

CHILD'S GROWTH CELEBRATED THROUGH TRADITIONAL CELEBRATIONS IN MACEDONIAN CONTEMPORARY FAMILY

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Abstract: The paper discusses the traditional ritual related to childhood in the contemporary Macedonian family. The following rituals are observed: the ritual of “invitation to mekici” – at childbirth, baptism, the preparation of “postapalki” – when the child takes its first steps, and birthday parties. The empirical material based on archival materials, field research, direct observations, but also on participatory observations, so called “insider’s approach”, has shown that many traditional elements of ritual in the modified form are present in modernity, so we can consider their functional equivalence as well. It can be concluded that the rituals rise to the level of solemn celebrations, which clearly show the consumer spirit and the prestige that is aimed to be shown. The new living conditions impose new rules of socialization, new types of associations, to which part of the tradition is transferred, therefore the categories of kinship appear as a cultural matrix that shapes the way people present their relationships with others.

Keywords: contemporary Macedonian family, childhood, tradition, festive celebrations, consumer culture

Introduction

The subject of interest is the birth and growth of a child and the extent to which the traditional rituals are present in the contemporary Macedonian family. Taking into account the fact that we will try to see how many traditional elements are present in contemporary culture (the period between the end of 20th and beginning of the 21st century), I will also refer to the traditional culture, which is inevitably subject to change. Therefore, older written ethnographic material sources will be used, along with recent archival materials deposited in the Archives of the Institute of Folklore in Skopje,¹ direct observations, sometimes participatory observations (mainly in Skopje), Internet sources, the impact of electronic media, various social media, as well as different forums that can be seen as a type of transfer of information about tradition in contemporary times. In my research I will rely on Bausinger’s Theory of Functional Equivalence to a great degree.

¹ Own field researches were performed in the period from the late 90s of 20th century until today among orthodox Macedonians.

In Macedonian folkloristics, ethnology and anthropology, childhood is mainly observed in the frames of the ethnographic monographies (Павловић 1928: 217–220; Петровић 1907: 362; Петреска 2002; Петреска 2005: 137–141; Петреска 2008: 55–90) that mostly focus on researching the traditions associated with birth, childhood and socialization of children. A number of works deal with children's folklore (Цепенков 1972, кн. 9: 311–401; Хаџи-Пецова 1964: 53–61; Величковски 2000: 264–265; Величковски 2006: 43, 59; Величковски 2011), which has recently been researched worldwide in a special scientific field called childhood folkloristics (Величковски 2011: 7).

The French family historian Philippe Ariès pointed out that judging by the fine arts, childhood did not exist in medieval Europe, and his thesis was that with the economic changes and social development, childhood as a concept in family life was accepted in the 17th century, which implies that it is a social construction (Ariès 1962). Several other researchers share the same opinion that childhood was created in the past two or three centuries. Rob Weatherill is among them, and his opinion is quite interesting and ironic. He believes that it was not until the beginning of the 18th century that the modern family was born which nurtured its privacy and paid more and more attention to the child, his needs, feelings, health, as well as to his upbringing and education. In the 20th century, the upbringing of children increasingly became a social and state concern. In addition to families, children and their socialization started being taken care of by kindergartens, social work centers, the church, the media and of course, the schools (Vederil 2005: 167–168; Trebješanin 2005: 280), and childhood started to be perceived as a transitioning period from birth to adulthood (Vederil 2005: 168). However, Rob Weatherill ironically points out that the same thing has been happening in modern times. By eliminating the generational differences between parents and children at the behest of modern, democratic, negotiating strategies, the notion of the child as a child is eradicated again (Vederil 2005: 191–192). Contrary to authors who believe that childhood did not exist, other authors reject this view, which is inconsistent with the traditional cultures that still exist today, i.e. that past childhood records are undeniable, but the length of childhood and the child's role in the family and society were very different from modernity (Lancy 2008: 6). However, due to the long period of "childhood" that we accept in our time, modern societies are more obsessed with children than traditional ones. Today, both the time of parenthood and childhood have become more definite and separate from the other phases (Koković n.d.: 81).

Unlike modern childhood studies that are rapidly evolving today in Western Europe and America, their attention is primarily focused on children's voices and the (im)possibility for their articulation that lacks local constructions (Marković 2010: 158–159). David F. Lancy, examines childhood in different cultures around the world in three contradictory constructions of childhood – Cherubs, Chattels, and Changelings, and he provides a wide range of reflections on childhood, from denying the existence of childhood as a separate life period to re-examining the construction of childhood in its global context, with a special feeling for the local constructions (Lancy 2008). He simultaneously views childhood as a cultural and biological phenomenon, and follows its changes throughout history and in different cultures. With his numerous examples taken from different cultures, he aims to show that childhood cannot be seen only from the aspect of the Western culture, i.e. of the Euro-American ethnocentrism, but that different cultures view childhood differently (Lancy 2008: 1–5, 400–410). Starting from the fact that the contemporary ritual about the birth and growth of the child in the Macedonian family and the presence of traditional elements will be considered, I come closer to Lancy's conception, according to whom the analytical subject of childhood anthropology begins when the child does not exist or is not born yet, and in accordance with that he addresses the issue of family planning, pregnancy, infanticide, family structure, economic viability of the family, etc. (Lancy 2008: 14–16; 75–119). In accordance with that, I will give a review of the period of pregnancy, the rituals after birth, baptism, the time when babies start walking, and birthdays as the most popular.

Tradition in birth-related rituals

Although modern society is considered free from rituals, and that people do not perform them anymore, rituals still show their presence in contemporary modern culture. The rites of modern culture are free from the magical-religious component, and they can be referred to as secular rites. However, the mythical-magical model (especially when it is expressed in the rites of passage), as well as the cultural-historical model, focuses great importance on the cultural means directed towards the child's development, especially in the transitional, critical moments of growth. Birth, walking, talking, puberty, and even breastfeeding or growing teeth are not just biological phenomena, but above all, human events that have the marks of culture imprinted on them thanks to the customs, magical rituals and procedures. According to popular beliefs, the rituals and customs in critical

and transitional moments, not only mark, but also significantly encourage and enable these key developmental changes, which would not have happened without the intervention of culture (Trebješanin 1991: 378–386). Similarly, even much more advanced modern societies cannot just ignore important events, and place great importance on events that follow the birth, growth of the child (for example: the growing of the first tooth, birthdays, etc.), and all important changes that start to happen (Lancy 2008: 22). Contemporary Macedonian culture does not lag behind in that regard. But more rituals rise into solemn events – celebrations.

In Macedonian contemporary culture, having offspring is still an important moment for almost every married couple. During weddings in the past, a series of rituals were performed in order for the young couple to have offspring, primarily a boy. Whereas in contemporary times (the period between the end of 20th and beginning of the 21st century) rituals cannot be observed to a large extent (with the exception, for example, when after the couple's signing in the registry office, coins, candies and chickpeas are thrown over their heads). Although the planning of the family, in terms of the number of children and the time the young couple wishes to have them, depends on themselves², it seems that the tradition has left some traces here. I say this because, for example, during the first two years, a very common question addressed to the young married couple, especially the bride, is this: "Is there anything new?", meaning, "Are you pregnant?" If after this period "there is nothing new", then more distant relatives and friends avoid this question further, but secretly consider that "something is wrong", not taking into account that all that might not be the desire of the young people. According to tradition, the first year is the time when the bride should conceive, and after the expiry of that period, a whole range of measures are undertaken so as to cause conception (seeing healers, drinking healing waters, passing under hollow stones, etc.). The development of medicine, the level of education, and the openness of the media to speak on these topics are important factors that contributed to the solution for the "infertility" of young married couples to be sought in medicine.³ However,

² This is not always the case, at least not at that time, because very often the reason for an unplanned marriage is the pregnancy of the girl.

³ Recent anthropological research in the field of fertility deal with research on biomedical assistance in conception, with the problems of in-vitro conception, i.e. artificial insemination and their effects on female patients, i.e. their individual experiences, especially in cases when it is not successful; the problems of people

in some extreme cases with a certain stratum of the population, regardless of their religion and nationality, the practices of getting healing water or passing through hollow stones are still maintained. A living example of this is Govedar Kamen – located in the area of Sveti Nikole, where on St. George's Day (5–6 May), an infertile woman is fraternized with an unknown man, who is afterwards referred to as “blood brother” and sometimes “godfather”. The interpretation of the retention of the rite performed on Govedar Kamen is that it is performed when the most important values prescribed by the Macedonian culture are questioned – life, and offspring. But we must not forget the other side that arises, the one that is particularly present in the most recent period – the economic benefit of it. Sometimes the desire to be a blood brother had grounds in the benefit of it; purchase of a lamb that had already been sacrificed, and that was much cheaper than lambs bought at regular shops, then the numerous stalls around Govedar Kamen, where various trifles were sold (Петреска 2019: 69–70; 102).

The sole period of pregnancy is not accompanied with any ritual. Whereas in the past, the position conditioned by uncertainty and unpredictability that accompanies pregnancy is expressed by the characteristic duality: the pregnant woman is endangered, but she herself is a source of danger to the environment, in contemporary environments, this uncertainty can be seen only in the designations “pregnant”, “expectant”, “blessed”, “heavy with child”. The uncertain and unpredictable pregnancy, especially the first one, instead of being accompanied by rituals is now alleviated by regular medical monitoring and the inevitable medical advice on the woman's behavior in this condition. Analogous to this, one cannot talk about hiding this condition from the closest environment, but talk about it openly, and that spares the woman on many levels. The uncertainty is regularly monitored by the obligatory ultrasound, which can be considered as the first photograph of the baby or seeing it, while it is still in the womb. This is supported by contemporary anthropological research, which considers that printed sonogram from the ultrasound scan being given to a pregnant woman to be “the first photograph of the baby”, and the sonograms of different stages of the fetal development can be used to decorate the first

who want to have children and the legal regulations in some countries about whether a woman or a married couple with a stable marriage can conceive in this way, the questions and different thoughts related to biological and social paternity (Keržan 2003: 212–220; Knoll 2003: 229–243).

pages of the children's photo album (Knoll 2003: 238). Ultrasound and sonograms are also believed to create emotional and social connections with the fetus. The emotional relationships are viewed through three dimensions: the first as "behavior", the second as "reassurance", and the third as "bonding", while the social relationships are seen in the act of showing the sonograms of the unborn baby to family members, when they start to develop emotional attachment to it (Knoll 2003: 237–238). In present-day conditions, the young couple, especially the woman, is the one who feels the uncertainty and insecurity the most. Unlike the past, when the mother-in-law, and other female relatives on the side of the bride had the role of "advisory bodies" for this situation, nowadays, in addition to expert advice given by medical institutions, there are other older female relatives, female friends who have already gone through such a state to give advice, as well as the media – both print and electronic. However, this also speaks of the growing interest of society in keeping the pregnant woman in good health, getting a healthy baby, and raising healthy offspring (Петрепка 2008: 61–62).

Worldwide research on the future parents' talking to the fetus, the so-called "belly talk" is seen as a form of linguistic socialization aimed at young children, and in addition it also plays an important role in the socialization of the expectant parents. This form of talking in American culture is described as "a middle-class culture, with planned values, control and foresight in the interest of a 'quality, and healthy child'." (Han 2009: 316–326).

Traditionally, the birth of a baby was considered to be the beginning of the mother's emotional and mutual life between her and her baby. Modern science now makes it clear that the organs of the newborn do not "light up" at birth: studies show that emotional and mutual life is practiced while the fetus is still in the womb. It is believed that a relationship can be constructed with the baby before it is born, and this "communication" can have important consequences for the baby's development and personality.

The development of science, the media network, and especially recently the Internet, contribute to such trends to be present in Macedonian culture. The advice given to both future parents, in terms of constantly talking to the fetus while it is still in the mother's womb, playing music, caressing the fetus, in addition to the aforementioned language socialization, can be interpreted as prior acceptance and recognition of the unborn child in the family community, but also as socialization of the future parents

themselves in expectation of their new role that they will get in the near future.

In regard to socialization of the parents for their future roles, as well as the acceptance of the child in the new family community, we can also include the practices of allotting space for the unborn child – a nursery, or simply transforming a part of the bedroom, getting clothes and other necessities for the unborn baby, because nowadays there is simply no couple expecting a baby and not being obsessed with these sweet problems, at least in the final stages of pregnancy. However, this also clearly shows that childhood is one of the tools of consumption (Lancy 2008: 25, 28). These trends emerged after the Second World War, especially with the processes of industrialization and modernization, and have been present until today. The overall socio-economic, political, educational changes, and the fast pace of life reflected in rituality, which was penetrated with values from the western culture, where the emphasis is on the consumer culture. This can be seen as the acceptance of innovations, new habits, rituals, especially in the city, but with the retention of traditional elements.

As more characteristic rituals performed at the birth of a child are the preparation of “mekici”, “tiganici” (fried buns), “langidi”,⁴ and baby showers (Петреска 2008: 65), which unlike in the past when this ritual was performed in the period up to 40 days from the birth of the baby, when close relatives, mostly women, visited the new mother, and brought sweets for the baby, today the visiting period is much longer and it can stretch out to a year, with mandatory gifts for the baby – clothes, but also various items necessary for the mother to make things easier around the baby – tubs, high chairs, play baskets, etc. That is why baby showers can also be seen as a ritual that is related to the raising of the child.

Preparations and invitation to “mekici”

The act of birth has a significant role in contemporary conditions as well, because the arrival of the long-awaited new member of the family is a significant change for the family. In the traditional rituals at birth, the main effort was to provide the mother with an easier delivery, but also the newborn child to be accepted by the new community, primarily by the fraternal family community. Although today these rituals are significantly reduced, we can talk about their presence to a certain extent, but in a different form and a new function. When it comes to the traditional culture,

⁴ Small buns made from wet dough and fried in hot oil.

for example at the birth of a child in the region of Radovish, a baby cake was prepared from the seventh to the ninth day, and during that period only women were invited to the new mother's home, and the women brought "langidi", buns or pies as well as gifts for the baby (Кошевец 2020: 60–61); in other places, the mother-in-law was the woman that made the "mekici" and invited other women over. When paying a visit, the women most often brought something sweet.

As an acceptance ritual that still exists at the birth of a child and is more actual in the father's part of the family is the preparation of "tiganici" (fried buns), "mekici", or „langidi“. At the birth of the child, the same or the next day, depending on the time of the birth, close friends and family are invited into the father's home where the news of the new arrival is announced and it is accompanied by the preparation of "mekici". The invited guests usually bring gifts such as boxes of chocolates, flowers, and nowadays very often they bring baby books, toys, etc. Forums on the Internet bear witness to this widespread custom in terms of questions about the adequate gifts that should be given during this occasion:

...What do you buy as a gift when you are invited to "mekici" with a close family, or with an acquaintance/friend? Is there a certain custom for that day? Who is supposed to make the "mekici" for the second, third child? I always bring a box of chocolates and wine, I also include a gift card, but for my close relatives I make something more interesting. Three years ago, when my boyfriend became an uncle, instead of bringing a box of chocolates, I made 21 different dolls with chocolate candies (because the baby girl was born on 21st December) and I wrote "It's a girl" on the ribbon" (Snow Queen), or: „When I am invited to "mekici" by close relatives, I bring a cake, a baby book, and flowers. If they are distant friends/relatives, I bring a box of chocolates

(Alondra).⁵

The preparation of "mekici", or "tiganici" by the husband's mother (usually made by the mother-in-law), can be interpreted in favor of the masculine principle, starting from the fact that in traditional culture, by getting married, the woman starts living with her husband, i.e. the father-in-law. However, this is only one side, because the changes in the way of life, analogously cause changes in the relations in the family, and thus in the ritual. Therefore, very often, in addition to this preparation of fried buns in the home of the husband/father-in-law, it is also found in the home of the

⁵ See the link: <https://bit.ly/3yxYBrj>

bride, which speaks about the mutual acceptance of the newborn child (besides the male side) and the side of the bride. Lately, many families have been organizing a gathering for “mekici” in restaurants. There are various reasons for that: small living space, unwillingness to make a mess in the home, or the desire for the newborn’s family to present itself on a more “prestigious level”. There are different opinions about the organization of such celebrations:

...Ever since I can remember, the whole family went together, my mother and father. Now, if they invite us to “mekici”, we will all go together again, my husband, my daughter and I. I love these celebrations, somehow they are my favorite, and that’s when I find the “mekici” the tastiest. Yes, they resemble wedding receptions, but they are beautiful. I do not condemn those who invite people over at restaurants; on the contrary, it is a good idea for them, considering that you do not have to make a mess at home, nor do you have people smoking (you do not smoke in restaurants, and at home you’d be engulfed in smoke, that you’ll have to let air flow for days)...“

(Lolyta 777)”,

or:

I have to nag a little here now. What’s with the latest fashion of inviting people over for “mekici” at a pub? Yikes! There must be a special date. The baby will turn one until the parents find an available spot at the restaurants, because they have to find the appropriate one and show themselves off. I don’t know what happened to these people with the pubs and the celebration! Not that it is not for celebration, but I cannot figure out the pubs in this situation

(Perina).⁶

The presence of the rite is evidenced by the latest developments during the Covid 19 pandemic, when in the initial period of the health crisis, a period with quarantines, limited movement (the quarantines were around the end of May 2020), packed portions of “mekici” with something on the side – cheese, or something sweet were brought to relatives, and friends at home, without actually entering their homes.⁷ The easing of the measures has helped to re-start the gatherings for “mekici” at homes or restaurants, but it depends on the families themselves, whether they want to gather or not. The traditional ritual of “tiganici” (fried buns), aside for taking place in the frames of the family, is also found on another level (for example, work

⁶ See the link: <https://bit.ly/3JaeEAn>.

⁷ Personal experiences.

posts). It is a very common practice for the new father to celebrate this act by bringing “tiganici” to his workplace, but he also takes “tiganici/mekici” to his wife’s workplace. In addition to the new father, it often happens that the parents of the newborn’s parents bring “mekici” or something sweet to their workplaces.⁸ The case of bringing “mekici” to work, but also inviting close colleagues for the rituals of gathering for “mekici”, or baby showers can be associated with new living conditions, when the city life imposes new types of associations, to which part of the tradition is transferred to; thus categories of kinship emerge as a cultural matrix that shapes the way people represent their relationships with others (Salot, Segalen & Zonabend 2002: 111). In this sense, workplace associations can be considered as associations imposed by urbanism, where communications with colleagues are often more intense and intimate, and where people tend to become more familiar with colleagues rather than with relatives.

The tradition in the rituals related to growing up

Here I would again refer to the already mentioned baby showers, baptism, the first steps of the baby, and the birthdays. In traditional culture, by throwing a baby shower, the child was accepted in the new community; however the wider community also participates at this moment as well (Jovanović 1993: 77; Влаховић 1995: 77), while the baptism is another higher level of acceptance of the child, when it gets his/her name and becomes an individual, and that represents the most characteristic aggregation ritual that is being observed in the rites of passage theory (Van-Gennep 1981: 89–91). All the rituals being performed today that rise to the level of celebrations carry the consumer spirit, so in that sense the question arises about the connection between these celebrations, i.e. their organization with the neoliberal market economy and consumer identity. Another important point for contemporary celebrations is that in addition to kinship ties, the new times, especially the city life, imposes other types of associations.

In the past, sweet things were brought to the new mother and the baby for the baby shower. Modern times offer other opportunities for gifting, very often clothes, but also various items (strollers, high chairs, various toys, etc.).

⁸ In the case of a large company, then such treats are organized for the closest colleagues, and if it is a small company, then all the employees are invited.

Baptism has undergone several changes compared to traditional culture: the socialist period, the collapse of socialism – the last decade of the twentieth century, until today (Петреска 2005: 103–119; Петреска 2008: 66–73). The period of socialism, which propagated atheism, was characterized by the exclusion of church rites from the system of family rites and holidays, and consequently it led to the reduction of baptisms and the role of godfather. It often happened the child to be baptized by any person instead of the godfather, most often a member from the extended family. This was especially characteristic of urban areas, most often in those families where one family member was a member of the Communist/Socialist Party. In this way, the families tried to hide from the public world. But the socialist period failed to completely erase the traditional belief in the character of the godfather and in the act of baptism, especially in rural areas. Naturally, this belief was more strongly expressed with the older generation, but it is quite present with today's middle generation (which at that time was a younger generation), as evidenced by the answers along the lines that “it is bad to change the godfather, so say the old”, although the beliefs about the godfather's curse are not as strong, and baptisms have not ceased in any period (Петреска 2008: 66). It was during that period that the godfather emphasized his position through the gifts he gave his godchild (clothes, baby bedding, gold, money). But the family also gave the godfather and his family “bovčaloci” (several gifts packed together), which were much bigger than the traditional ones. Also, the preparations of dishes and gifts for the other guests were significantly greater compared to the traditional ones. It seems that the period around the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, were the most favorable for a profound acceptance of the consumer economy and the emphasis was on the economic component, because that period was the most favorable for the population in terms of finance. The statements of the respondents clearly confirm this:

- V. P.: Did you have baptizing parties for your children?

- I: Yes, for all of them. And for my grandchildren. Those were huge parties with lots of guests. We gave gifts... For my (children). My family didn't have great parties. We gathered the close family, my mother, father, some uncles, those were the people.

- V. P.: Was baptizing allowed then, at your time?

- I: It was, no one forbid it. We baptized our children. Someone said that the communists didn't baptize their children. But we baptized ours.

- V. P: And what did you say about your daughters-in-law? Did they have big parties?

-I: Great baptizing parties with music and dancing, and lots of tables with food from one part of the yard to the other“.⁹

The last decade of the 20th century until today has been characterized by the economic crisis that hit Macedonian society and is still ongoing, and because in contemporary conditions the role of the godfather and the related rituals of marriage and baptism involve a lot of material expenses, it often happens that the godfather himself gives up the position of godfather. This means that in environments where the tradition of respecting the godfather has never ceased, the young couples first invite the old godfather/best man and after he gives his permission, they ask for a new one. In environments where this tradition was not very common, mainly in larger cities, it often happens that the person the young couple wants to choose as a godfather/best man, whether for a wedding or a baptism, does not want to accept this role due to material reasons. The reason for this lies in the fact that as soon as something begins to be accepted by the majority of the population, it begins to be accepted as a custom, and the consumer spirit in connection with baptism and other festivities has already been deeply ingrained. Thus, the custom of being a godfather and preparing baptism parties remain with their newly formed values – showing off the status of the godfather, but also that of the couple’s family and this status is shown through the consumer identity.

Consumption, consumer culture and economic gain, which are considered to be influenced by the Western culture, are gaining momentum, but the traditional elements remain skillfully blended. A good example of this is my latest Internet browsing, then various social networks, various forums, where modern ways of inviting a godfather/best man either for a baptism or a wedding can be seen. Although most often the invitation is accompanied by bringing whiskey or another drink, the decorated bottle is the one that can be associated with the traditionally decorated “bottle-card”, just as the gifts-giving was “mandatory” in traditional culture, and it is present today between the two families, but in different forms. In addition to

⁹ The interlocutor (female), b. 1930 in v. Deljadrovce – Kumanovo. Recorded in v. Idrizovo – Skopje in 2004. Regarding the fact that the interlocutor was married at 19, getting her children married and getting her grandchildren, hence the time of their baptizing parties confirm that exactly that period (70s and 80s of the 20th century) people started having big baptizing parties.

this, there is a comment I found online and it goes: „so, a baptizing party is an expensive pleasure“ (Soncicko)¹⁰.

The same can be said about the rite called “postapalki”, which in traditional culture was performed when the child started taking its first steps. Thus, for the Kumanovo region, J. Hadži-Vasiljević reports that the mother kneaded “kravaj” (bread) or a loaf and invited over older children. Two children carried the baby and shouted “fly, fly, fly”. Then, they let the baby walk, and were given a loaf of bread (Хаџи-Васиљевић 1909: 370). From my field research in the Kumanovo area, I also learned that a loaf of bread was kneaded, put in a plate with a ring put next to it, and it was believed that which of the two the child reached for, he would be inclined towards that. If the child reached for bread, there would be bread in his life, and if he reached for the ring, he would have jewelry (Петреска 2000: 325). It was similar in Maleševo, where “preapalka” was kneaded in the shape of a “footprint”, over which they put money, paper, a pencil, a spindle, a needle, or a hammer (different object for boys and girls) and they believed that the object the child would reach for first, would be his future trade (Павловић 1928: 219). My field research proved that this ritual was nearing extinction at the end of the 20th century, because I was always told “that is how it used to be done”, although I do not rule out the possibility that it was done in individual families. This ritual was not present in bigger cities, especially Skopje. But in contemporary times this ritual is present and that can be also confirmed by browsing various social networks, as well as various forums, which in modern times can be seen as kinds of transmitters of information about tradition (electronic media, and the Internet can be used as field research; about this see: Гавриловић 2005: 144–150; Senjković & Pleše 2004). I will refer to a couple of examples found on the forums:

...One of these days we are going to make “postapalki” for my nephew. We were told they are supposed to be made and given away on a new moon. We asked the church and they told us that the new moon is on January 20th, so we are going to make them next week, and I’ll post a picture here” (The-Queen). “...They are not made everywhere, I honestly didn’t know about this, because it is not practiced in my area. It is not practiced even where my husband’s parents come from. I found out about this tradition a year ago, I like it, so maybe I will do something like this for my second child” (Annath). “Through common logic I realized that this is a custom and that it is practiced when the baby takes its first steps. But can anyone explain it to me

¹⁰ See the link: <https://cutt.ly/P8p2QxB>.

in more detail? Is this done in Skopje? How long after the baby starts walking is this done and what is the custom? Is it only for the family or is there a celebration with guests?"

(Lovely 93).

This is a custom, just as we make rice pudding for the baby's first tooth. They are called 'postapalki'... the mother makes them when the baby makes the first steps, and then takes them to family, for example my boy started walking 6 days ago, but I'll make them tonight and tomorrow I'm going to take some to my sister-in-law, my maid of honor, brother-in-law, godmother, close friends... but I'll give them on the doorstep and then I'll move on – that's the custom; you are not supposed to stop so that the baby would walk in life without stopping

(Snow-Queen).¹¹

Ads about sold "postapalki" can be found, as well as recipes, and molds that have the shape of a baby's foot (Петрепка 2021: 9). Here again, the consumer culture comes to the fore, and the promotion of cultural traditions can be viewed as commercial product (Петрепка 2020: 56).

In contemporary times, a custom that is very common in connection with the celebration of childhood is the birthday. Particular importance is given to the celebration of the first birthday, which can be associated with all the traditional rites besides the baptism (for the first birthday as a substitute or equivalent of baptism, see: Ковачевић 2001, III: 28), that were performed in the past, the rituals to which the community paid more attention, and with which it publicly promoted the gradual entry of the child into the community (baptism, first tooth, first steps, first hair trimmings) (see also: Малешевић и Братић 1983: 88–91; Krel & Đorđević Crnobrnja 2021: 496).

Birthday celebrations did not have the same importance in many, more developed countries decades ago (Bausinger 1990: 15). Today, it can be freely said that there is almost no person who does not give importance to the birthday, especially the birthday of his child. Celebrating that day every year is a new challenge for every mother and father, as well as a new problem. It is certain that this does not involve identical celebrations, because there are differences, for example between different social strata and social groups. It could be said that birthdays are a typical example of events that start to change and from a fashion trend, they turn into customs. Fashion gives the mark of a social rank (Bausinger 2002: 148).

¹¹ See the link: <https://bit.ly/3IU7EIR>.

There were no birthday celebrations in the Macedonian traditional culture. Their momentum begins in the socialist period, especially the period around the 70–80s of the 20th century, when the consumer's culture begins to appear. My own field research clearly shows that mass birthday celebrations start to appear in that period. However, celebrating a birthday also depends on the economic situation of the families, so there are families where it is modestly celebrated, although for every parent their child's birthday is an important event (Петреска 2008: 73–74).

The situation was similar in the other neighboring countries.¹² Thus in Serbia, it is assumed that the custom was imported from Central and Western Europe, and its popularization was around the 1960s (Малешевић и Братић 1983: 87; Krel & Ђорђевић Crnobrnja 2017: 63; Krel & Ђорђевић Crnobrnja 2019: 137–138). Research on the Socialist period in Yugoslav socialist society (i.e. Macedonian, as a part of it) suggests that the reasons for the popularization of this type of social practice should be seen primarily in the light of the radical social, political, economic and cultural changes that took place in Yugoslav society in the second half of the 20th century. An ideal secular ritual was recognized in the celebration of children's birthdays, which ideally served as a substitute for family celebrations of a religious nature (Малешевић и Братић 1983: 88–91). The popularization is intensified by the fact that the institutions that dealt with the upbringing and education of children and youth, from kindergartens, through primary schools, and high schools, are also responsible for its retention. In that way, social control is implemented, i.e. institutionalizations of this custom through professional care (Krel & Ђорђевић 2017: 63). All this contributed to the creation of a favorable climate for further affirmation of this celebration during the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, and during the 80s of the 20th century it became one of the most important family holidays, not only in urban, but also in rural areas. This was also influenced by the significant increase in the living standard of the population, which influenced the formation of consumer habits. In this context, with the birthday celebrations, the family sends a message to the social environment about its prestige, expresses its love and attention to the child (Малешевић и Братић 1983: 94). Nevertheless, beside the family that wants to show its

¹² As reference for celebrations, congratulations and organization of birthdays, see: Малешевић и Братић 1983: 87–99; Џоловић 1986: 189–199; Братић 1981: 61–68; Krel & Ђорђевић Crnobrnja 2017: 61–70; Krel & Ђорђевић Crnobrnja 2019: 135–152; Krel & Ђорђевић Crnobrnja 2021: 491–507.

prestige in front of the invited guests, as well as the prestige through the organization of the birthday and its content, there are the guests who show their prestige through the gifts they bring to the child. This confirms Moss's thesis about the gift-giving, gift acceptance and return of the gift, presented at the beginning of the 20th century, that the gift is a tool for showing superiority, i.e. prestige (Mos 1982 (2): 207).

In Macedonian culture, the celebration of birthdays from the Socialist period until today (Петрепка 2007: 167–183; Петрепка 2008: 73–90), as it is the case in other places, has undergone many changes, but consumption and the consumer culture always come in the foreground. The already established consumer culture, along with the placement of the child in the center of attention of every family, where the care, upbringing and education of one's own child have an important place, and every year, the birthday for the parent and the child (especially at an older age), represents a significant transition to growth that should be marked, continue to last and have done so since the collapse of socialism until today.

The ever-growing openness to the western world and western culture, the penetration of values from their culture, despite the poor economic situation, continue with the spirit of the consumer economy, so in that sense more venues are opened for birthday celebrations, especially in Skopje¹³ (McDonald's – which has been closed for more than 10 years, play-houses, cafés, children and youth's theaters, cinemas, zoos, home parties, birthday parties in restaurants with live music, home parties with live music, etc.) (Петрепка 2008: 76–80). In addition to the fact that the parents want to celebrate their child's birthday, because it is an important event for them, it is also important for the child himself (Петрепка 2008: 76–80). Today, children prefer their birthday parties to be outside the home, which can be seen from the reaction of the children themselves, when their parents cannot provide a party with their friends for any reason. These kinds of parties are usually with classmates, and because the children are firmly connected, the birthday child can feel envious or inferior when compared to other children.

¹³ The field research that I conducted more than 10 years ago, when I researched birthdays, mostly referred to Skopje, primarily because of financial reasons, and on the other hand, I participated in organizing birthday parties as a parent, but also attended birthdays as a guest. I conducted field research in the immediate vicinity of Skopje with an older generation of respondents, pertaining to whether and how they celebrated the birthdays of their children and grandchildren.

The rapid changes in the society in every field, cause rapid changes in such parties as well. While more than twenty years ago school children were included in such organized parties (play-houses, cafés and other entertainment places), and kindergarten children mainly celebrated their birthdays in the kindergartens, nowadays more often parents organize birthday parties for their pre-school children at play-houses (starting from 3 years of age). Nowadays, school-age children (especially from the age of 9), increasingly want to organize their birthday parties in cafés, children's disco clubs, etc. It can be noticed that there is a decrease in the years of parties with peers, which can be considered as an ever-growing recognition of the individuality of the child, and the need to be with his group of peers. On the other hand, the parents re-announce the important event for them – the birthday of their child, which is not only performed in the kin group, but also on another level – the kindergarten, which is increasingly given importance in reference to the socialization of pre-school children. Celebrating birthdays with kids from kindergarten at play-houses, leads to the announcement of the event from the birthday child's parents to the other parents. As it often happens, the parents of the invited children also attend the party, hence new associations grow between the parents through their children. Sometimes such acquaintances can turn into very stable friendships. It becomes clear that forming new bonds and associations through these new celebrations, especially in the larger cities where the urban culture presides, the associations of people do not take place only within their kin group, but increasingly turn into new associations, formation of new social groups (peers, friends), and these forms become accessible to children from their early age.

Concluding remarks

Research on the birth and growth of a child has relied on contemporary rituals in Macedonian families. The entire socio-economic, political, and educational changes from the second half of the 20th century until today have been reflected in rituality. From the contemporary behaviors of the young couple and their families expecting offspring, it can be concluded that future parents socialize much earlier in their future roles, but the fetus is also accepted much earlier by his new, future community (open discussions of the woman's condition, constant monitoring of the pregnancy, arranging a room for the unborn baby, as well as getting clothes, etc.). Therefore, it can be said that a secular rituality is present. It is understandable that some important events that mark human life in the

everyday life of contemporary man cannot be simply ignored. Therefore, the emphasis is more on ascending the rituals into solemn events – celebrations. In this context we can talk about the rituals of preparing and inviting people for “mekici” at the birth of a child, baptizing and birthday parties that rise to the level of festivities. Although we can talk about secular rituals, which are not independent of tradition, to some extent, the magical-religious component is also present. Baptizing parties, which are very pronounced today, can be a good example, but this can also be seen in the preparation of “mekici”, with which modern times call up on tradition: „The symbol of ‘mekici’ implies the child to be soft, and they are served with something sweet, so that the child will have a sweet life“,¹⁴ and the symbol of the „postapalki“ implies that they are given away to the doorsteps of the families’ houses, so that the child will walk throughout life without stopping.

The fast pace of life, mobility, which is especially evident in the recent period, characterizes the contemporary rituality with the consumption element, consumer culture, economic profit; however traditional elements skillfully fit into modernity. The consumer culture is shown by the organization of these events as festive celebrations and by spending a large amount of money, so the families would show their prestige, whereas the guests would show theirs with the gifts. The rituality, i.e. the celebrations related to the birth and growth of the child can also be seen as an economic resource, in terms of the places where the festivities are organized, their contents, and the activities undertaken (e.g. making “mekici”, “postapalki”, birthday props, etc.). Traditional elements of ritual can also be seen as symbolic capital (according to Bourdieu) that can be turned into economic capital (Burdije 1999: 213–216; Ivanović 2008: 117–118).

New living conditions, and the urban culture, impose new rules of socialization, new types of associations, to which part of the tradition is transferred, so the categories of kinship appear as a cultural matrix that shapes the way people present their relationships with the others. This can be seen in the list of invited guests – in addition to relatives, there are also friends, neighbors, co-workers with whom they form close relationships, the selection of a godfather/best man on a friendly basis, peer groups, etc.

Based on the several ways of contemporary celebration and the invitation to “mekici”, baptizing and especially birthday parties (these are not qualified with a unique celebration among different segments of the

¹⁴ See the link: <https://bit.ly/41pOMZE>.

population, which is also related to their mentalities – having home parties, parties at restaurants with live music or home parties with live music; for birthday parties besides these, there are the parties that are thrown at play-houses, children's disco clubs, and cafés), it can be concluded that these celebrations include some innovations and mixtures related to customs, old traditions, new fashions and individual preferences. Hence, Bausinger's perception of culture can be accepted (Bausinger 1990: 15), which is that a certain form of life achievements in changing situations, introduces new creations of the family in its ritual role, but certainly not independent of tradition.

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**РАСТЕЊЕТО НА ДЕТЕТО ОДБЕЛЕЖАНО ПРЕКУ
ТРАДИЦИОНАЛНИТЕ ПРОСЛАВИ ВО МАКЕДОНСКОТО
СОВРЕМЕНО СЕМЕЈСТВО**

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Резиме

Во трудот се разгледува традиционалната обредност во врска со детството во современото македонско семејство. Земени се предвид: обредот „канење на мекици“ – при раѓање на дете, крштевката, подготвувањето „постапалки“ – при проодување на детето и како многу распространети се родендените. Емпирискиот материјал заснован на архивски материјали, теренски истажувања, непосредни набљудувања, но и набљудувања со учествувања, т.н. инсајдерски пристап, покажаа дека многу традиционални елементи во обредноста, во видоизменета форма, се присутни во современоста, па може да се зборува и за нивна функционална еквивалентност. Може да се констатира дека обредите се издигнуваат на ниво на свечени прослави, во кои јасно се гледа потрошувачкиот дух и престижот што се сака да се покаже. Новите услови на живот наметнуваат и нови правила на социјализација, нови видови здружувања, кај кои се префрла дел од традицијата, затоа и категориите на сродство се јавуваат како културна матрица, која го обликува начинот на кој луѓето ги претставуваат своите односи со другите.