ABSTRACT

THESIS: Being Unbound: Forays into Romanian Magical Practices

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The purpose of this study is to describe and understand the relationship between Romanian Orthodoxy and local tradition as it relates to binding and unbinding practices in rural communities in northern Romania. In this research, ‘binding’ will be generally defined as a curse or some limit placed upon a person intentionally, indirectly, or accidentally, while ‘unbinding’ refers to the process of removal of these restrictions.

In this research, I am interested in observing and interviewing individuals who practice binding and unbinding in Romania and how they and members of their communities perceive these practices. By conducting semi-structured interviews and examining the relevant Romanian literature, I will assess the roles of religion and marginalization in this context for connections to and measures taken against witchcraft and magic. Further research may lead to the comparison of binding and unbinding in other geographic areas in Romania in order to determine cross-community similarities and differences. This research may also be used to explore why acceptable practices in Romanian Orthodoxy are sometimes considered heretical in Western Christianity.

The literature in anthropology on witchcraft is vast; however, there has been little contemporary research done by anthropologists on Romanian magic in English and there are
even fewer studies focusing on binding and unbinding. As Romanian magic does not easily fit into historical, anthropological portrayals of Western European witchcraft, it should be considered a separate topic with its own analytic problems and merits its own body of literature. Further, the existing sources are largely outdated or not available in English. The data from this study will be used to help fill this gap in the literature. This research also contributes to the studies of religion, folklore, magic, and belief by providing comparative material on ideas like bewitchment and binding.