September 22, 2013, http://www.razumkov.org.ua/upload/Przh_Religion_2013.pdf.

²² Semen Charnyi, "Iudaizm na prostorakh SNG," *Ievroazjatskii ievreiskii iezhegodnik* (2005–2006): 82.

²³ Tsadik Nachman asked to bury him in Uman to commemorate the massive murder of Jewish people in 18th century (Koliivshchyna in 1768, Haidamaky rising).

lished Jewish world. Rabbi Nachman's works (i.e. his tales) emphasize a loss of status as necessary for becoming a "true" Hasid and prefer those who have previously been sinners.²⁴ The stress on "simplicity" instead of "sophistication"²⁵ has made this wing of Hasidism attractive to various social groups.²⁶ Due to this, Breslav Hasidism is sometimes considered an outlaw sect of Judaism that is, on the one hand, rather closed for non-Jewish outsiders but, on the other hand, may be open to those who did not have opportunities to join other sects of Hasidism because of power conflicts.

The first organized groups of pilgrims started coming to Ukraine after a long break from 1920 to 1987, which latter is the "perestroika" time with the fall of the Iron Curtain. Their numbers increase from year to year and reached a high in 2013. Most pilgrims come from Israel, the USA, France and Canada²⁷ to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, so that the biggest part of the year is not connected to the pilgrims' reception (we do not take in account random visits to the grave throughout a year due to comparably small numbers of pilgrims). In this manner, collective representations of the Hasidic pilgrimage lead us to differentiate the main actors of the performance.

Based on observations and interviews, we can classify the actors into two groups: Hasidism representatives and non-Hasidism representatives, though, with various sub-groups most prominently seen in Uman:

1) The representatives of the Hasidic sect in Judaism who live in Uman on a permanent basis (according to the latest official information in 2012, there is about 1000 Hasids);

2) The representatives of Hasidic sect in Judaism who come to Uman to worship Rabbi Nachman's grave (in simple words, true pilgrims);

3) The Jewish population in Uman who seems almost invisible among other locals, mainly Ukrainians;²⁸

4) The non-Jewish local population in Uman, consisting of permanent and temporary inhabitants (e.g. for the latter students) who do not deal with Hasids on a regular basis;

²⁴ *Rabochiie materialy mezhybozhskoi shkoly po khasidizmu* (Moscow–Medhybizh–Jerusalem: Sefer, 2012), 133.

²⁵ Viktoriia Mochalova, "Iudei i khristiane v Vostochnoi Ievrope: otnosheniie k chuzhoi mudrosti," in *Mudrost'-pravednost'-sviatost' v slavianskoi i ievreiskoi kul'turnoi traditsii. Sbornik statei*, ed. by O. V. Belova et al. (Moscow: Sefer, 2011), 121–144.

²⁶ On sophisticated history of Hasidism see Turov, *Rannii Khasidizm*, 12–66.

²⁷ We can compare official figures year by year. Nearly 27,000 pilgrims from 16 countries arrived in Uman in 2013; 26,000 pilgrims from 25 countries came in 2011 and 2012; 23,637 – from 23 countries in 2010; 18,806 – from 23 countries in 2009; 15,309 – from 23 countries in 2008; 14,787 – from 20 countries in 2007; 10,000 – from 17 countries in 2003, 200 pilgrims in 1988 – see official information at <http://www.irs.in.ua>; <http://www.oda.ck.ua>.

²⁸ According to the data of National census-2001 in Ukraine (<http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/>), 93,6% of Uman inhabitants marked Ukrainian as their native language. According to the site information of Jewish Communities in Ukraine <http://jewua.org/uman/>, there were 612 Jews in Uman in 2012; Jewish communities of Uman Jews and Breslov Hasidism do not contact with each other.

5) The representatives of Judaism (non-Hasidic sect) who come to Rabbi Nachman's grave in Uman either for religious or cultural purposes, as well tourists with ill-defined attitudes towards Judaism;

6) Those who deal with the Hasids on a regular basis, i.e., translators, doctors, police, taxi drivers, rental agencies and private catering service suppliers, as well as local authorities and journalists.

In recent years, the interaction between Hasids and non-Hasids has been changing. This change is tri-fold: Hasids have become permanent residents in Uman, non-Hasidic guests to the grave have increased and the total number of pilgrims has increased yearly. Also, beginning in 2011, great changes in power concentration and distribution has occurred (and will be analyzed later). Some previously mentioned actors seem less important or unimportant in the performance (such as locals who do not communicate with pilgrims on a usual basis). This change in performance, broadcast by mass media outlets, may cause social problems because it could change the perception of the pilgrimage and the general public's opinion about the pilgrims' performance.

Concerning Medzhybizh, the situation seems less structured. This town is considered a transit one. There is no local Jewish population; there are no Hasids who live there on a permanent basis; tourism is connected to the Medzhybizh castle, not to the grave of Baal Shem Tov, and not all pilgrims consider Medzhybizh as a place worth visiting. Accordingly, the local population in Medzhybizh has a rather vague understanding of the phenomenon of pilgrimage and, at the same time, a rather unified attitude to it completely determined by the economic decline of their settlement in the Post-Soviet era. It is typical to use the words "Hasids" and "Jews" as synonyms in Medzhybizh. In Uman, by contrast, where Hasids are mainly regarded as a separate phenomenon, they are a subset of the Jews. Medzhybizh people see the pilgrims as a symbol of the renovation of the village ("at last we have a normal road here," M., 50) and as a resource of jobs for locals ("twenty people can work now for Jews," M., 45). The pilgrims have managed to organize service positions (for example, garbage collectors). In Uman this dependence is not so evident (although service positions for locals, e.g. garbage collectors, are also popular in the town): people demonstrate different attitudes to the pilgrims that are often mediated and determined by the authorities, the media, and so forth.

Here we should mention the absence of an explicit position of dominant religious communities (first of all, the Orthodox) towards the Hasidic movement. It can be explained by the almost complete segregation of parishioners and the stereotypes about Hasids as those who arrive in Ukraine from time to time, but do not play any stable role in religious life (in Uman, in the first place). Also it shows that the Hasidic movement remains a new phenomenon hard to grasp all at once.

Turning to the means of symbolic production in the performance, there is visual differentiation of pilgrims from others. Wearing white and black multi-layer dresses, kippas and hats, long peyyots, and clothes with ropes attracts attention by themselves, not to mention the tradition of men's privilege of celebrating Rosh Hashanah which has

led to almost total absence of Hasidic women in Rosh Hashanah space in Uman. Locals who do not understand the culture of the Hasids' dress usually call it "strange" or "somewhat crazy": "They like to buy caps with a rabbit fur, but why do they need such things in the early autumn?" (F., 60).

Remembering that Hasidism is oriented towards the joyful expression of emotions, the behavior of pilgrims often contests reserved etiquette and accepted social norms – reciprocal misunderstandings caused the appearance of special instructions for pilgrims starting from 2010 (see Appendix 1). Admitting that such instructions typically contain eight general rules and some special rules concerning driving on the road, all instruction information is concentrated rather on the issue of safety than explaining cultural differences. Particularly, stress is placed upon the dichotomy of "known-unknown" that affords a foreigner a position of an outsider communicating within his own circle (i.e., "don't leave your luggage unattended or other supervision of not well known people," "don't drink alcohol with occasional people"). Some rules are not clear and may be interpreted in different ways, such as "adhere to rules of common living with other people in the same dwelling," while others are precise (i.e. not to make noise from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.)

Taboos within the generally closed Hasidic community prohibit mutual understanding of meanings of the same things, which is uncovered in numerous interviews (both in Uman and Medzhybizh). We may appeal to the concept of cultural shock²⁹ as appropriate for both sides encountering each other for the first time. According to the Medzhybizh interviews, it is typical for Hasidic men to perceive Ukrainian women as open to intimate types of communication according to the openness of the clothes; this is also an issue of debate in the mass media. Both the Medzhybizh and Uman interviews signified that such perceptions could be amended on the communicative level, although mass media replicates the news about attacks or aggressive behavior towards women.³⁰ Such messages may be considered more valid than official police reports, as the Index of trust toward mass media has usually been higher in independent Ukraine than trust toward the police.³¹ Moreover, the strict rule of not bringing women to the feast Rosh Hashanah has been somewhat revised as our observations in Uman have shown in recent years; in 2012 a separate entrance for women was rearranged to be in the front of the grave, not in the back part (as before). Some people who deal with the Hasids on a regular basis have a lot of humorous stories about cross-cultural communication ("I have taught them how to behave with the garbage – put it in the bucket, now we say hello to each other," F., 37)

The most special means of symbolic production refer to Saturdays (Shabbat) – a holy day for Jewish believers (especially for the Orthodox Hasids) and the prescriptions

²⁹ Adrian Furnham, Stephen Bochner, *Culture Shock: Psychological reactions to unfamiliar environments* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986).

³⁰ Iryna Patlatiuk, "Khasydy pidrizaly cholovika i zatoptaly zhinku," *Hazeta po-ukrains'ky*, September 14, 2010, accessed September 22, 2013, <http://gazeta.ua/post/353807>.

³¹ Vorona and Shul'ha, *Ukrains'ke suspil'stvo*, 564.

about what is possible to do during Shabbat. One can ask the question: “What is forbidden to do for a good Hasid on Shabbat?” and receive various answers even from the Hasids on a scale from “everything” to “nothing.” There are certain more or less common rules: do not switch on or off anything connected with electricity or housework; which is one of the reasons why Hasids prefer settling on the lower floors of multi-storied buildings and leave the lights on.

The area around the grave of Rabbi Nachman in Uman is rather small, which causes a large concentration of Hasids in one district (Pushkina Street). Based on Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of “nomination power,” we state that several quarters of this street are under the symbolic power of the newcomers due to advertisements in Hebrew and specific places marked in Hebrew as well (which, as we stated, happened in late 2000s). Moreover, loud translation of music and prayers in Hebrew all day long during Rosh Hashanah that could be heard within several kilometers gave ground to the local population’s interpretation of this sound as an “audio-expansion” (for the sake of justice, music has been abandoned during night time by the Uman authorities).

Media coverage of the issue can also be regarded as a mean of symbolic production of the performance, aiming to deliver the information about the Hasidic pilgrimage in a certain way. Returning to 2009, we see six unique³² materials in national media concerning our subject, combining informative and subjective modes of communication in order to attract an audience. In 2010, there were eleven of them, while in 2011 the amount of media materials has arisen to 25, focusing on problematic areas of cross-cultural understanding. Incidentally, 2011 was the year of the emergence of a political movement “Uman without Hasids” triggered by the right-oriented political party “Svoboda,” which also adds to the thematic area. In 2012, there were found 23 unique media news programs with some shift of accents towards tensions between the authorities and the locals, as well as the displeasure of locals with Hasidic pilgrimage. At the same time, materials of 2011 and 2012 contain so called “conciliating” messages about the means of finding solutions to problems, and general cross-cultural peacefulness. In 2012, it is possible to differentiate several articles on cultural issues (i.e., newly established Hasidic wedding traditions near the grave of Nachman, the emergence of Hebrew courses for those who will to study the language, and so forth), whereas five materials are about the potential conflicts of Uman citizens with regional authorities, not with Hasids. It is possible to sum up that on a national level the Hasidic pilgrimage is shown as a rather strange and complicated phenomenon that disturbs some locals and gives profit to other locals, including authorities.

Thus, we turn to the next part of the performance – its *mise-en-scene*. The ground around the grave of Rabbi Nachman has changed much in the 2000s. It means that, along with the restoration of the grave, a lot of specific infrastructure appeared in the district, such as hotels, shops, places of worship, and so forth. In this fashion, in re-

³² By uniqueness I mean inclusion of the same material only once, though it could be reprinted several times in different sources.

cent years the phenomenon of Hasidic pilgrimage has switched its periodization from “sometimes in September” to perennial on guard mode.

The most prestigious places to live are those neighboring the grave of Nachman. It is quite clear that due to the land limitations and the number of Hasids coming to Rosh Hashanah, the Hasids are segregated not only from Uman locals, but as well they are stratified in their own communities. Such segregation is both caused by and reflected in the pricing politics for rent among locals – about one third of media materials about the pilgrims spread information about “crafty” citizens managing to earn their annual income during one Rosh Hashanah. Evidence of informants among the locals substantiates the idea that the Hasids are the source of income for some part of the Uman population who live (or have flats or houses) nearby the grave. In such fashion, Uman citizens can settle many pilgrims at once. The typical explanation of having high prices is grounded in the fact that many settlements need capital repairs after the pilgrims’ departure. On the other hand, how many local people can do this in the conditions of a growing and externally arranged infrastructure? This question does not have a statistical answer due to the hidden operations of private renting in order to avoid taxation. In any case, the typical media message on the Hasidism touches upon the growth of Uman’s income related to the pilgrims that creates and maintains the vivid social stereotype. “Pilgrims are mostly afraid of locals: local authorities persuade them that Uman citizens are ‘cutters,’ so the pilgrims need hundreds of policemen” (M. Honcharuk).³³

A comparison with Medzhybizh illustrates many differences. Medzhybizh, as a village, which lost status of a town in 1924, does not have the proper infrastructure to settle many pilgrims; thus, it has become a transit point on the way to or from Uman. An illustrative citation from one of Medzhybizh interviews reads: “Foreigners need toilets, showers in the house, they do not understand the absence of such utilities inside. Sometimes it happens that they sleep anywhere with a free bed if there are no other variants, but they do not pay much for it” (M., 40).

Arranging for *mise-en-scene* for the pilgrims in Uman has created the prerequisites for rethinking the location of the town center. What is the center, one can argue – Rabbi Nachman’s grave or Lenin’s monument with a square located rather far from each other? Moreover, the location of the grave is much closer to the central entrance to the Uman landscape park “Sofiyivka” (a place of tourist attraction), than the official town center. This question becomes more appealing in the autumn. A yellow line defining the borders of the old Jewish cemetery is a metaphor for bordering a town inside another town, or double center construction.

The issue of double space, or even space contestation becomes more dramatic during Rosh Hashanah when Uman police and Hasidic guardians create double protection of the area of worshipping (Pushkina street) and do not let anyone local come inside unless they do not show the passport with the stamp of someone living on this street (or

³³ Yaroslava Muzychenko, “Uman’ proty khasydiv?” *Ukraina moloda*, September 2, 2010, accessed September 22, 2013, <http://www.umoloda.kiev.ua/print/84/45/61128>.

press credentials, as an exception). All this, we suppose, creates additional conditions for tensions in the society connected with the pilgrims; moreover, such conditions are supported and stimulated by the local authorities in order to prevent open cross-cultural conflicts. Why is it so contradictory? We can find the explanation in another part of a performance – power.

First of all, we should reflect upon the essence of power in our case. What does it mean to have or not to have power? If we consider power as a political tool with symbolic and economic consequences, we should again return to the question of actors. In addition to what has been written above, we have authorities on at least three levels: national, regional and local (representing both sides of interest – Hasidic and non-Hasidic). Returning to media mentioning of main actors, we include the appearance of so called “third forces” that play their games: Uman’s NGO “Council of Public Organizations” (Rada Hromad’skykh Organizatsii), the right-oriented “Svoboda” party and regional authorities (both based in Cherkasy as the administrative center, not in Uman; in 2011), as well as special people representing Israeli police and performing the guardian function (in 2012 and 2013). It means that the relations of power connected with the pilgrimage are still in the process of revision. As an illustration, in the sample of 65 analyzed materials in the open source media (2009–2012, see Appendix 2) there are 18 articles with references to the authorities, from the beginning of 2012 – not of local, but of regional level; 22 – with references to the police and 25 – to local inhabitants, in general. The discourse of Hasidic pilgrimage in Ukraine is in the process of formation – the most typical titles and main ideas revolve around the figures (how many pilgrims are expected to come, how many police would serve during the feast period, and so on), aiming to emphasize the importance of the phenomenon and the necessity to protect it (or, in other words, to be protected from it). A significant indicator of power reformation is that the Hasids started to arrange their own hotels and dining places, invite their own police and doctors (from 2011), moreover, the question of mediation and decision-making has officially moved to the higher regional level.

Though we intentionally pay attention to the whole performance not limiting it by cross-cultural issues, it is time to reflect upon the media that represent the performance. In fact, more than a half of the articles (35 out of 65) deal with existing or potential areas of conflict. Only one sixth of the materials about conflicts refer to the fact that conflicts go beyond cross-cultural issues, concentrating in the political and economic matters of local authorities (agreements of local authorities concerning the land renting, the Uman plant “Megometer,” and kiosk arrangements, for instance), but there is a shift to such materials in 2012. Other materials classified as conflict related might be those reconstructing the conflicts of local population with Hasids, especially in 2011 when some violence happened in the streets of Uman (as we stated above, this year can be grasped as a “turning point” in the appearance of counter-conflicting “relief” materials). It is worth admitting that even in one of the leading pro-Jewish organizations (Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine – Vaad) this violence has been interpreted in terms of ordinary incidents regarding the volume and pur-

pose of pilgrimage.³⁴ Thus, media reflection on the pilgrimage focuses on its cross-cultural points, while leaving political issues aside.

The last element of a performance belongs to its audiences. As well as a performance is retranslated in the media its audience has grown enormously. Direct audience viewing of a performance consists of Uman locals and guests who may even conduct a participant observation depending on their geographical location in the town. All the actors mentioned above, including the pilgrims, belong to audiences as well, at the same time performing functions of legitimization and social control over the situation. Returning to the issue of special protection of the space during Rosh Hashanah and the increasing numbers of guardians nearby, we conclude that the artificial contraction of the audience who receive primary data and (the no less artificial) expansion of the audience who receive the data from the secondary sources (media as an example) are in dynamic relationship. Moreover, recent tendencies to double frame the boundaries of a community that has always been rather closed to the outside world signify that it is not about the cross-cultural tolerance *per se*, but rather about *mutually* gated communities.

Is Cultural Performance Successful?

Referring to J. Alexander's words, performances are successful only insofar as they can "re-fuse" all these elements, meaning that in the simple collective entities they must be "fused" and then "de-fused" along with the segmentation and differentiation of the collectivity. Moreover, "performances fail when this relinking process is incomplete: the elements of performance remain apart, and social action seems inauthentic and artificial."³⁵ In this fashion, we see the interrelation of each element of the performance – space and actors, audience and power, collective representations and means of symbolic production. The recurrence of the performance from year to year signifies its necessity for at least some of the actor groups we outlined above. In terms of Alexander's model,³⁶ we observe "the separation of written texts from background collective representations" in media messages about the pilgrimage; "the estrangement of the means of symbolic production from the mass of social actors" meaning its meted out access to different groups as we stated above; "the separation of the elites who carried out central symbolic actions from their mass audiences" on the example of appearance of different groups with power interests. At the same time, successful performance reckons with making power invisible as a force³⁷; this is what we see in the majority of media mes-

³⁴ Viacheslav Likhachev, "Doklad o proiavleniakh antisemitizma v Ukraine v 2012 godu," *Vaad Ukrainy*, December 2012, accessed September 22, 2013, <http://vaadua.org/news/doklad-o-proyavleniyah-antisemitizma-v-ukraine-v-2012-godu>.

³⁵ Alexander, Giesen, and Mast, *Social performance*, 29.

³⁶ Jeffrey Charles Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social performance Between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 4 (2004): 539.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 527–573.

sages along with the interviews – the emphasis falls on the characteristic features of pilgrims and their behavior, while power tensions remain in the background.

Such performances have provoked counter-performances that, although not relevant to our research samples due to their recent occurrence, deserve at least brief attention. As mentioned earlier “Rada Hromads’kykh Organizatsii” was an accessory to the cross arrangement near the place of Hasidic praying in June, 2013 (at the same time placing the questions of power front and center),³⁸ while Cherkasy regional authorities conducted a meeting with the representatives of the Hasidic community in the Uman synagogue in September 2013.³⁹ Such counter-performances show that Hasidic pilgrimage is still seeking a place for conceptualizing and positioning itself within the existing “alignment of forces.” The pilgrimage is not only about culture, but also about politics, history and economics.

So, if we regard the Hasidic case as immanent for contemporary Ukraine (at the same time distancing the debates about the Rabbi Nachman’s grave transportation from Ukraine to Israel), it is necessary to think of possible social consequences of existing tendencies, both in the pilgrimage places and the media. We assume that the absence of open conflicts during the pilgrimage time is connected with the artificial segregation of possible grounds for conflicts. There is a large information gap concerning understanding the “Other” that might become a trigger for future cross-cultural conflicts existing in contemporary society mainly in specific contexts. Statistics about actual conflicts during the years of research are minimal,⁴⁰ though the thematic motif of danger is constantly appears in the media and may be explained as an advantageous for the authorities: “Hasids still believe in local haidamaki as a reason to pay to Uman’s police 650 thousand hrivnias in 2009,” according to the words of Uman’s journalist V. Hamalytsia.⁴¹

The current situation shows the need to conduct an information campaign directed at mutual understanding of different communities, as well as to implement transparent mechanisms for resource distribution in order to avoid further speculation.

Conclusion

As has been shown, the Hasidic pilgrimage in Ukraine can be regarded as a successful cultural performance with all necessary elements of such a performance. Despite long standing historical precedents, the Hasidic pilgrimage is still a new phenomenon

³⁸ Irina Musaieva, “V Umani pered prriezdom palomnikov-khasidov nazrevaet konflikt,” *Hazeta po-ukrains’ky*, August 2, 2013, accessed September 9, 2013, http://gazeta.ua/ru/articles/life/_v-umani-pered-priezdom-palomnikov-hasidov-nazrevaet-konflikt/509912.

³⁹ “Cherkas’ka vlada v Umani pishla do khasydiv u synahohu,” *Pro vse*, September 3, 2013, accessed September 22, 2013, <http://provce.ck.ua/cherkaska-vlada-v-umani-pishla-do-hasydiv-u-synahohu>.

⁴⁰ Likhachev, “Doklad o proiavlenniakh antisemitizma.”

⁴¹ Svitlana Tuchynska, “Palomnytstvo khasydiv do Umani ne lyshaietsia bez skandalu. Shcho tam vidbuvaetsia?” *KyivPost*, September 15, 2010, accessed September 22, 2013, <http://www.kyivpost.ua/ukraine/article/palomnytstvo-hasidiv-do-umani-ne-lishaetsya-bez-skandalu-scho-tam-vidbuvaetsya-3808.html>.

in Post-Soviet Ukraine. The understanding of performativity helps reveal its stable and emerging elements, as well as to disclose the most problematic areas and their possible consequences. Initially, the cross-cultural nature of possible conflicts is consistently substituted by resources redistribution, the most visible of which are power and money. Thereby, actors playing in the performance can not be merely grouped into “locals” and “pilgrims” opposed to each other; there are many more types of actors involved, lines of communication mapped, and possible conflict areas generated.

All the methods helped reconstruct and analyze the Hasidic pilgrimage as an overall performance from the position of an actor and audience, generalized by the position of a researcher. Results of the observations pointed out to the great visual change of the *mise-en-scene* of the performance over the years 2009 to 2012, its adaptation to the needs of pilgrims on an everyday basis and, at the same time, some contemporary compromises in relatively traditional perceptions of gender. Media coverage of this cultural performance accents the numbers of pilgrims looking and behaving in a different way, and, in this fashion, creates a vision of danger that should be (and is) managed by the police. The other side of media coverage concerns the profits of locals and the opposition of other locals, as well promotions of stereotypes in the economic arena. The analysis of interviews has shown at least several trends regarding the performance. Those locals do not who interact with the Hasids on a permanent basis have rather vague views of the community and its aim in Rosh Hashanah celebration, though they share stories and legends about “the Other.” Locals in Uman tend more to differentiation (between “Hasids” and “Jews,” between “authorities” and “ordinary people,” and between “good Hasids” and “bad Hasids”), while perceptions of the Hasids are more heterogeneous in urban environments in comparison with the village’s connection to the aggregate pilgrims’ image with the possible economic revival after Post-Soviet devastation.

The plasticity of structural and resource characteristics of the pilgrimage means that it is far from becoming an established phenomenon with defined areas of the sacred and the profane. As this article is an attempt to substantiate the performative nature of the pilgrimage, many questions await the future answers. First, this is a question of transitive areas among the communities and actors able to change their previously held views and values and cultural mechanisms; second, a question of the admixture of religious and touristic elements in the pilgrimage raises both external and internal indicators of the diagnostics; and third, there is the question of comparison with other cases located outside Ukraine.

Appendix 1.

Research sample of articles on the Hasidic pilgrimage during 2009–2012⁴²

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**Appendix 2. A memo for foreign guests.
How to behave in Ukraine and not become a victim of crime⁴³**

Welcome to Uman. Below please find Ukraine's rules, which you should follow. They will provide for your security while not restricting the rights of local citizens. In particular, you should abide by the following rules:

- have your documents with you at all times;
- at night, stay in the places you planned to spend the night;
- follow the fire safety rules and remember neighbors besides you;
- keep in mind that during the day noise cannot exceed 80 db. From 22.00 to 06.00 it is forbidden to make noise, and the fine for breaking the rule can exceed \$50;
- do not leave your belongings unattended or attended by unknown people or companions;
- do all currency exchanges only in banks;
- avoid, especially at night, deserted streets, dark gateways, and places which are far from the main roads;
- not use alcohol with unknown people or companions.

When using a scooter, you should:

- have documents for a vehicle, including a civil liability insurance policy, as would be expected of all owners of vehicles;
- obey the traffic rules and, in particular, do not exceed the normal speed limits (60 km per hour) or ride on the sidewalks. Do not create emergency situations on the roads, and stop on the order of uniformed policemen.

There are administrative and criminal fines for the violation of these rules.

If someone committed an offense against your person, you should immediately go to the police or call 102.

In case of need, police and emergency services are always ready to help you.

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⁴³ Originally issued in Russian and Hebrew versions. Translated into English from Russian by the author of the article.

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