

RATIONALITY, MODERNIZATION, AND MAGICAL FIGURES IN
BUCOVINA: A COMMUNITY CASE STUDY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

JESSICA LAFOUNTAIN

DR. JAMES M. NYCE – THESIS CHAIR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

MAY 2015

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Rationality, Modernization, and Magical Figures in Bucovina: A Community Case Study

STUDENT: Jessica LaFountain

DEGREE: Master of Arts

COLLEGE: Science and Humanities

DATE: May 2015

PAGES: 64

In September 2010 Romania proposed a law that would make witchcraft a taxable profession. Romania, who joined the European Union in 2007, is undergoing a process of modernization. According to the literature with the onset of modernization, comes a decrease of traditional beliefs, such as witchcraft and magic for example. If Romania is modernizing why would lawmakers propose a tax on witchcraft? This question was explored during ethnographic in Bucovina, a north eastern rural province of Romania, during the summer of 2011. Throughout this fieldwork informants stated that this tax only concerned the Roma, an ethnic minority in Romania, whose practices were thought to be illegitimate. Informants went on to say that this law would never be passed and that there are more legitimate magical figures practicing in rural areas in Romania.

This thesis describes my encounters with a number of magical figures in Bucovina, in particular in Costna, a village where I talked to Ana, a magical figure practicing divination. I talked to members of her community who knew her well. This thesis describes the different views community members have of this magical figure and magic in general, as well as looks at how these views relate to the modernization of Romania.

In Bucovina, despite modernization, magic and witchcraft do not seem to have

disappeared or to be replaced with more so called “rational” beliefs. Not only have these beliefs not disappeared, but rather they may be used more and in fact play an important part, somewhat paradoxically, in how Romania has modernized. In effect, Romanians have used magic and witchcraft with remarkable success to make sense out of and to “operate in” the modern world.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express gratitude to my thesis chair, Dr. James M. Nyce, who has continually supported me throughout my research. Thank you for teaching me new ways to look at the world and to believe in myself, in the field and in my writing. I would like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Gail Bader and Dr. Evelyn Bowers. Dr. Bader, you have taught me how to ask questions in the field and you always explain things to me most clear when I am having trouble with my writing. Dr. Bowers, I am forever grateful for your support, interest, and suggestions concerning this topic.

This thesis is dedicated to Alexandra Cotofana. Without your help and friendship, this research would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC.....	1
Methods and Materials.....	7
Literature Review.....	10
CHAPTER 2: MAGICAL FIGURES ENCOUNTERED IN BUCOVINA.....	21
CHAPTER 3: COMMUNITY CASE STUDY:	39
CHAPTER 4: FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	55
REFERENCES.....	59
APPENDIX A: MAP OF EASTERN EUROPE.....	62
APPENDIX B: MAP OF ROMANIA.....	63
APPENDIX C: MAP OF BUCOVINA.....	64

Chapter 1: An Introduction to the Topic

In the southern eastern European country Romania, witchcraft is so popular, that in fact it is for some a profession that can make them very rich. There are people in the country who are famous as witches and there is even a state registry. Romania is going through an economic recession at this time and in order to increase revenue a law was proposed in September 2010 by Alin Popoviciu and Cristi Dugulescu, lawmakers from the ruling Democratic Liberal Party, to tax witches, as well as fortune tellers (Associated Press 2010). When the proposal was voted down in September 2010, it was said that the people in power feared that they would be cursed if the law passed (Associated Press 2010). However, one source says that the law ended up passing in January 2011 in the Lower House of Romania's legislature.¹ Under the new law, like any self-employed person, the witches will pay sixteen percent income tax and make contributions to health and pension programs (Mutler 2011).

Media Accounts of the Witchcraft Tax

Since September 2010 when the law first was proposed, internet news sites have been checked on a weekly basis to see what the timeline is when it comes to the progress of this tax. There is however a sense of vagueness when it comes to the entire process of how this bill was passed into law and whether in fact if the tax voted out of the legislature. There is also still the question of whether the text has been translated from Romanian into other languages.

Taxing witchcraft was first mentioned in the media in September 2010, when Popoviciu and Dugulescu of the Democratic Liberal Party proposed a law to tax witchcraft. The law was defeated in the Senate, after it was reported that many of the legislators changed their vote at the

¹ Romania's current government is a semi-presidential parliamentary representative democratic republic with both a parliament and a senate, and is headed by the prime minister and the president. From 1947 to 1989, Romania had an often brutal communist government. Before the communist era, Romania had a brief fascist government during World War II and preceding World War II Romania had a monarchy.

last minute in response to curses launched by the witches (Conger 2011). The law was eventually passed and put into place in January 2011 (Conger 2011).

In February 2011, another bill was proposed in that the witches would be fined or possibly put in jail if their predictions did not come true. Witches would also have to obtain a permit to practice, have to provide customers with receipts, and would be banned from practicing near schools and churches. (Stanglin 2011). This bill passed in the Senate in early February 2011, but was not approved as of this time by the Financial and Labor committee or the Chamber of Deputies (Stanglin 2011).

In March 2011, an article appeared that claimed this second bill was voted down (The Telegraph 2011). This article is confusing though because it states that witches actually being taxed was voted down as well. Nevertheless, other news accounts said that this bill was put into place January 2011. During field research some attempt was made to understand some of these contradictions, as I tried to obtain first-hand Romanian accounts of what legislation actually occurred with taxing witchcraft.

Witches Against The Tax

Media sources said that many witches were upset, some outraged about the possibility of being taxed. A group of witches had even thrown poisonous plants and other such magical devices into the Danube River to curse the politicians and the government (Associated Press 2010). Brataru Buzea, who considers herself Queen Witch, told csimonitor.com, “We do harm to those who harm us...They want to take the country out of the crisis by using us? They should get us out of the crisis because they brought us into it”. “My curses always work!” she then exclaimed (Mutler 2011).

Maria Campina, another well-known Romanian witch, told the Associated Press, “It is

difficult to tax thousands of fortune tellers and witches partly because of the erratic sums of money that they receive” (Associated Press 2010). Another witch, Alisia, told csimonitor.com that the tax law was “foolish”. She continued, “What is there to tax, when we hardly earn anything?” (Mutler 2011). Although it is often believed (Conger 2011) that witchcraft is a lucrative business, income is not something we know much about in Romania, especially among those whose incomes are not declared in any formal way like witches. There are some who argue that the law is hard to enforce because payments to witches are usually small cash amounts of 20 to 30 lei (\$7-\$10) per consultation (Mutler 2011). When it comes to the bill that was in the process of being passed in February, usatoday.com reported that Brataru Buzea said, “They cannot condemn the witches; they should condemn the cards... Witches should not be blamed for bad predictions if clients do not provide their real identities or dates of birth” (Stanglin 2011).

Some political commentators in Romania believe that this tax has nothing to do with trying to help the country's economy. Geoconger.wordpress.com reported that one such commentator, Stelian Tanese, said, “The government does not have real solutions, so it invents problems” (Conger 2011). Some Romanians believe that politicians are attempting to regulate witchcraft because of nationalist sentiments against the Gypsy, or Roma population, to which most witches are believed to belong to. Some also believe that this regulation is occurring because of the perceived wealth of witches as often shown in the country’s tabloids in which witches are often a subject (Conger 2011).

Witches for the Tax

There are some witches who see a positive side to this taxation. During a January Epiphany celebration, a group of witches met at the Chitila River, which is north of Bucharest, to celebrate. They were in favor of the government measure, saying that it officially gave them

recognition (Mutler 2011). As one witch there, Mihaela Minca, told csimonitor.com, “This law is very good. It means that our magic gifts are recognized and I can open my own practice” (Mutler 2011). But witches who believe this tax grants them legitimacy or helps professionalize them and their work seem to be in the minority.

Research Questions

To become a member of the European Union, Romania, worked quite hard to present Europe and the world an image of itself as a modern, modernizing Western nation state. Most of the literature on modernity assumes that in some unproblematic way modernization will replace traditional belief with various forms of rationality (Berger 1967; Weber, et al. 2002). If Romania is modernizing, according to these models, it would make sense for witchcraft and the associated belief in it to decline. The witchcraft tax and the debate surrounding it described here suggest this is need not be. Therefore, the questions to answer during this research are:

- What does it say about Romania that a tax on witchcraft was even seen as a reasonable project for any national government to embrace?
- What does a witch tax suggest about the representations the Romanian people have of themselves, their culture, and Romania's place in the world?
- What does this tax say about Romanian beliefs about witchcraft and those who practice it? Do these beliefs vary by cultural group or economic class?
- Why does witchcraft appear to play such an important role in a presumably modernizing Western society? What does this say about current models of modernization?

Research

During summer 2011, I spent a little over a month in Bucovina, a historical and cultural region located on the northeastern border of Romania with Ukraine and situated on the northern

plains of the Eastern Carpathians.² (Maps of Eastern Europe, Romania, and Bucovina are shown in Appendix A-C.) For three weeks I was part of a course designed by Ball State professors, Drs. James M. Nyce and Gail Bader, where students did an ethnographic study of different aspects of a village. The last two weeks I was there to work on my own research. Alexandra Cotofana, a fellow anthropologist, served as my translator and fellow researcher. During summer 2012, I returned as part of a group of professors and researchers, including Nyce and Cotofana, to conduct further and follow up research on witchcraft in the area.

At the start of research in 2011, I asked about the witchcraft tax. A question about this tax was in fact part of the class's survey questions. Most of the people I interviewed told me that the witchcraft tax only applied to the Roma, an ethnic minority in Romania, and that the type of witchcraft to be taxed only occurred in the cities. They also said that it was a ploy from the government to boost the economy and to enrich those in power. The people I interviewed also believed that there is no way that government could possibly enforce this tax.

During interviews with two priests, I heard "real" witchcraft mentioned. This contrasts with the skepticism about Roma magic I had encountered earlier. When I asked these priests about these witches, they said that real witchcraft uses ritual or calling of supernatural forces, and what the Roma do is not real witchcraft. One of the priests in an interview gave me the name of a village where a "real" witch lived.

² Bucovina has an area of about 27,000 sq. miles and is populated by approximately 4.5 million. Bucovina is populated with majority of Romanians, followed by Ukrainians, as well as a minority composed of Roma, Polish, and Germans. Bucovina is known for its many fifteenth century painted monasteries which create a plentiful tourism industry for the region. Bucovina is also known for its folklore, picturesque villages, and beautiful mountain scenery (Reid and Pettersen 2007: 270).

In 1775 Bucovina was annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire to which it belonged until after World War I, when Bucovina was returned to Romania (Reid and Pettersen 2007: 270). The part of Bucovina that lies in Ukraine, was incorporated into Ukraine in 1940, when it was annexed by the Soviet Union.

After visiting this first “witch”, or magical figure, the focus of my research changed.³ I wanted to know if other such magical figures existed in the area and how they were seen by the communities in which they lived. I was able to find many more magical figures in the region. I attempted to learn something about the role they play in their villages, as well as what views their fellow villagers have of them. The witchcraft tax also continued to be something that I asked informants about through these two summers of research.

The remainder of this thesis will discuss the field methods I used throughout this research, as well as present a literature review with information on the study of witchcraft and magic in anthropology, in Romania and elsewhere. This thesis will then introduce the reader to the magical figures I interviewed, linking these figures to what the literature has to say on the subject. The thesis will then present a case study – one intended to explore different positions of rationality held by members of the same community regarding an important magical figure, who also lived there with them.

³ This first witch was in fact a woman who claimed only to practice divination. Often times the word “witch” is used to describe any person who has magical abilities. In this thesis I will use the term “magical figure” to describe the people I interviewed, whether they are witches, practice divination, or practice anything else the local population considered magic.

Methods and Materials

As mentioned in the Introduction, one priest in Bratara, the village in which interviews were originally conducted, told us that real witchcraft does exist and there is a witch in a nearby village, Costna. After speaking with this witch in Costna, who practiced divination, my research focus moved away from the witch tax per se. Instead of looking at the witch tax or witches exclusively, I wanted to look at magical figures in general. I became interested in attempting to find other magical figures as well as witches, and looking at the roles that they played in their villages. In particular I looked at how “rationality”, or what community members believed to be reasonable or logical, in respect to these figures beliefs and actions.

The first set of magical figures that I located was through a chain of referrals. Another priest, not the one from Bratara, told me about three villages along the Romania/Ukraine border. He said that there were magical figures located in each of these villages. To locate these magical figures Alexandra Cotofana and I asked people at local stores, bars, or simply just people walking down the road if they had heard of any magical figures who lived in their village. We would then ask where the magical figure lived. Each reference surprisingly, substantiated that there was a magical figure in each of these villages.⁴

I did not want this chain of reference to be the only way to locate magical figures and since potentially, it might bias my research. I therefore surveyed villages, chosen based on convenience, in the same area asking about magical figures. By random, I mean that I was not referred to any of these villages. As with the villages to which I was referred, I had Alexandra ask people in local shops and people walking in the streets if there were any witches or other magical figures in their village. I located elderly village members, because living in the village

⁴ I only visited two of the three villages suggested during this period. I was unable to visit the third village due to poor road conditions.

the longest often made them most knowledgeable about the people who live there. This way of locating magical figures was also successful.

When interviewing the magical figures I generally started by asking them to tell me about themselves, as well as what it about what they do that is considered magic. I also continued to ask about the proposed witchcraft tax in order to get the views of the magical figure. I would then ask questions like the following:

How would you define yourself as a magical figure?

What do people in the community think of you?

What does the village priest think about the magic you do?

What makes a person a witch?

Do you feel any different when you do magic?

How do you know if someone believes in what you do?

When you meet a new person can you tell if they have magical powers?

Do you ever work with someone else while doing magic?

Do you use/read books or manuscripts that help you with your magic?

Have you ever taught anyone magic?

What would you tell someone if they wanted to learn magic from you?

How do you know if someone is a good candidate to learn magic?

If you do teach someone will the magic always work for that person?

If a magical figure had limitless power, what could they do?

What is the worst kind of magic?

If the magical figure performed some type of ritual, I asked questions concerning the ritual, including:

Do you always do the ritual the same way?

Do you know when your cure has been successful?

Can other people stop your cures from working? If so, how do you prevent it?

In Costna, I was also able to interview a number of community members about the village's magical figure and witchcraft and magic in general. I was able to interview the magical figure's priest and doctor, a local high school teacher/ethnographer, and a female acquaintance that had gone to school with her. These interviews make up the case study section of this thesis. My focus is the different and competing positions on rationality held by community members regarding this magical figure. Specifically the magical figure's position in the community becomes the lens through which issues of rationality can be addressed.

In 2012, a group of anthropologists, including myself, returned to Bucovina to conduct further research on magical figures and the role that they play in their villages. New magical figures were interviewed. I was also able to visit with the magical figure in Costna, who is discussed in the case study section of this thesis.

Alexandra Cotofana translated all interviews that occurred during fieldwork. All interviews used in this thesis were audiotaped, after informants gave their consent. All these interviews have been transcribed. Detailed field notes were also taken during each interview. Interview tapes, transcriptions, and field notes have been digitized and saved in a password protected space (The Bader-Nyce Romania Research Archive: <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/RomHisPil>). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ruled my research exempt. All villages and informants names used here are anonymous.

Literature Review

There is relatively little written in English on magical figures and witchcraft in Romania. To assess the scholarly material on the topic written in Romanian since the nineteenth century is beyond the scope of this thesis. In Europe, culture is often studied as either sociology or folklore, and not seen as anthropology, which concerns only physical aspects. Another possible explanation for the lack of recent material in English is because Romania was under Communism for the latter half of the twentieth century. People might not have wanted to discuss or report these topics because of the regime's negative attitudes towards any ideology inconsistent with Marxist rational materialism. Moreover scholars were discouraged from, if not outright forbidden from publishing in Western languages. As a result, I look at a number of different information sources to give some background, including anthropological literature on witchcraft and magic from Africa and other places in Europe. Sources from Romania, including Bucovina, the area where I conducted research, will also be reviewed.

Literature on Witchcraft and Magic

Africa:

Anthropologists have been interested in studying witchcraft, magic, and rationality around the world. There are similarities and differences among witchcraft and/or magic in different cultures and places. I begin by discussing anthropological work that has been done in Africa, largely in English. As John Middleton and E.H. Winter discuss in the introduction of *Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa*, witch beliefs have been found to be almost universal in Africa (1963: 1).

One of the most notable anthropologists who studied magic and witchcraft was E. E. Evans-Pritchard, a British Social Anthropologist, who studied the Azande, an African people

located near the Upper Nile. Witchcraft for the Azande was used to explain the coincidence surrounding or leading to unfortunate events. According to Evans-Pritchard, “witchcraft beliefs embrace a system of values which regulate human conduct (1963: 63). Witchcraft was part of everyday life for the Azande and helped hold together and inform the social structure. Evans-Pritchard was also among the first to address the “rationality debate”, looking in an informed way at the differences between what he termed “primitive mentality” of the Azande, and a scientific, “rational” mentality (Luhmann 1989: 345).

Monica Wilson also researched witchcraft and magic in Africa. Wilson, too, connected witchcraft beliefs among African people to their social structure (Wilson 1951: 313). She suggests that “witch beliefs are general in small-scale societies with inadequate control of their environment and dominated by personal relationships, societies in which people think in personal terms and seek personal causes for their misfortunes” (Wilson and Wilson 1945: 89).

The linkages between witchcraft and formal aspects of society in Africa and elsewhere continue to preoccupy most British Anthropologists interested in the topic. In 1970, British Anthropologist Mary Douglas published, *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, a collection of the publication of papers presented at the *Association of Social Anthropologists*, to honor the retirement of E. E. Evans-Pritchard. The event also marked the thirtieth anniversary of *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande* (Evans-Pritchard 1963)

In the introduction Douglas gives a summary of witchcraft studies as of 1968. She states, “Dangerous in Europe, the same beliefs in Melanesia or Africa appeared to be tame, even domesticated; they served useful functions” (Douglas 1970: xiii). She goes on to ask if this difference is due to a difference in social conditions or is the result of European prejudices. Douglas also discusses how since Evans-Pritchard first published the interests of researchers

have shifted. One of the most important points the volume made is that although there are differences, “European and non-European witchcraft and magic are after all sociologically and ideologically comparable” (Middleton 1972: 917).

During this period M.G. Marwick also did research on witchcraft and magic in Africa. In Marwick’s article, “Anthropologists’ Declining Productivity in the Sociology of Witchcraft”, he suggests that when it comes to researching and writing about witchcraft and magic “the contributions of anthropologists, have in recent years been eclipsed by scholars in other disciplines” (Marwick 1972: 378). The reason for this, Marwick argued, is the “failure to distinguish between the dogma derived from informants’ statements and the social characteristics of accusers, witches, and victims aggregated from samples of case histories large enough to yield statistically significant results” (Marwick 1972: 378).

Marwick made his own contributions to the anthropological studies of witchcraft and magic. In his article “Witchcraft as a Social Strain-Gauge”, he creates a “social strain-gauge” in order to make ethnographic material from different areas easier to compare, so as to advance the sociology of tension and conflict, and to advance the role anthropology can have in understanding human behavior (Marwick 1964). There are five points that make up the “social strain-gauge”:

Firstly, terms such as sorcery or witchcraft must be clearly defined and the differentiation between destructive magic socially approved and that socially condemned should be maintained. Secondly, the well-established principle of comparing the ideal with the real applies in this field of inquiry as much as any other, and should not be forgotten simply because it is obvious. Thirdly, beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft invariably have a social setting in the sense that they mediate, though they sometimes complicate, the living together of people in the on-going process we call society. Fourthly, the field-worker, in collecting material, has to pay particular attention to the three central characters, the accuser, the alleged sorcerer, or witch, and the believed victim, to the social relationships, the rivalries and the alliances between them. Finally, the ethnographer should

again apply a well-established canon of field-work to this particular topic (Marwick 1964: 267).

Marwick's theoretical work also looks at "the charmed circle". The charmed circle he defines as unchanging and inevitable cultural world that can include explanations of the world which include witchcraft and magic. In "How Real is The Charmed Circle in African and Western Thought?", Marwick looks at what he refers to as closed, tradition based, unchanging tribal societies and open, changing, modern societies. He then asks the question, "Has modern man escaped the charmed circle of magical thinking?" (Marwick 1973: 68). Marwick suggests that although society is modernizing and leaving the tribal, tradition based way of thinking; it has "merely transformed from one closed form to another, for example, to one or more of the ideological systems which collectively has become the main substitute for a tribal ideology" (Marwick 1973: 69). Following Max Weber, one of the founding fathers of Sociology, for example, on such shift is that traditional belief and ideology will diminish as a nation modernizes and that these will eventually be replaced by science, reason and bureaucracy. Again this is a global issue especially for small nation-states who ability to define modernity for itself is more limited than say older, larger nations. What makes Romania stand out, and is of interest to us here, is the role magic and witchcraft have played in the nation's transition to modernity.

More recently research on witchcraft and magic in Africa has been done by Todd Sanders (2003). In "Reconsidering Witchcraft: Postcolonial Africa and Analytic (Un)Certainties", Sanders suggests that most theorists of witchcraft in Africa claim that the concept of witchcraft falls under the local notions of modernity. Sanders disagrees and argues that belief in witchcraft and magic can best be understood through the local concepts and understanding of tradition (Sanders 2003: 338). In short the kind of disenchantment of the world Max Weber thought was

inevitable can run into resistance and co-option in which local belief and tradition may even strengthen or at least change if not innovate. Weber's disappearance of magic, the literal translation of the phrase the disenchantment of the world, seems especially in Romania not to have occurred but rather seems to help fuel and reinforce the nation's turn to modernity.

Clifton Crais, another contemporary anthropologist, researched power, magic and witchcraft in post-apartheid South Africa, by looking at how people used the concept of evil in the shaping of cross-cultural encounters there. In Crais's book *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power and the Political Imagination in South Africa*, he equates witchcraft and power in this way "where there is power and all the emotions it unleashes, there is the occult" (Crais 2002: 5). Crais goes on to explain that "people have probed the state and their contemporary predicaments using a grammar of magic, and especially of witchcraft, that formed part of a historic and continuing discourse about the rule of tragedy and sadness in the world" (Crais 2002: 12).

Another anthropologist who did research on witchcraft in post-apartheid South Africa is Adam Ashforth. In *Madumo: A Man Bewitched*, Ashforth discusses the bewitchment of his longtime informant Madumo, who is torn between following his un-bewitching regimen and "Westernizing" his mind. Ashforth credits witchcraft in South Africa during this time as a response to spiritual insecurity in a troubling time. "For Madumo, "Westernizing the mind" is not a way of denying the reality of witchcraft but a mode of combating the real power of witches" (Ashforth 2000: 247).

Europe:

French Anthropologist, Jeanne Favret-Saada, conducted ethnographic fieldwork on witchcraft in the Bocage (Western France) during the 1970s and 1980s. I use her fieldwork and analysis as a model in part as I conduct and write up fieldwork in Romania. Favret-Saada studied

witchcraft beliefs and experiences of rural peasants. She describes witchcraft as a “symbolic system producing specific social and psychological effects” (Favret-Saada 1989: 40). She also claims that practicing witchcraft still occurs and was not something that is frozen in the 16th century as some scholars on European tradition suggest (Favret-Saada 1989: 40).⁵ Further, Favret-Saada suggests that to understand witchcraft experiences and beliefs the researcher has to become “caught up” in these experiences (Favret-Saada 1980: 15).

Ellen Badone also conducted fieldwork in France. In her article, “Illness, Biomedicine, and Alternative Healing in Brittany, France”, Badone looked at the relationship between medicine and alternative healing (unorthodox, magical). She concludes that that people in this region of France continue to use combinations of orthodox, traditional medicine and alternative healing (Badone 2008: 190).

Historian Keith Thomas used written records to research witchcraft and magic beliefs from sixteenth and seventeenth-century England. In *Anthropology and the Study of English Witchcraft*, Thomas says that during this period, “like elsewhere, witch beliefs and witchcraft allegations helped to account for the misfortunes of daily life” (Thomas 1970: 54). Witchcraft allegations also occurred “when there was a breach in the norms of neighborly behavior” (Thomas 1970: 66). An example of this case would be if something bad happened to someone after a widowed neighbor came and begged for some farm supplies and they refused her. Thomas goes on to discuss the possible reasons for the decline of witch beliefs in England. Some reasons include the industrial revolution, the scientific revolution, and the movement from the countryside to large scale communities.

Another reason that is given for the decline of witch beliefs is the Reformation. Max

⁵ A book that discusses this viewpoint of witchcraft practices being frozen centuries back is *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Ankarloo and Clark 1999).

Weber argued that the Reformation led to a disenchantment of the world. This in turn, no matter how much Weber is disputed today, led to a growing skepticism among all classes about the reality of witchcraft. In turn, this led to both reinvention of traditional belief in Europe which anticipated or attempted to finesse this skepticism. It also paradoxically may have even caused an efflorescence in traditional belief because the close ties, as well as mutual policing, of church and state weakened when it came to things like magic and witchcraft. Also the practitioners were quick to co-opt the new traditions of rationalism and skepticism to defend their practices and beliefs.

T.M. Luhrmann is an American social anthropologist, who studied, as well as participated in contemporary magic groups in Great Britain. “In England several thousand people practice magic as a serious activity and as members of organized” (Luhrmann 1989: 4). These groups often have pagan roots. These groups may have emerged due to religious revivalism, or to serve those who feel alienated or confused by a modern scientific-rationalist society (Luhrmann 1989: 338).

Another anthropologist, Alexandre Popovic has researched magic in Balkan populations, those of the former Yugoslavia in particular, by looking at text sources. Popovic focuses mainly on Muslim populations. Muslim magical practices fall under two categories, popular magic and religious magic. Popular magic includes protecting oneself against the evil eye, by carrying a talisman for example. Religious magic includes reciting areas of the *Qur'an* to protect oneself against evil or to use the *Qur'an* for divination purposes. He states that Muslims may go to priests (and vice versa) for talismans, or to be exorcized through prayer. Popovic concluded that although there are similarities and differences, Muslim magical practices are more complex than

the practices of Christian populations (Popovic 2004: 137-143).

Scholarly Material on Witchcraft and Magic in Romania

The article, “The Vampire in Romania” (Murgoci 1926) classifies different types of evil beings that populate Romania. These include vampires, werewolves, witches, the spirits of witches, and dead witches who cannot find a resting place. She also discusses the different Romanian terms used for these beings. Different measures are described concerning the ways in which these beings are kept from returning from the grave. This is what Murgoci has to say about witches: “Witches in Romania are often little more than wise women, or *babas*, who in their turn are only less common than leaves of grass; they also attempt good deeds as well as evil” (Murgoci 1926: 349).

“The Making of a Bewitchment Narrative” (Hesz 2007), also describes some of the different attributes of witchcraft in Romania. Hesz for example describes a man who has been bewitched. He had been laid off work and has become an alcoholic who suffers from depression. The family consulted an Orthodox Priest as well as “witch doctors” to find out if the man had been bewitched and what he could do to get rid of his bewitchment. Hesz notes that many times people will blame their personal problems on witchcraft. The author refers to the witches who cause problems for people as “private witches” who are “... accused of bewitching cows so that their milk goes to them or are suspected to make love magic” (Hesz 2007: 22). In Romania, these witches “are thought to obtain their power from evil transcendental forces, and the harm triggered by them affects the guilty and the innocent alike” (Hesz 2007: 22).

There has also been research done specifically in Bucovina, the area of Romania where I conducted fieldwork. From January through March of 2009, Iulia Brânză researched magical

practices in Bucovina, the northeastern region of Romania.⁶ She went to nine villages in the area and her respondents were men and women with the majority over fifty years of age. Brânză concluded that people living in rural areas in Bucovina still use and are influenced by magical practices, in the form of ritual and superstition, as well as different forms of divination (Brânză 2009a).

The people in rural Bucovina are superstitious, especially when it comes to animals, due to the role that animals, especially livestock, play in their daily lives. There are animals whose arrival is seen as good or bad luck. There are animals that are oracles, for example, owls and dogs predict death and storks predict loneliness. There are certain animals that should not be killed, or else there will be consequences (Brânză 2009b). There are also certain rituals that are done that involve animals. Many people will have red tassels on their horses to protect them from the “evil eye”, which is other people wishing harm upon them.

The rural people also use magical practices for different reasons, including making decisions and organizing their labor. The people also often use household objects (firewood, hair brushes, fences, ribbons, etc.) to predict the future (Brânză 2010). For example, girls in this area will look in hemp seeds to see who their future husband will be. Brânză concludes that the magical practices that are encountered in these rural areas are remains of complex divination rituals that date back to pagan times (Brânză 2009b).

Brânză also mentions that people in Bucovina, and Romanians in general, do not believe in magic in the form of spells unless they desperately need something. They will often seek help from both a priest and witch. They will openly visit the priest in the church and secretly visit the witch (Brânză 2010).

⁶ Brânză wrote three articles for the Institute of Bucovina’s journal *Analele Bucovina*, a cultural institute. This is a Romanian language journal. For this thesis I used translations of these three articles done by Alexandra Cotofana..

The Contradiction to Modernity

It has been stated in the research problem section of this paper that most of the literature on modernity assumes that in an unproblematic way modernization will replace traditional belief with various forms of rationality (Berger 1967; Weber et al. 2002). If Romania is really modernizing, according to these models, it would make sense for witchcraft and the associated belief in it to decline. The witchcraft tax and the debate surrounding it suggest this is not the case. One source, on magic in Eastern Europe, might provide an answer. Despite modernization, “magic has adapted itself to its new environment. It is not a survival of a bygone era, but an integral aspect of popular culture” (Andreescu-Miereanu 2005: 5582). The author goes on to say, “It provides people with the power and know-how to understand their world and their position in it” (Andreescu-Miereanu 2005:5582).

Conclusions

After looking at sources on witchcraft from Romania, as well as other places around the world, the conclusion is reached that people believe in magic and magical figures exist because people are trying to make sense of the world around them. To put it another way, these beliefs and magical figures often provide Romanians with, from their perspective, a reasonable and logical way to make sense of what is going on in a world where very little makes sense. It is difficult to exaggerate the socio-economic stresses put on rural Romania, having gone through first the replacement of the Monarchical hierarchy and the elimination of the peasantry by Communism following WWII, and subsequently the anti-Communist Revolution. Another common tie with Romania, and examples written elsewhere, is that many of the areas in which magical figures are found are modernizing. In this case modernization is the physical, social, and economic changes a society goes through to become a player in the global economy. In effect it

seems paradoxically that the resort to what might be thought of as archaic discourse and models of explanation have today retained value and legitimacy in the face of modernity. While all of the nation states surveyed are in the midst of an encounter with modernity often within relatively the same span of time, the question arises why there is this resort to processes that modernization could be in the process of rendering suspect.

Another question that emerges after reviewing the literature for this study is why has there been a lack of publications on witchcraft and magic in the field of anthropology in English in recent years. In “Anthropologist’s Declining Productivity in the Sociology of Witchcraft” (1972), Marwick discusses what the consequences will be if the study of witchcraft moved to the periphery of anthropology. Others who study witchcraft, historians for example, are looking at written sources, like court records, which do not always reveal the full store. The same can be said about scholars of religion who seldom either practice ethnography or may not be well trained if they do. Further, if we “give up” on witchcraft, not only are we abandoning part of our heritage as anthropologists, but we may be giving up on an aspect of culture that not only is interesting in and of itself, but can reveal what in many cultures is “secret” but important. Marwick (1972) points out the loss this would have for studies of social structure and social relationships and that the loss would extend much further given the link that witchcraft has to other significant aspects of culture, like rationality.

Chapter 2: Magical Figures Encountered in Bucovina

This chapter discusses some of the magical figures interviewed during fieldwork in Romania. I begin by giving a brief discussion of witchcraft in Romania. I also report how each magical figure was located, as well as the initial meeting and the actual interview(s). I also discuss what the magical figures had to say about themselves, including how they define themselves, and what they say about magic in general. I categorize these magical figures in relation to each other based on how they themselves classify each other.

Witchcraft in Romania

Broadly speaking, witches in Romania can be divided into two categories. The first group consists of those who are eclectic in their practices and beliefs and appeal to a broader demographic. These practitioners are advertised all over the country, in newspapers, on billboards, in social media, and on the Internet. Informants often said that these witches are taught these abilities, rather than born with them. These witches (often Roma and from other minority groups in Romanian) are often deemed untrustworthy and reputed to take advantage of people. These are witches who, presumably, would be more affected by a witchcraft tax because their practices often resemble those of a modern business.

The second category consists of more rural practitioners, on whom this thesis will focus. In Romania, these figures are likely to be Romanian and seen as more traditional and usually live in remote, often mountainous areas. I will refer to these witches as magical figures as they and others define themselves in different ways. The magical figure, their clients, and others, may define them as witches, people who practice divination, and card readers. They are even sometimes put into specialized categories, for example one of the informants described herself as someone who cures individuals of their fears.

Romanians go to these figures to learn about their future, or to solve all kinds of difficulties, including impotency, financial problems, and relationship issues. These figures can often tell if the problem is caused by another person or simply results from natural occurrences and events. People can also visit magical figures to cause harm to others, for example to have someone's animals not to produce milk or to prevent two individuals from falling in love.

Orthodox priests in Romanian villages often deal with witchcraft and magic. "In Romania witchcraft is viewed as a folk custom not in conflict with the tenets of the Orthodox Church" (Conger 2011). If a person feels that he or she has been cursed, say their crops will not grow or their cows will not produce milk, they will often go to an Orthodox priest and he will perform a ritual to counteract the magic. However, it is also believed that priests can also be paid to put curses on people (Hesz 2007). This magic is not necessarily seen as evil because, if a curse the priest puts on someone works, it is God's will that this happens. The priest simply acts as an agent of God's justice.

Terms Used in Thesis

Divination is one term that was often brought up by informants. Divination is "a process through which ritual practices are used in order to discover matters that are hidden in every day perception" (Barfield 1997:123). People visit individuals who divine for many reasons, including gaining "information connected to future events, sources for certain illnesses, and the identity of those who can bewitch you" (Barfield 1997:123).

Two terms that I use throughout this thesis are "binding" and "unbinding". Binding, or bewitching, is usually done with destructive intentions, at least from the point of view of those who consider that they have been bound. Some examples of binding would be causing a couple to break off their relationship, someone to become ill, or causing someone's animals to fail to

produce milk. Unbinding is usually done as defense to binding. People who are able to unbind will refer to this as technique for defense and protection.

Alexandru Barba, Drobina, Male Witch (2011)

While in the field a priest me that I would be able to find magical figures in three mountain villages along the Ukraine border. When I arrived at the first village, Drobina, I asked women in a convenience shop if they knew of any individuals in their village who practiced magic or witchcraft. They told me that their cousin through marriage was a magical figure and that they would call him for me.⁷ He was working in the forest, so Alexandra and I had to wait for him to return. When he arrived he drove with us to his large modern home and let me interview him in the foyer of his house.

Alexandru Barba is 52 years old. He grew up in the village next to Drobina, called Sitipitu.⁸ He lived there for 25 years before coming to Drobina. He was raised by his grandmother from the age of nine months to twenty years. His grandmother, who was a refugee from the Ukraine, lived to be 103 years old.⁹ Alexandru said that his grandmother was able to unbind evil.¹⁰ When he was twelve he started having dreams that he said would come true the next day. He told his grandmother about his dreams coming true and she told him that he would be somebody great someday. After his dreams started coming true he realized that he too was

⁷ This male witch was referred to as a “Hultani”, a term which means weather witch. These witches are able to change the weather at will. For example they are said to be able to cause rain. While interviewing, he denied that he was this type of witch.

⁸ Drobina and Sitipitu are both ethnic Ukrainian villages.

⁹ Alexandru belongs to the Huțuli ethnic group. The Huțuli are ethnic Ukrainians some of whom live in Bucovina. The Huțuli are reputed to have unique magical practices.

¹⁰ Alexandru’s grandmother died at the age of 103, but he said she looked as beautiful as she did at age thirty. When she died the sun shone directly on her burial. He said it was beautiful. He thought that this sign showed that her soul went to heaven. Many in the village came to the funeral because they thought something strange might happen with her body, but it was normal and beautiful.

able to unbind like his grandmother did.¹¹ At age fourteen he began working with people as a magical figure.

When asked how he categorizes himself as a magical figure he told me he was a “Vrajitoare”, Romanian for “male witch”.¹² People know about him from word of mouth, although he claims that his phone number can be found all over the world. People from outside Romania, he said, often come to see him and the majority of his clients are foreign. People from all religions come to see him, “whether they are Orthodox or Protestant”. People will call him by phone and he will decide if the person should come see him or not. He says that he sometimes will turn people away when they come to his door to ask for help.¹³ He knows immediately when he can and cannot help people. He stated he will not do bad things for people, such as if a woman comes to break up the family of someone else, or if someone wants another person to be killed.

When a person comes he will read cards for them. He said that he tells people what is heavy on their hearts. Many people do not know what their problems are and they are just living with them. The way that he helps depends on the problem. If an individual’s problem is unknown to him or her he will create out of soil a representation of the person. He then puts this soil person in the chimney to dry it out. He then looks at how the soil person dries to see what problems the person has in their life. Alexandru also has a book from the Ukraine that tells him how to help people. He said that although he has everything in his head, he sometimes has to check the book.

There are some who come with specific problems. Many people come to him with

¹¹ Out of seventeen brothers and sisters he was the only one to have gotten “the gift”. His grandmother was the only child out of six to receive the gift

¹² Alexandru said that male witches are rare. For every 100-500 female witches there is only one male witch. He said that the gift is thousands of times stronger with the male.

¹³ He said that he often turns people away who come to his door to ask about his gift. He decided to speak with my translator and me because we were “light on his heart”. After doing an internet search on him I discovered that he has given many others the same interview he gave me, word for word.

illnesses, or that have children with illnesses. For example, he has saved epileptic children.

Another problem he helps with is women who want to get married but have not found a man to marry them. He also said that he has infertile or unlucky women coming to him. He will unbind them to change their luck. He also has saved people who had the Devil inside them. His book from the Ukraine tells him how to unbind and help with these kinds of problems.

As I discussed before, when I first arrived and was directed to Alexandru I was told that he was working in the forest. I had falsely assumed that he was doing some type of logging work, but this was not the case. In fact he was harvesting materials for his magical work.¹⁴ Alexandru described what he was doing at work that day. A thirty year old woman came to him because she was unmarried. He had to go to her home that day to retrieve three two-liter bottles of tap water and three of her bras. Alexandru pulled the three bras out of a bag nearby to show me. At midnight he will put this water in a pot with the bras and with nine pieces of charcoal from a tree hit by lightning, which he retrieved from the forest that day before I met with him. He will look at the pieces of charcoal to see if they move around in the water. If the pieces of charcoal move around, a spell has not been placed on the person, but if the charcoal stays in one place there is a spell. After this is done with the charcoal, the woman can only wash with the water from the pot consecutively for three days, as well as consecutively wear each of the bras. On the final night she will dream about water. Nineteen days later she will be unbound and she will be married. She will find her other half from God.

Alexandru will sometimes go to a person's home when they need his help. He will work there until the rooster crows. If he works after this, whatever he does will not work. A common problem for people in the village is headaches. To cure a headache Alexandru uses red and black

¹⁴ Alexandru said that helping others as a male witch is his sole occupation. His wife did not have to work. He lives in one of the largest homes in the village which had recently been remodeled. This shows that being a male witch has been very lucrative for him.

fabric to cover the person's head. He said that he burns the "living fire" off or out of the person's head with a natural fiber. There is a flame but it does not hurt the person. The flame eventually goes out and the person is cured.

Alexandru also recounted a story about how he met his wife, who is his second wife. He met her when he was reading her cards. Her cards said that she would end up marrying an older man who already had children. A year and a half later Alexandru divorced his first wife and married this woman. He never thought at the time of the reading that it would be him that she would marry.

According to Alexandru, some people in his village some "see him with good eyes, and some see him with evil eyes".¹⁵ Everyone in the village is nice to his face. He claims that he helps the poor in Drobină. He has paid for sixteen funerals in the community. He feels that he is respected in the village. He said that he does not have issues with anybody. However, he does not get many "customer's" from Drobină because it is a poor village. He also thinks that his lack of customer's from the village is because if he helps a person get out of trouble then the person who caused the trouble will hate him.

Alexandru has three children from a previous marriage and two children from his present marriage. He believes that his six year old daughter might have his "gift". She is the most attentive to him and she already copies things that he does. At six years old she knows what each divination card means. His heart tells him that she will have the gift. If she does end up with the gift he will help her. He said that he has many secrets that he will only tell his daughter if she ends up having his gift. If she does not have his gift he will take his secrets to the grave. He does not however wish for any of his children to have his gift. People are sometimes coming to him

¹⁵ He told my translator that some people in the village say that he has the Devil inside of him, but he told her not to translate this phrase to me.

with desperate, dying children, and he does not want his children to have the burden of trying to help them.

When I got up to leave I shook his hand. He looked in my eyes and told me that I will live a happy life, but only if I keep the heart that I have now. He then wrote his address and phone number on a sheet of paper. He saw me as a potential customer who would someday need his help.

Iona Lazar, Falteni, Cured Individuals of Their Fears (2011)

Upon entering the village of Falteni, I decided to ask the employees at the local market if there were any magical figures in their village.¹⁶ They immediately said that there was and that the woman had helped one of their children. They gave my translator and I directions to her home and we set off. When we arrived at the home, we were greeted by a woman who turned out to be the magical figure's daughter. She asked her mother if she would speak with me. An elderly woman who turned out to be 87 years old came outside and greeted us happily. The interview was done at a table on their porch.

I told her that I heard that she had helped the child of the local shop employee by doing some magic. When asked her how she would categorize herself as a magical figure, she replied by saying that she helps children and adults overcome any fear they may have. For example, she will help someone if they are afraid to drive after being in an accident, or if someone is scared of fire after seeing something on fire. She said that people would often dream about what they fear.

Iona said that everyone gets scared sometimes and there are some people who tend to get more easily scared than others. People who are more sensitive to being afraid, "weak of heart" as

¹⁶ I was never referred to the village of Falteni. I came to this village when because I surveyed a number of villages randomly. In these villages I asked about magical figures in local shops and to people walking in the streets. This was done to give to help insure that local chain or network of referrals regarding magical figures did not entirely bias the data one way or another.

Iona describes, may go crazy because of their fears. She has worked with two boys whose horse and cart went into a ditch. One of the boys was so scared he would run away from the house at night. The mother of the boys was very thankful that Iona was able to help them. There are also individuals that Iona wishes she could have cured. Iona knew of a shepherd from Falteni who went up the mountains with his sheep. As a joke, someone knocked on his door at night and ran away. After opening the door and finding no one there, the shepherd became so frightened that he lost his mind and died. She could have helped him.

She told me the process by which she cures fears. First she puts lead on a big spoon and sets it on fire until the lead melts. She then pours untouched water, mixed with holy water and incense, which she steals from the church, in the spoon. Iona will then interpret what people are scared of from what appears in the melted lead on the spoon. For example, if an animal appears the person is scared of that animal, or if a car appears the person is afraid of cars. If a flame remains on the spoon, the person is scared of fire. The person then has to take three sips of the untouched water mixed with holy water and incense. Iona said that this process works because when the water mixture and the lead meet, the lead breaks, and so the fear in the person also breaks. However, for this process to work, the person also needs to believe in what she is doing.

Iona learned how to do this form of magic from an old woman. A woman can only practice this magic if she is a widow. Iona has been a widow for thirty years and has cured fears ever since she became a widow. She also told me that female gypsy witches, for example the Burcășițe, who are from the Călărari tribe of gypsies, are also able to do what she does. These gypsy witches, she said, are also able to bind and unbind magic, but she cannot do this.

I went on to ask Iona how people in the village, or elsewhere, know about what she does. She said that people know about her by word of mouth. When someone from Falteni marries

someone from another village and moves there, they will tell people in their new village about Iona. She also told me that rural areas have “more people like her”, or magical figures. She also said in rural areas, when the doctor cannot always help someone, they will tell the patient to go to the old ladies because they will know what to do. In the cities she said the gypsies are the ones who do these things.

Throughout the interview Iona spoke in a very matter-of-fact manner about curing fears. She seemed eager to tell me information and spoke very happily about what she does. At the end of the interview I asked her if the church considers what she does wrong. Iona responded by telling me that many people in her village think that she is a witch. She however does not consider herself to be a witch. She then said that she once read a book that she bought from a monastery that said that what she does is a sin.

Witch Priests (2011)

Throughout my fieldwork, I asked the priests I talked to about their views on witchcraft and magic in Romania. I was often told that the witchcraft and magic are forbidden, but the Church accepts that it happens. Some priests I interviewed said that there are some Orthodox priests who do practice forms of magic and witchcraft. I will refer to these priests as “witch priests”.

The form of magic that these witch priests perform is referred to as “opening the book” or “reading from the book. The book refers to “the *Bible*”, or other religious books. The first I had heard about witch priests was from the priest Bogdan from Costna, a medium sized village. He said that some priests can open the *Bible* or other religious texts and interpret the things that they read there. This is a rare occurrence, but he does not think it is appropriate and it is not Orthodox theology. He said that this is sad because the priests he knows that do “open the book” are often

very good people and very serious priests. Bogdan also went on to say, “the priests that open the book say that because they are priests, God allows them to open the book to wherever it makes sense for the person who seeks help. That is the way that God will answer the questions of these people. The *Bible* will actually speak to you at any page you open it.” Bogdan also said that there are some priests who open the book strictly for money. These priests are not serious.

In Fraternoa, a small village, two sisters in their early twenties told me about a priest and his wife who could open the book. The priest and his wife were from a village about a half hour away called Nea Bota. The sisters told me that the priest’s wife also knows how to bind and unbind marriages. They also said that the priest was struck by lightning one time that he opened the book, and not he cannot walk or speak normally. They said that since this happened the priest is not able to open the book, but his wife is still able to.

Priest and His Wife, Nea Bota:

I was able to interview this priest and his wife in Nea Bota. When I got to their home there were a number of cars already parked in their driveway and a woman was standing outside that had just had the priest open the book for her.¹⁷ Dr. James M. Nyce, Alexandra and I all approached this woman and asked her if the priest and his wife would talk to us about opening the book. The woman told us to just ask and that they would probably speak with us.

When we knocked on the door the priest’s wife answered and said that she would talk to us. She said that her husband was “reading the book” for some other people and he would be able to join the conversation afterwards.¹⁸ We met in what appeared to be a living room or a

¹⁷ This contradicts what the sisters from Fraternoa said about the priest not being able to open the book after he had been struck by lightning.

¹⁸ “Reading from the book” was clearly a business for the priest. During our visit, people were coming and going.

guest room set up also to be a waiting/clinic room and began our interview.¹⁹ We mentioned “opening the book” to her and asked if she could talk about what she and her husband do.²⁰ The priest’s wife started out by telling us that her husband is one of two Orthodox priests in the village. She would not tell me their names or let me begin tape recording the interview until her husband could take part in the interview.

She began by saying that people come to the priest with problems, for example, if they are stressed or if their children are disobedient. She said that people also come with psychological issues. Reading the book will help all of them. He will read from the book from his home and also at church. She said that the priest knows that what he does is successful, because people will come back and thank him. Everyone from the village, she said, comes to the priest with their problems.

Sometimes people will exhibit physical behaviors when the priest is reading from the book. For example, they will yawn, fall asleep or get the hiccups when the priest is reading from the book. If this occurs, the priest will sometimes have trouble reading the book. When this happens it means that people responsible for the person’s trouble, for example other people or magical figures, are resisting the prayers.

Being a priest who “reads from the book” can create problems. For example, the priest’s wife who we were interviewing said that there was a priest on television who could “read the book”. This priest was fired from his television job for doing so. Her husband was almost ready for retirement and he too is afraid of losing his job because he read from the book. She also said

¹⁹ As soon as the interview began with the priest’s wife, both my translator’s and my senses and perceptions were somehow distorted. This applied not just to interview itself, but its contents as well. Also, to elements of their living room, like wall paper colors changing and becoming distorted. The feeling began for Dr. James M. Nyce later during the interview, after the priest entered. After the interview we all discussed how we felt and discovered we all had similar sensations. This also distorted the translation and what each of us had taken down in our field notes.

²⁰ During the conversation the priest’s wife and the priest never used the words “opening the book”, but always “reading from the book”.

that there is one man in the village who is afraid that that her husband could unbind things this man has bound. Because of this fear, the man screams and howls outside the church like an animal when the priest gives sermons.

She went on to say that she herself does not read from the book. She is more interested in astrology and psychology. Also she said that when girls come for help they usually tell her more than they tell the priest. She then, contradicting herself, told us that she and her husband work together while reading the book. She assured us that she and her husband never try to harm people. They never try to separate couples for example. Instead they try to make things right for husband and wife.

As for binding, she says that when she is “unbinding” she feels content in her heart. This is especially true in the cases in which she helps people, for example, people who have drug or alcohol problems. Although she knows how to unbind, she does not know how to bind.²¹ She says that when she unbinds what she really is doing is praying. They, she and her husband, only use religious books to unbind. She said that what she and her husband do is a joint collaboration and she will not continue to do this after he dies.

The priest’s wife does not know if people can learn the process of “reading from the book”. She said that people have their own place in the world. Some people are meant to do what she and her husband do and some are not. She never thought she would be doing this. But still ever since she was a child she could see things in her dreams. In 1968, for example, she dreamt that she would be soon close to dying and that a woman would save her. In three weeks, she was electrocuted. She said she “has her own vibrations”.

The priest’s wife also spoke a little about witchcraft. She said that people go to witches

²¹ The sisters in Fraternoa said that the priest’s wife was able to bind and unbind marriages. Generally in order to unbind one has to be able to bind, but sometimes magical figures will not admit that they can bind because binding is so much more morally ambiguous.

because they are curious about what the witches can do. She said that there are people who will go see witches and then come have the priest read for them in order to have peace. They will see the priest because after seeing the witch they will have a negative state of mind. Another reason people may visit the priest is because they are scared of what the witch tells them. The people who come to see the priest who had been to a witch will not discuss everything that the witch told them She ended by joking that the most powerful things someone said a witch did to them was take their money.²²

At this point in the conversation the priest entered the room and joined the interview.²³ He had a slight speech impediment and walked with a limp, almost as if he had a stroke.²⁴ The priest started by saying that he had been an apprentice for an older priest who read from the book. At some point the older priest moved away so he was left to read from the book on his own. Once people knew that he could do it, around 2005 or 2006, they came and asked him to open the book.

The priest said that he started reading the book because people in the village asked him to. There are periods, he said, when people from the village are coming to him all the time and there are periods when nobody visited at all, sometimes for weeks. The priest and his wife thought that someone had put a curse on them that caused this.

The priest and his wife not only work from home, but will also make home visits to open

²² The Priest's wife used the word Mamona when discussing these witches. This is one of the Romanian terms for "Devil" and also has connotations with Greed.

²³ The strange sensation of warped senses continued, and for Dr Nyce these sensations began, when the priest entered the room. My translator Alexandra and I had a stronger sensation with the priest's wife, while Nyce only had this sensation, which increased as we interviewed this priest.

²⁴ This coincides with what the sisters in Fraternal said about the priest not being able to walk or speak right after being struck by lightning while opening the book. While we did not ask the priest about his limp and speech impediment, at one point it was asked if anything evil ever returned to him while opening the book and he replied no.

the book.²⁵ Sometimes they will not get home until early morning because when they will open the book for one person, this person will refer them to another person, maybe a relative, who also has a problem and then this person will refer them to another person and so on. The priest said he will not open the book more than three times in one night because it can be very tiring.

Although he is reading from the *Bible*, the priest said that not everything is written in the book.²⁶ His wife jumped in to say that binding and unbinding are different from what they are doing.²⁷ However the priest went on to say that when he is reading the book he is unbinding and it is a form of exorcism.

The priest said that when reading the book, he does not read from the *Bible* much, but from other religious books. He said that people normally read from the *Bible* every day. The books he uses when he reads are normally read for special situations, such as baptisms or holiday services. He would also read these things when there was a full moon, because he knows from astrologists that the power of what he reads is then stronger.

We told the priest what we had heard previously from other priests about the process of “opening the book”. We had been told by other priests when they practiced “opening the book” they opened the *Bible* to a random page and then interpret what they found on that page. The priest said he does not do this and that to do so is a form of divination. There are specific things that he reads and he only reads these things. He mentioned that he and his wife had watched television shows about the priests who open the *Bible* to a random page and then make interpretations. They do not know of anyone who does this.

²⁵ The priest and his wife used to only open the book at midnight, but now they will do it whenever people want.

²⁶ There are three parts of the *Bible* that the priest will not read from because he is afraid. He would not say what these three parts were, but he said that they make him afraid and feel as though someone were pouring hot wax on him.

²⁷ At many times the priest’s wife quickly jumped in after the priest answered questions. It was almost as if she wanted to conceal certain things from us or make sure her husband was not divulging too much information.

According to the priest, other priests are afraid to read the book because while doing so the devil will try to harm you. For example, the problems of the person one is reading for could come back to the priest or to the priest's family. The priest himself said it was that sometimes hard for him to read from the book. He feels like he cannot find air to breathe when this happens.

The priest went on to say that reading the book can remove bindings. If a person is bound or has a spell put on him or her, he makes the patient kneel. He puts a chair in front of him or her so they can rest their elbows on something. Some of them will start to hiccup, others will start to yawn, and a woman once started to snore. The stronger the curse is, the harder it is for the priest to read. There was one curse that was so strong, that when the priest was reading he began to feel nauseous and his skin turned yellow. If the person comes back to the priest and the priest reads the book for him again it is easier the second time for the priest to read. He said that the power of prayer is often stronger the second time around.

The priest and his wife are interested in learning how to become better at reading the book. They want to improve their techniques. They have been to other priests to have the book read for them.²⁸ The priest also said that he and his wife also visited someone who practices divination. They did so because they wanted to see what kind of books he used and how he practiced, so they could learn more about how these things are done by others.

Although both the priest and his wife categorize what they do as simply reading prayers for people from religious books, they did contradict themselves. At some points throughout the interview they classified what they did as magic. I was left with the impression that there was more involved in "reading from the book" than what they told us. For example, the wife brought up binding and unbinding in the conversation, but she also said that they did not do this kind of thing. The priest also contradicted himself when he said that "not everything is written in the

²⁸ When the priest goes with his wife to get the book read, he will not say he is a priest or wear priest's clothing.

book”, but yet he told us he only reads specific prayers.

The priest, and more his wife, have an interest in astrology, the occult, and divination. They have gone to diviners to study their techniques. It is possible that they are looking for new skills to market beyond what they already do. It is clear from this interview that both the priest and his wife were able to manipulate common sense reality in ways that no other magical figure did this summer (see footnotes 11 and 15).

Manuela, Brata, Able to Feel What Others Are Feeling/Assisted in Exorcisms (2012)

Brata was a village in Romania where we, Alexandra and I, asked about local magical figures in a bar. The woman working at the bar said that there is a local magical figure, Manuela, but warned that she is an alcoholic. She gave us the woman’s phone number and when we called asking to meet with her, she told us we had the wrong number and she hung up. The woman at the bar then volunteered to call Manuela. The woman told her that we were ok and persuaded her to talk to us.²⁹ It was decided that we would meet Manuela’s home.

When we entered Manuela’s home, her five year old daughter was present, and continued to be present for the interview. There was also a neighbor working in her yard. She seemed cautious when talking to us while he was in her yard. She often peered out her windows, which she made sure to close. She even went as far to turn the television up loud while she talked to us, in order that he would not hear.

Manuela started the interview by telling me that I was tense and that my life is going ok and I do not need her help. She told me that she was struggling with her emotions throughout the entire interview because she could feel what I was feeling. She said that although talking to us was tiresome for her, she felt reanimated because I was in her home.

²⁹ The lady from the bar is married to Manuela’s brother. Manuela told us later that the lady from the bar disliked her.

When we asked Manuela why she would be considered a magical figure, she told us that although she no longer practices, she used to practice divination. She is also able to feel what others are feeling. She has also assisted in some exorcisms. She is able to tell just by looking at people when they have evil in them.

Manuela had her first experience with her abilities when she was fifteen or sixteen. At the time she was sitting next to a woman and began to feel sick. She knew at that moment that there was evil inside the woman next to her. A priest witnessed her feeling this way and told her that she had a gift and to never stop using it.

Her ability has risks. It takes a lot of her energy to do what she does. When she sees people who have evil inside them she begins to feel really bad. For example, feeling bad could mean she would become sleepy, nervous, and would not be social. Her hands would become physically deformed and she could have paralysis of the mouth. Once when she was assisting in an exorcism she had to have an ambulance called for her. At one point in time she helped the village priest with exorcisms.

She has had a somewhat working relationship with the priest in the next village, who deals with people who have demons inside them. Some of these people are brought to the priest literally bound by their hands and feet. If people come to her with these types of problems Manuela will refer them to this priest. She also advises them to go to masses and to fast.

There was one other magical figure who I interviewed during fieldwork, Ana Luca, a woman who also practices divination. I was also able to interview other members of Ana's community. The next chapter will look in some depth at Ana's position in the community, as well as interviews with Maria. It will also present some of the different voices in Ana's

community, and elsewhere in Bucovina, and how they represent different positions of rationality concerning Ana, magical figures, and magic in general.

Chapter 3: Community Case Study

Throughout fieldwork I was able not only to talk to magical figures, but often other members of the community in which the magical figures lived. Some of these people knew the magical figures personally, others were only their acquaintances, or just had heard of them. In Costna, for example, I was able to interview many individuals who knew Ana, the local magical figure who practiced divination.³⁰ Each person who led me on the path to find Ana also told personal stories that allowed me to see the role that Ana had played in each of their lives. Their individual beliefs regarding magic and Ana were portrayed in their interviews.

After hearing about a witch in Costna from a priest in Bratara, a nearby village, I decided that is where I should begin my quest to find a magical figure. Costna is a medium sized village along a paved road. It has a few restaurants, bars, and shops. There is also a city hall, police station, a doctor's office, and local library. Libraries in Romania, as in many other places in the world, are hubs of knowledge. Librarians usually know basic information about the village, as well as the people who live there. This seemed like the appropriate place to ask where the local magical figure was located.

Inside Costna's library, Alexandra and I found the librarian, a woman in her forties, and explained that I was interested in Romania's proposed tax on witchcraft. We told her that we heard there was a magical figure, who was also described as a witch, in the village. Even though my focus had changed from the witchcraft tax to magical figures, this seemed a good icebreaker, one that seemed less intrusive than asking flat out, "Where is the local magical figure?" The librarian became visibly nervous and said almost instantly that she could not help me. She said there was a woman who knew things but that she could not tell us more. I had Alexandra explain that I am only a student and that I did not mean any harm, but the librarian insisted that she could

³⁰ Ana was referred to as a witch by most of my informants.

not help me.

The librarian told us that one of the local Orthodox priests (of which there were two in Costna) might be able to help us. She called the priest's wife and explained that I was interested in the witchcraft tax and looking for the local magical figure. The priest's wife apparently did not understand how the priest could help us and apparently making no connection between a priest and a magical figure.

The librarian then told us that the magical figure's daughter worked as a hairdresser in the building next door to the library, which could have been why the librarian was so nervous. The librarian told us then that the magical figure knows everything and that she already knows we are here and that we are talking with her. She said that we were getting her into trouble with the magical figure. The librarian then walked into the hair salon where the magical figure's daughter worked.

When she came back out she said again that magical figure knows what I am doing and that she will not receive my translator and me. She said that the magical figure is old and sick. She told us too that this magical figure practices white magic. She ended the conversation by saying that the magical figure donates money to the local churches, as well as gives money to poor people, but the librarian would not tell us the magical figure's name. The librarian did give us directions to the priest's home whose wife she had called.

Nobody was home at the priest's house, so I decided to ask a woman, also middle-aged, walking down the street if she knew about the local magical figure. Like the librarian the woman appeared nervous, even frightened, and said that she did not know anything about this magical figure. Alexandra and I then walked into a local church, where the woman, whom we had just spoken to on the street, was working.

As soon as we entered the church the woman came up to us and told us that the magical figure we were looking for is named Ana. The woman in the church went on to tell us that Ana practices divination and only sees people from other villages. She does not want to predict the future of people in Costna. During fieldwork we found that other informants often said that the magical figures that lived in their villages only saw people from outside the village.

The woman in the church went on to say that if someone stole something from you or killed someone dear to you Ana can tell you who did it. People will also go to see Ana for illness. The woman also said that usually people go to a doctor or to the priest when they have problems like this, and these options are the right thing to do. This statement is another that my informants often made during fieldwork. When people have problems the right and rational thing to do is visit a doctor or a priest, depending on the problem. The next step then might be to visit a magical figure like Ana.

The woman in the church went on to tell us how she and Ana's paths have crossed throughout her life. She has known Ana since they went to school together in the village. She said that, despite this, once in public, Ana acted as if she did not know her. She did not know why, but thought maybe it was because of her connection with the church.

She once went to Ana out of desperation because of problems she was having with her husband. Ana would not see her, but ended up stopping her on the street one day. Ana told the woman that the woman's husband and her husband's mistress both wanted to kill her. The mistress was putting things into the husband's coffee so that he would stay faithful to her and that he would see his wife, the woman in the church, as the devil.³¹

The woman said that after Ana told her this she prayed a lot about her husband. Her

³¹ When my informants talked about spells, it was common to hear about people putting bodily fluids (menstrual blood, semen, urine) and hair into coffee, as a way to tie someone to themselves or to someone else.

husband subsequently developed liver problems and started fighting with his mistress and the woman ended up feeling bad for her husband. Now she does not even think about going to a magical figure because of her relationship with God.

I asked the woman if she thought Ana would help me with my research. She said that sometimes Ana will know beforehand when people are coming. When people arrive to see her she will already be standing at her gate. Ana will decide right there whether she will see you or not and she could tell you to go away.

I asked repeatedly where Ana lived and my informant said she refused to tell me where that was. She said too that Ana knew that we were having this conversation right now and that she was afraid that Ana would hate her. Tourists then came into the church and she had to tend to them. As we were leaving she told us that Ana lived on a hill.

The librarian and the woman and the church were reluctant, even frightened, when asked about Ana's home. The two women said virtually the same thing: She already knows you are here and that I am talking to you and I'd rather be careful about how much information I provide you with, as this might get me into trouble. Something about Ana caused both of these women to become afraid. Ashforth found the same thing, "If someone is a powerful witch around the community, the community knows it. They know that person, they know he's a witch and he's the one giving them troubles" (2000:129). This is true in Costna in that Ana came to mind for both of these women when the word "witch" was initially used and both of these women were reluctant to give information because they feared that Ana would cause them problems.

After leaving the woman in the church the only information I had about Ana was that she lived on a hill. I then decided to go into a small shop and ask a group of elderly men for directions to Ana's home. The men appeared nervous at first, but ended up telling me the exact

location of her home. They warned me to not tell Ana that they gave me directions to her house. I asked them if they could tell me anything about Ana. They described Ana as “special”. They said that she has a feeling whether she will see you or not. If you believe in what she does, she will see you. If you do not believe in what she does she will refuse you.

Alexandra and I made our way to Ana’s home. When we were close to her home, I asked a few people standing on the street or in their yards where Ana lived. All of these people pointed directly at her home and almost started telling me directions before my translator had even got the question out. They did not display the same nervousness as the others in Costna. Still, this led me to think that there could be a lot of traffic coming through the village going to see Ana. The people closer to her home might be used to giving directions to Ana.

We then had to cross a foot bridge to walk up to Ana's house, which was on a hill going into the woods in the village Costna. There were other homes on this hill, as well. We walked up to Ana’s home, led by a white dog. The dog appeared right after we crossed the bridge, we did not see him again, and then right before we got to the house the dog appeared again. After asking for more directions from a woman on the road we thought we knew which house to go to. The house we thought was hers was one of three big homes in a single complex. When we walked up to the house, almost simultaneously an older woman came out on her porch from the furthest home from us at the time She was dressed in a gray shirt, capris, and pink slip on sandals. She had no wrinkles, a kind face, and she carried herself well. She looked to be in her 60s. A man, possibly her son, looked out from the porch of the structure closest to us. I asked him where Ana lived. He said that Ana was in Bucharest and will not be back until Tuesday of next week.

As this conversation was taking place, the woman walked down to us and stood behind the gate. I still did not know if it was Ana. From behind the gate she started speaking to us in the

third person. She asked us why we came. I said that a priest told us about her. She told me to tell the truth and I did I told her I was researching the witchcraft tax. Still talking to us in third person she said that Ana only practices divination. She is not a witch. If she were a witch, there would be cars surrounding her house. She said that she could not help me. In order to make the situation more comfortable, Alexandra told her that her grandmother had also been a magical figure. This is when the woman came out from the gate. She started smiling and at some point told us that she was Ana. Therefore Ana categorized herself strictly as someone who practices divination, based on what she said earlier when she was talking about herself in third person.

Ana said that her mother and her grandmother also practiced divination. The skill was passed down in the family. This meeting with Ana was not an interview per se. She led the conversation and I was unable to ask any questions. The final part of the conversation consisted of Ana telling Alexandra and me things about ourselves. First she talked about Alexandra, than me, then back to Alexandra, then me again. She knew I was American. She said I was ambitious and I will do great things. She said I was beautiful and intelligent. She said I was a strong, great woman. She told me I had surpassed all of the bad things that happened to me during my life. As far as advice she told me to be wary of a fat girl with big breasts. She also said to never take coffee from anyone. If I do, remember always to put water in it. The second time she started telling me things is after I shook her hand and told her thank you. She told me could see a man with brown hair in my eyes. She said I will have one girl and one boy. She told me I should grow my hair long and if I were to come back next year she would tell me “I told you so”.

She told both Alexandra and me to always follow God's path. She said that when crossing oneself always make sure that you go down in a straight line and then make sure your arm is straight when we go over. She also said to never look back at the door of the church. That is

where the devil is. She told us too that priests always ask for money. The only priest she trusts out of the five priests in the village is her own priest, Ion one of the two Orthodox Priests. On our way out, she told us God bless you and have a nice life. She also told us to go to the bridge and throw a silver coin in it backwards and make a wish.³²

After meeting with Ana, I wanted to meet with people who knew Ana personally, people with whom she interacted in everyday life. I was able to interview her doctor, her priest Ion, and a local professor. These interviews shed some light on what these individuals thought about Ana, and about magic and witchcraft in Romania in general. These viewpoints ranged from extreme positivism to strong belief in magic and witchcraft. This chapter will discuss these viewpoints.

Ana's doctor was the first person I contacted in an effort to place Ana within the village context. I believed that as the only doctor in Costna, Ana might be one of his patients, or he might at least know about her. The doctor's views of witchcraft and magic would also be valuable to obtain because some times when people are sick, they will visit people like Ana, who are able to use their gifts to tell how a person got sick, if they will get better, or may even be able to cure them.

I told the doctor that we had heard there was a magical figure in the village named Ana

³² In 2012, Alexandra Cotofana and I were able to visit again with Ana. When we arrived, Ana's son opened the gate for us and directed us up to her home. When we entered her home, she sat me down in a seat specifically for clients. Alexandra sat off to one side. Ana sat across from me and read my cards, which were a normal playing deck. Most of what she talked about was very general and included a discussion of marriage, success, relationships, occupation, and children. She also told me that I should go to church and see a priest to help me with my problems instead of going to see others like her. Ana mentioned God several times during this interview and told me to always follow God's path.

Ana went on to say that during the past year she traveled to Frankfurt for a conference on magic. She said that magical figures from all over the world, including three from Romania, attended this conference. She made a point to say that none of these magical figures were Roma. She said that all of the magical figures toasted, and if their glass broke, which hers did, it means that the person is a strong magical figure. She mentioned that it was difficult for her to attend this conference because she has heart problems. This is what her doctor said the previous summer.

Whenever we tried to ask Ana questions about her gift or about magic in general, she changed the subject to continue divining for me. Another woman we met in Costna, who practiced divination, said that because Ana is illiterate and uneducated, she might not have had the competence or language skills to answer our questions, which is why she refused to answer our questions and always led the conversation back to divination.

and then asked if he knew about her and if he by chance had her as a patient. The doctor in Costna did in fact have Ana as a patient. He treats her for heart disease. He mentioned instantly that Ana is not exceptional in any way. He followed this by saying that he is not interested in her or what she does. He does not believe in such things.

The doctor went on to say that people do go to visit her to have her divine for them, even people from far away. They want to know about their love life and their family life. He mentioned that people will go to such persons when they are in difficult situations, because they are desperate for a solution. He said that oftentimes people without education will believe these types of things and can be more easily manipulated by people like Ana.

When further asked about Ana's life history he reported that during Communism she tended animals and that she has little education. Before the Revolution he had never known or heard anything about her gift of divination. After the Revolution and a trip she made to Bucharest, this changed. The doctor went on to say that witchcraft was more popular after the Revolution. I ended the discussion with a question about the witchcraft tax. The doctor said that the tax was not proposed to eliminate witchcraft, but to eliminate the wealth that persons like Ana can accumulate.

The doctor, who appeared to be in his sixties, had the most, positivist views of the individuals who discussed Ana with me. This could be attributed to the education he received in order to become a doctor. He also stressed the fact that Ana was not special in any way. He said that people who saw magical figures were easily manipulated. To manipulate someone is to influence someone in an unfair manner; therefore the doctor is denying any validity to Ana's gift.

The next interview that took place was with a local literature and language high school

teacher, who also has published on the folklore of the region of Bucovina (Dolinski and Dolinski 2001).³³ He had known Ana for years and remembered his children attending school at the same time her children were. He had his first encounter with Ana years ago when he was going through a lawsuit. When he had to go to court, Ana came up to him on the street and told him, “I know you are upset, but do not worry. Go to the trial and everything will turn out just fine”. The teacher went on to say that everything had turned out fine just like Ana said.

I proceeded to ask him about magic and witchcraft in Costna, as well as in Bucovina. He told us that he has an interest in these topics and that he believes these topics are also connected to folklore. He thinks that only in Bucovina, Maramureş (a region to the west of Bucovina), and the Apuseni mountain range, are there magical beliefs that are pre-Christian and widely practiced and believed.

The teacher explained that there are more witches in these areas because they are rural, mountainous, and more isolated. He said that people in these areas do not have access to authoritative, written information so they look for information in less orthodox ways. He went on to say that this more traditional magic and witchcraft do not occur in Romania’s cities. This could be due to the more personal relationships people have in rural areas. In “Anthropologist’s Declining Productivity in the Sociology of Witchcraft” Marwick explains that in urban life witchcraft generalizations are not generated because “urban tensions are discharged by competition of a kind different from that found in rural areas where it is conditioned by necessity for competitors to continue living in close personal association” (1970:381).

As far as knowing specific magical figures, other than Ana, the teacher at one time had an old neighbor woman who could unbind curses. The woman has since died. There was also an old

³³ The teacher was a colleague of Iulia Brânză, whose work on magic in Bucovina was referenced in the literature review of this thesis. Brânză went around to villages in Bucovina and asked questions similar to the questions that I asked during my fieldwork.

male witch who lived nearby, but he has also died. The teacher said that this old witch would open the *Bible* to a random page and would then interpret the page for people who came to visit him. He also said that the old male witch looked physically crooked and that he could not speak normally.³⁴

The teacher also told an anecdote that showed further that tended to believe in the irrational. He said that thirty-five to forty years ago in Russia there was a very big hospital where there was a nurse who was considered the greatest magical figure. Like Ana, this nurse practiced divination. A journalist was sent from higher ups in the Communist Party to interview her in order to discredit her and justify her being fired from the hospital. When the journalist went to speak with her he said hello to her, and instead of saying hello back, she said “Why aren’t you wearing your glasses? You see worse with your left eye than with your right”. In that moment the journalist forgot he was sent to discredit her and he ended up writing a positive article about her abilities.

At this point in the interview, I asked the teacher about the witchcraft tax that was proposed in Romania. He told me that this tax was not passed and that it mainly was concerned with witchcraft that the Roma practiced. I then asked what exactly Ana does that is different from what the Roma do. The teacher said that Maria does not work with objects, water, or animals. Maria only works with tarot cards and the *Bible*, things that typically do not go together in more rural, peasant magic.

The teacher explained that people with gifts like Ana, are born with them. People cannot just learn how to practice divination. However, he went on to say that Ana, and others with similar gifts, are often just very good lay psychologists. Sometimes they can guess what is happening in someone’s life just by reading their face. This was the only part of the discussion

³⁴ This description of the old male witch sounds similar to the “witch priest” in Nea Bota.

where the teacher was ambivalent about his belief in magic and witchcraft.

I then told him that some of the people I encountered in Costna seemed to be genuinely frightened of Maria. The teacher said that people in Costna were frightened of Ana because they believe that she can do anything she wants with them through her powers. This made me think about my interview with the doctor. The doctor did not believe in Ana's abilities. I asked the teacher if someone had to believe in magic for magic to work. The teacher said that if someone goes to Ana and they do not believe in what she does, she will tell them that they do not believe and turn them away at her gate.

The teacher then confessed that he had been once persuaded his wife to go visit Ana. His wife is a biology teacher and her beliefs tend to be very scientific. When they got to Ana's gate, Ana said, "Why did you bring her? She does not believe." She then turned the teacher and his wife away. This is consistent with what the woman at the church and the men in the shop said. She will turn you away at the gate if she does not think you believe in what she does or that she can help you.

Based on what the teacher said, he was, it seems, a believer in this rural, more traditional, witchcraft and magic. The end of the interview further supported this. He says that there is a battle within himself, between what is the known, and the unknown. He says that he is sure that since the beginning of time there have been magical figures. Favret-Saada's *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, found this same dichotomy. There is the "medieval attitude of peasants who wrongly attribute their misfortunes to witches, and the attitude of educated people who know how to handle causal relations correctly" (1980:5). This is not the case for the teacher though, who still has a belief in magic and witchcraft.

The last person I interviewed about Ana was Ion, Ana's Orthodox priest. Ana had told us

that Father Ion was the only Orthodox priest, out of the five in Costna, whom she trusted. During fieldwork it had been said many times that witchcraft and magic is looked down upon by the Church, so it was interesting to get Ion's perspective of Ana. The discussion began by explaining to Father Ion that after hearing about Ana from other priests in Bucovina, I went to meet her. I told him that Ana said that he was the only priest that she trusted in Costna.

Father Ion confirmed that Ana attends his Church just like any other faithful member of his Church and said that their relationship is typical of a relationship between priest and parishioner. Ana helps out around the church, especially with financial matters. Besides practicing divination, Ana also advises the people who visit her to attend church.

According to Father Ion, Ana is illiterate. Like the doctor, Father Ion said that her education is minimal. He also said her faith was simple. When she was young she tended to the animals in Costna and she was very poor. She left for Bucharest after the Revolution for unknown reasons. When she returned to Costna, she had the gift of divination. Ion seems to think that Ana was taught how to practice divination in Bucharest. When I met Ana however, she told me that divination was a skill passed down through the women in her family.

Ana's priest goes on to say that he would not call Ana a witch, but there is something special about Ana. He considers her to be on the margins of what is normal. He puts her under the category of clairvoyant, or someone who practices divination. He believes part of people's attraction to Ana is that she is very charismatic. Favret-Saada found similar things and says, "priests often give it (the power of magical figures) the dignity of charisma" (1980:46). Father Ion goes on to liken her charisma to the same charisma that politicians have. She also has a strong ability to focus. He notices this ability to focus even when she comes to church and prays.

I mentioned to Father Ion that I had come across people in the village who appeared to

be genuinely frightened of Ana. Not surprised, he said that they are afraid of her because they consider her to be a witch, and they are worried about what she might do to them. Some people in the village suspect that she takes the milk from the cows, so that they cannot produce milk anymore.

He said that when one has a role like Ana's it is important for people to be afraid of you. He said that apparently she is stronger than all the other magical figures in the area. The others fade away, but she remains a constant feature of the community. Father Ion believes that in traditional village life people like Ana have a clear purpose. People are looking for information, and look to people like Ana to provide it.

Father Ion feels that if Ana learned how to read she would drift away from the things that she does. He says that she is not into black magic, but he is trying to guard her by keeping her on a straight line so that she does not fall into larger sins. He says that someday God might show himself to Ana and she will stop practicing divination, but then says the opposite, that God might even be working through Ana in some way.

At this point in the interview Romania's proposed witchcraft tax was brought up, which lead Father Ion to relate his views and ideas about witchcraft and magic in general. Ion believes that Romania should not institute such a tax. During Communism witchcraft was outlawed in Romania. After the Revolution in 1989, Father Ion said that today magical figures are more open about what they do. They are able to advertise, for example.

He goes on to say that this type of witchcraft is not as huge a phenomenon in Romania as it is in the United States or the United Kingdom. He attributes this to the new-age wave of people going back to forms of paganism.³⁵ He attributes some of the magical practices in

³⁵ T.M. Luhrmann's article, "The Magic of Secrecy" (1989) provides a good discussion of some of these New-Age Pagan groups that Father Ion refers to.

Romania as being influenced by this Western “contamination” of paganism. Father Ion believes that what Ana does is a form of paganism and that it is no different than a person reading their horoscope.

Father Ion reminded me that in Romania there does exist a more traditional type of magic than Ana’s and that magical figures have always existed in the world in one way or another. He says that in the Orthodox Faith these people are just seen as gifted people. There have never been witch hunters, per se, in Orthodox culture. Orthodox people never linked these figures to witchcraft. Father Ion considers the Orthodox Faith to be unlike other religious groups, Roman Catholics and Protestants in particular, which he considers to be more rational and less willing to tolerate magic of any form.

Earlier Father Ion mentioned that Ana does not practice black magic. I now wanted to know what Father Ion considers black magic to be. He said that black magic occurs when the devil is summoned or when one is trying to harm someone else directly. But how does one draw the line? If someone asks for a million dollars, they might be taken from someone else, or if a woman wants a man to love her, she might be taking that person from someone else. Is this not potentially the work of the Devil?

Father Ion goes on to say that he considers all magic to be bad because when one is practicing so called white magic, black spirits may be using you unconsciously. He does not think Ana is practicing black magic or white magic. Ana herself does not consider what she does is magic. He says that Ana rather believes that she has a gift from God.

The priest says that although people in Costna fear Ana, she does not threaten anybody or have bad intentions like some other magical figures may have. In fact Ana really believes that she is a good Christian and does Christian things. She helps people with the gift that has been

given to her, and in return she receives another gift, money.³⁶

Father Ion went on to say that he knows of people who attend his church who have been to visit Ana or others similar to Ana. Father Ion, like many of my informants during this fieldwork, explained that people will go back and forth between a magical figure and their priest in order to get their problems solved. People will usually go to the magical figure out of sheer desperation. It is common that people first visit the magical figure, and then if the results are unsatisfactory, they go to the church, and first ask the priest for forgiveness for visiting the magical figure and second ask the priest to help them with their problem.

Iulia Branza also discusses this matter. In “*Credințe și Practici Magice in Bucovina (III)*” (2010) she says that the psychology of the Romanian people is that they do not believe in spells until they desperately need something. People will faithfully seek the help both of a priest and a witch. They will visit the priest and the church during the day, for all to see and will visit the witch secretly (Branza 2010).

Father Ion explained that in the Orthodox Faith visiting a magical figure is a sin. Orthodoxy says you should not look for miracles, just see and believe. He makes a clear distinction between the road that an Orthodox Christian needs to follow in contrast to the road of a person of a Protestant faith. Protestantism says one should look for the meaning, whereas Orthodoxy promises God will show himself to one. This is why he as a priest is against magic

³⁶ During summer of 2012, Alexandra Cotofana and I also met a magical figure who went to see Ana for help. This was Manuela, the magical figure discussed in the previous chapter, who felt evil in others and helped with exorcisms. She described a very strong witch in Costna. I believe that this “very strong witch” is in fact Ana, based on the description that Manuela gave of the witches’ home and the many dogs and cats being in her yard. In Romania, animals are not often kept as pets and it can be seen as a bad omen when someone has many pets.

Manuela said that at one point she was pregnant while she and her husband were working in Serbia. Her husband’s visa expired and he was sent to jail. She decided to visit Ana about this problem. Manuela told us that Ana knew the whole truth about this problem without her telling her anything. During the visit Ana told Manuela, “You know what I am doing. You just came to try me”.

Manuela went on to say that Ana practices divination, as well as binds and unbinds. She also said that she used seashells while practicing divination. She also believes that she works with the devil and demons. She said that after she visited with Ana she went to church to cleanse herself. She has had since had nightmares about her visit with Ana.

and witchcraft. People should not look for miracles. They are sent by God when the time is right. An Orthodox Christian is expected to wait patiently for miracles to happen.

The final question asked was about the “witch priests” mentioned in the preceding chapter of this thesis. Father Ion said that this is a rare occurrence, but there are some priests who just open the Holy Book and interpret the things that they read. This is where they drift away towards magic. He says that it is not Christian to do this. This is often a way of making money. Priests who are serious about their position will not do this. The priests that “open the book” say that because they are priests, God allows them to open the book to whichever page makes sense. They believe that this is a medium in which God talks to them. Father Ion was not certain whether this was the case or not.

On the scale of belief, from rational to traditional, Father Ion’s beliefs were more on the traditional side. Ion believes that the Orthodox religion is more traditional, and Protestantism and Roman Catholicism more rational and this could have something to do with his beliefs. Although he does not consider what Ana does to be magic, he does believe in magic and is against it.

Chapter 4: Final Thoughts and Conclusions

While I was doing fieldwork in Romania, I spoke to many people about witchcraft and magic. These people shared their feelings and opinions on witchcraft and magic with me. Some of the people I interviewed did not believe in magic at all, or consider themselves to think so rationally that they discounted magic. Others clearly believed in both magic and traditional beliefs. Some held both rational and traditional views even though these beliefs were often in constant competition with each other. Reviewing a number of ideas like this allowed me to place each person's beliefs on a Western scale of something like rationality.

During fieldwork I was also able to interview numerous magical figures. For example, throughout my fieldwork in Costna, as I interviewed different people a number of them mentioned local magical figure Ana. They often talked to me about Ana and her gift, as well as telling me personal stories about how Ana had impacted their lives. When I would ask about magical figures in different villages, I found that almost each village had its own magical figure, or there was a magical figure in a village nearby. Indeed, some people were able to refer us to magical figures that lived thirty or more miles away from them. This does not seem like a long distance, but in an area where people still travel by horse and cart, it says a lot about the power of word of mouth. Individuals were also open and sometimes quite willing to discuss their knowledge and opinions of witchcraft and magic.

One of the central tenets in anthropology of magic is that people are very hesitant about discussing magical figures and the practice of magic. Max Marwick for example suggests that sometimes anthropologists rely too heavily on abstract statements about magic and witchcraft and too little on summaries on specific instances (1970:383). This was not the case in Costna and elsewhere in Bucovina. Individuals not only openly discussed their beliefs in magic and

witchcraft, but I was also able to get specific directions to magical figures and actual cases of the practice of witchcraft. Individuals also discussed specific witchcraft accusations.

In the literature on anthropology, the point is often made that witchcraft and magic are often topics that people are not willing to talk about. Often it can take long periods of time to gain the trust necessary for people to discuss magical figures, let alone be willing to identify magical figures themselves. In rural Romania this was not the case. When I asked about magical figures in various Romanian villages, I received referrals and almost every referral checked out. The magical figures that I interviewed were also open to discuss the gifts that they had and how they would help people in their communities and elsewhere. The practice of magic and witchcraft takes place quite openly in Bucovina. Why here in Bucovina are magical figures so prevalent and why are people so willing to talk openly about these beliefs and traditions related to them?

Magical figures, such as Ana, have clear connections to the community, community members and in Ana's case, also the Church. The nature of these connections helps determine what views individuals have of Ana. The librarian, the woman at the church, Ana's doctor, the local teacher/ethnographer, and Ana's priest all had different views of Ana and her magic. Some showed more belief in magic than others, and one, the doctor, showed no belief at all. Why these different viewpoints? In the introduction of Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, he mentions how sex, kinship, class, and distance can affect the frequency and direction of witchcraft allegations (1963). These social factors help determine how people view magic and witchcraft. I would also include here factors such as occupation, education, proximity to the magical figure, and previous interactions with the magical figure.

When it comes to belief in magic there is often putative correlation between education

and more rational views. For example, as far as witch beliefs go in Africa, some believe that witch beliefs will disappear “because of the impact of Western ideas and social forms, and that education of a Western type is the most important factor in the ultimate destruction in these beliefs” (Middleton and Winter 1963:19). In *Anthropology and the Study of English Witchcraft*, Keith Thomas says that having beliefs in witchcraft “depend in part upon the education and the intellectual equipment of the individual concerned” (1970:57). However, in Bucovina often people with a “Western” education still believe in magic and witchcraft. One example would be the professor who was interviewed. He had received a university education, but still believed in magic. Many of the priests that were interviewed during fieldwork had also received higher education; yet witches and magic exist for them as well.

Another trend that Romania does not follow is that witchcraft and magic are said to diminish when technology and other elements of modernity are introduced to the area. During this research I was often in rural areas, but these villages were modernizing. They had television, Internet, automobiles, all markers of modernity. Further, the people in these villages often travel to nearby cities or to Bucharest, the capitol.

Ana, the magical figure discussed in the last chapter, made the comment that if she were a real witch, her home would be surrounded by automobiles. This idea that automobiles, which are still a sign of affluence, prestige, and Westernness in Romania, would surround a “real” witches house contradicts the assumption prevalent in the literature that as modernization and the secular increase, belief in witchcraft will diminish. To become modern and be interested in modernity does not necessarily mean that there will also be any disengagement from traditional belief in magic and witchcraft. This may seem contradictory to those of us in the West, but one has to keep in mind that Romanian Orthodox faith provides a different ideological scaffold from

which modernization and secularization proceeds. The idea that the “more” someone is a witch will increase not only one’s trade but the socio-economic status of one’s clients (Ana’s reference to car’s and being a “real” witch) also casts doubt on any common sense equation with modernity with disbelief in tradition. In fact, there is much literature from outside Europe that suggests the same thing. It is time to bring these insights home and apply them to those who live nearer, and have more similar beliefs, to us.

In Bucovina, despite modernization, magic and witchcraft do not seem to have disappeared or to be replaced with more so called “rational” beliefs. Not only have these beliefs not disappeared, but rather they may be used more and in fact play an important part, somewhat paradoxically, in how Romania has modernized. In effect, Romanians have used magic and witchcraft with remarkable success to make sense out of and to “operate in” the modern world.

As previously mentioned there are many questions about magic and witchcraft in Bucovina, and Romania as a whole, which need to be further researched. My future goals are to conduct similar research in other areas of Romania to see how they compare to Bucovina. An extended stay in one community would also be beneficial, in order to gain more first-hand accounts of how the magical figure has affected the lives and views of rationality of community members and “rationality” and modernization of the community. As Romania continues to modernize, it will also be interesting to see if magical figures, and the belief in magical figures changes at micro and macro levels.

References

- Andresco-Miereanu, Ionna
2005 Magic in Eastern Europe. *In* Encyclopedia of Religion. Lindsay Jones, ed. Pp. 5580-5583. Detroit Macmillan.
- Ankarloo, Bengt, and Stuart Clark, eds.
1999 Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia.
- Ashforth, Adam
2000 Madumo: A Man Bewitched. University of Chicago Press.
- Associated Press
2010 Romanian Witch Tax no "Brewing" with Lawmakers There. Electronic Document, [Http://www.csmonitor.com/From-the-news-wires/2010/0910/Romanian-witch-tax-not-brewing-with-lawmakers-there](http://www.csmonitor.com/From-the-news-wires/2010/0910/Romanian-witch-tax-not-brewing-with-lawmakers-there). Accessed January, 25 2011.
- Badone, Ellen
2008 Illness, Biomedicine and Alternative Healing in Brittany, France. *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness*. 27(2): 190-218.
- Barfield, Thomas
1997 *The Dictionary of Anthropology*. Blackwell Publishing: UK
- Berger, Peter L.
1967 *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Anchor Books: New York
- Brânză, Iulia
2009a Credințe și Practici Magice in Bucovina. Alexandra Cotofana trans. *Analele Bucovina*: 16(1).

2009b Credințe și Practici Magice in Bucovina. Alexandra Cotofana trans. *Analele Bucovina*: 16(2).

2010 Credințe și Practici Magice in Bucovina. Alexandra Cotofana trans. *Analele Bucovina*: 17(1).
- Conger
2011 Romanian Witch Tax Introduced: The Church of England Newspaper. [Http://geconger.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/Romanian-witch-tax-introduced-the-church-of-england](http://geconger.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/Romanian-witch-tax-introduced-the-church-of-england)

- Crais, Clifton
2002 *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power and the Political Imagination in South Africa*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dolinski, Avramia, and Gheorghe Dolinski
2001 *Arbore: Străveche Vatră de Etnografie și Folclor*. Bucharest: Eficient.
- Douglas, Mary, ed.
1970 *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E.
1963 *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*. Clarendon Press: Oxford.
- Favret-Saada, Jeanne
1980 *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

1989 Unbewitching as Therapy. *American Ethnologist* 16(1): 40-56.
- Hesz, Agnes
2007 The Making of a Bewitchment Narrative. *Electronic Journal of Folklore* 37:19-34).
- Luhrmann, T.M.
1989 *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

1989 The Magic of Secrecy. *Ethos* 17(2): 131-165.
- Marwick, M.G
1964 Witchcraft as a Social Strain-Gauge. *Australian Journal of Science* 26: 263-268.

1972 Anthropologists' Declining Productivity in the Sociology of Witchcraft. *American Anthropologist* 74(3): 378-385.

1973 How Real is the Charmed Circle in African and Western Thought? *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 43(1): 59-71.
- Middleton, John and E.H. Winter, eds.
1963 *Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher.
- Middleton, John
1972 *Review of Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*. In *American Anthropologist* 74: 914-917.

Murgoci, Agnes

1926 *The Vampire in Roumania*. *Folklore* 37(4): 320-349.

Mutler Alison

2011 *Witch Tax Hits Romanian Witches and Fortune Tellers*. Electronic Document, [Http://www.csimonitor/World/Latest-News-Wires/2011/0107/Witch-tax-hits-Romanian-witches-and-fortune-tellers](http://www.csimonitor/World/Latest-News-Wires/2011/0107/Witch-tax-hits-Romanian-witches-and-fortune-tellers). Accessed January 24, 2011.

Popovic, Alexandre

2004 *Magic Among the Balkan Populations: Convergences and Divergences*. *Balkanologie* 4(2): 137-143.

Reid, Robert and Leif Pettersen

2007 *Romania and Moldova*. Lonely Planet.

Sanders, Todd

2003 *Reconsidering Witchcraft: Postcolonial Africa and Analytic (Un)Certainties*. *American Anthropologist* 105(2): 338-352.

Stanglin, David

2011 *Romanian Witches Could Face Jail if Predictions Don't Come True*. [Http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ohdeadline/post/2011/02/Romanian-witches-may-face-jail-if-predictions-don't-come-true/1](http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ohdeadline/post/2011/02/Romanian-witches-may-face-jail-if-predictions-don-t-come-true/1). Accessed February 22, 2011.

The Telegraph

2011 *Romanian MP's Vote Against Witchcraft Bill*. [Http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Europe/Romania/8355804/Romanian-MPs-vote-against-witchcraft-bill](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Europe/Romania/8355804/Romanian-MPs-vote-against-witchcraft-bill). Accessed April 25, 2011.

Thomas, Keith

1970 *Anthropology and the Study of English Witchcraft*. In *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*. Mary Douglas, ed. Pp. 47-79. London: Tavistock Publications Limited.

Weber, Max, with Peter R. Baehr and Gordon C. Wells

2002 *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings*. Penguin Classics: New York City.

Wilson, Godfrey, and Monica Wilson

1945 *The Analysis of Social Change*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Wilson, Monica

1951 *Witch Beliefs and Social Structure*. *American Journal of Sociology* 56(4): 307-313.

Appendix A: Map of Eastern Europe



Image Courtesy of Google Images

Appendix B: Map of Romania



Image Courtesy of Google Images

Appendix C: Map of Bucovina



Image Courtesy of Google Images