

BEING UNBOUND: FORAYS INTO ROMANIAN MAGICAL PRACTICES

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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 Further, the existing sources are largely outdated or not available in English.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.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2015, I traveled to northern Romania with a group of graduate and undergraduate anthropology students supervised by my research advisor to conduct fieldwork for my thesis. While each member of the group entered the field for different research purposes, I intended to explore the topic of ‘witch priests’ and how they are perceived by members of their communities. In this context, I understood witch priests to be Romanian Orthodox priests who also use their abilities to ‘open the book’ to help those who have been bewitched or cursed and want the curse removed. At first, I assumed that the book was something like a grimoire or collection of spells and invocations and the priests were more witch-like than priest. Contrary to my initial impression, ‘the book’ is a holy text, the *Evangelhie*, which contains scripture and prayers – quite the opposite of my original understanding. I came to find that when opening the book, these priests read a specific set of prayers, the *molifte*, to lift bewitchments or bindings and exorcise demons from those in need. The *molifte* are also read during baptisms to keep children safe from possession and curses as a form of protective magic (Pócs 2004:184).

Over the course of five weeks, we interviewed members from several towns within Suceava County (see Appendix C, Figure 1) to learn about these witch priests and the magic they practice. All of our participants self-identified as Romanian Orthodox. Throughout the research, I discovered that there were many more practitioners in play than just witch priests; subsequently, there were more types and processes of binding than I had originally thought. Although I did not understand it at the beginning of the study, the negative connotation of ‘magic’ or ‘curse’ is not necessarily correct for what these practitioners do or for how their magic is seen within the community. Durkheim posits that magic is generally seen as antithetical to religion and thus somehow immoral (1995:44), though the power inherent in both is defined as

supernatural in nature. In an attempt to mitigate any negative prejudice I came into the research with, in this thesis, ‘magic’ will refer to the ritual *practices* that compel the supernatural to act in a certain way, (Frazer 1967:58; Moro 2013:450–451).

As I became immersed in Romanian Orthodoxy, I began to realize its textbook presentation and reality do not align; strict Orthodoxy shuns magic, so how can these practitioners claim to have these abilities *and* be faithful Orthodox? Something more is happening here that does not entirely fit with Orthodox practices as perceived by outsiders. As more interviews were conducted, the research team was able to gain an understanding of the connections between different types of practitioners and which specific issues they were consulted to remedy. Over the course of the fieldwork, I refined my research to focus on the differences between these practitioners and what types of problems were brought before them to be cured as well as the frequency of such occasions.

RESEARCH TOPIC AND PURPOSE

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 in rural communities in northern Romania. In this research, ‘binding’ will be generally defined as some limit magically 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 understanding individuals who practice binding and unbinding in Romania, and how they and members of their communities perceive these practices. I will examine the role of religion in this context for connections to witchcraft and magic. Marginalization, or lack thereof, of those who bind and unbind will be assessed to

determine any benefits there are regarding the social acceptance of magic or binding. For this study, my goal is to advance the understanding of Romanian binding and unbinding practices. 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 (Botica 2010).

SIGNIFICANCE AND EXPECTED RESULTS

The anthropological literature on witchcraft is vast (Douglas 1970; Evans-Pritchard 1937; Kluckhohn 1967; Kluckhohn and Leighton 1962; Mair 1969; Malinowski 1955; Peek 1991; Russell 1987); however, there has been little contemporary research conducted 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. However, the existing sources are for the most part 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.

I expected to find binding and unbinding practices, far from being considered heretical and asocial, to be fundamental to rural Romanian social life. It is my belief these practices are so fundamentally integrated into Romanian Orthodoxy they have become not only a source of healing and certainty for the people of rural northern Romania but also a method to address issues of morality and social justice.

POSITIONALITY

I approached this research as someone who has never truly been involved in religion. I was raised in a Methodist household and attended church for a few years while I was a child. I realized early on that what I was hearing from the Church did not quite fit my worldview. Something just did not mesh with my own ideas and beliefs. I did not have faith in what I was hearing from the Church, but was fascinated with the information, viewing it as a modern mythological construct. As I grew older, I became increasingly interested in religion and magic and how the two intertwine historically. My academic career has focused on archaeology, anthropology, and classical culture. This has formed the basis of my interest for initially studying Romanian witch priests and has significantly influenced my academic interests in general.

Before this study, I had no prior connection to any of my participants. The assumptions I initially held about my research population are largely based on the idea that they would be similar to members of my own culture in the Midwest. I expected most of this population to live in rural areas, have religious diversity, speak English – at least in part – and any religious figures within Romanian Orthodoxy adhered to the same laws as Roman Catholicism (in 1054, there was the “great schism” within Christianity, producing the Orthodox and Catholic faction, still I assumed the basic laws concerning marriage, hierarchy, and interpretation of scripture would be the same). Although I knew that Romania was a communist country until 1989, I assumed the practices of the government and the cultural perception of the governing bodies and institution were similar to my own culture.

Assumptions that were not based on similarity to my own culture center on the witchcraft. In the Midwestern United States, witchcraft is seen as something rooted in

Protestantism, a part of the New Age Movement or a parlor trick; In Romania, witchcraft is a very real, concrete part of life, especially in rural areas. I believed that witch priests were male priests and witches were both male and female, though a greater number were female because witchcraft and healing are generally seen as the women's sphere.

The assumptions that I believed my research population might hold about me also centered on witchcraft. I assumed that participants would believe my culture was strange because of the lack of magic. Further, I thought participants would initially assume I had prior experience with witchcraft or its practitioners. Due to my previously mentioned assumptions regarding language, I also believed that participants would expect me to speak or partially understand Romanian.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Perhaps the most famous history of witchcraft at least for English speaking readers is that of Western Europe's. Witchcraft in Europe during the early Middle Ages was associated with evil forces that brought misfortune to members in the community. "In the medieval context, true witchcraft is a statement about Christianity made in its terms. While it is a rejection of Christ, it is a recognition of the Christian devil and a conscious embracing, not of natural forces, but of evil" (Santino 1983:12). Many people of that time and place considered witchcraft as an anti-social, evil, and immoral practice largely owing to the accounts of (and the belief in) Sabbath and Black Mass (Moro 2013:285).¹ Cavendish points out that the Mass was feared so because it focuses on "things which are backwards or upside down – an inverted crucifix or saying the Lord's prayer backwards – are linked with evil and the Devil because they reverse the normal and proper order of things and the Devil is the arch-rebel who seeks to overturn the order established by God" (1967:21).

Belief in magic and divination has long been acknowledged by the Roman Catholic Church. By the 10th century, accounts of the Black Mass began to surface, making demonic witchcraft seem an almost inevitable part of life (Rhodes 1974; Cavendish 1967: 15-20) The 11th century brought about the schism between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, allowing for greater variation among European theology (Pollis 1993:341). The result was that Roman Catholicism became increasingly intertwined with the Western world view and attendant

¹ Ahmed (1968) describes Black Mass as the predominant feature of Sabbaths, which occur once in seven years. A central feature of the Mass is the ritualistic torture and sacrifice of a pure person, usually a female or child. Black Mass is intended as the antithesis to the Roman Catholic Mass whereupon all things pure are altered to become vile, e.g. the bread and wine served at the Roman Catholic Mass are transubstantiated into the body (Host) and blood of Christ, whereas the Black Mass makes use of bread mixed with unknown substances to color it black or red and blood or urine of the victim also mixed with vile substances. The service consists of praising the Devil, reading the Lord's Prayer backwards, stabbing and desecration of the Host, and pouring the blood onto the ground (Ahmed 1968:251–254).

rationalism while Orthodoxy formed a stronghold in the East linked to what the West thought was the mystical (Pollis 1993; Cavendish 1967).

Consequently, in 1484, the issuance of the papal bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus* officially recognized the existence of witches and witchcraft and provided the authority to persecute them in Western Europe (Manning 2012:72). The Eastern Orthodox Church remained much less concerned, either in theory or practice, with the identification and persecution of witches and other magical figures (Pócs 2004:187). As Eliade points out, Romania “developed under a less rigid ecclesiastical control than those [cultures] of Central or Western Europe. Furthermore, the Romanian Church...did not possess an institution analogous to the Inquisition” (1975:158).

The result is that in many Eastern Orthodox nations popular lay magical traditions persisted and the church there allowed for greater incorporation of local custom into religious practices (Pollis 1993:342). Ismail and Griffith (1999) go further to state that when Bulgaria, another Orthodox nation, declared Christianity its official religion in the ninth century A.D., the reality was such that a “dualistic faith, reflecting on one hand, the beliefs and practices of pagan primitivism, and on the other hand, the officially accepted Orthodox version of Christianity” was created, preserving and integrating older practices (1999:4-5). Ismail and Griffith (1999) trace a few of these ‘pagan’ practices to their places in contemporary Orthodoxy and discuss how this blending melds with political elements to create a popular but unique national identity.

Still, the depiction of Eastern European magical traditions and figures, even in the scholarly literature, continued to be largely derived from *Western* European notions of magic and witchcraft (Martin 1992). Eliade (1975) also discusses how witchcraft is viewed within Western culture and its problematic nature. He focuses here on two problems in the literature: the origin

of Western witchcraft and the supposed nature of witchcraft practices. He argues that the topic of witchcraft requires a holistic disciplinary understanding and the research thus far has “been hopelessly inadequate” (1975:152). Eliade (1975) notes, too, that inadequate and often incorrect primary and secondary sources are cited repeatedly, furthering the problem and creating stereotyped depictions of witchcraft and magic. Here, in the Euro-American sense, witchcraft has been directly connected to the Christian Devil and evil (Luhmann 2013:308). In this context, witches are individuals who make pacts with the Devil – a concept seldom found in Romanian traditions and literature.

Another fundamental problem with how Eastern European witchcraft is viewed under a Western lens is the prevalence of Black Mass. Gardner (2002:14) and Cavendish (1967:309–310) assert that the Black Mass is generally accepted as a blasphemous parody of the Roman Catholic Mass itself; however, this ritual, often associated with witchcraft in the West, has no analogue in Romanian traditions. In Romania, the closest parallel occurs when a person who believes he or a member of his family has been wronged asks a priest to say a mass to bind the wrongdoer (Pócs 2004:178). A Romanian Orthodox “priest legitimizes the idea that the cursing of humans is directed against the work of Satan, against the sins imparted to man by Satan, and is a just punishment meted out in the name of God” (Pócs 2004:184) a theory which bears little relation to what we commonly associate in the West with Black Masses.

From a Western theological standpoint, Ismail and Griffith lament that, “[u]nfortunately this popular religion, this ‘Pagan Christianity,’ simply confirms that pragmatism and superstition...in matters of faith always find a way to survive and resurface” (1999:4-5). Indeed, from this viewpoint, this type of ‘popular religion’ is a kind of ‘split-level’ or ‘dualistic faith.’ Though these terms are somewhat accusatory, for the sake of continuity with the literature, these

terms will be used in the research.

Since Orthodoxy is translated to mean ‘the one true faith,’ the term split-level Orthodoxy seen in Eastern Orthodox countries is problematic. However, Botica (2010) provides an in-depth study of the contradictions between how Romanians practice Orthodoxy while also incorporating aspects of folk belief and customs that are unbiblical. He posits that Romanians rely on local folk beliefs and practices rather than strict Orthodox practices such as prayer to obtain help with problems in their daily lives (Botica 2010:4). In effect, as Gibbs (1994) argues, anyone who does this is considered a nominal Christian, a Christian “in name only” (1994:13).

Seeking help in ‘unbiblical’ ways can then have negative repercussions, causing those in need to sometimes explain their rationale for doing so. Such narratives surrounding a binding, or bewitchment can be used to various ends. Hesz (2007) argues the narrative of a bewitchment is a social negotiation mechanism within Romanian communities. The narratives are told from the perspective of the bewitched and are interpreted differently by different social groups, and the roles and conflicts within the narrative differ accordingly. Hesz here offers three interpretations of these roles with the potential for more and notes the flexible nature of the narrative:

in case of harm done by a witch [the bewitched] are seen as innocent victims, while in case of a priestly curse they are either positioned as being guilty in the conflict leading to bewitchment, or they are believed to cause their own miseries by falsely cursing someone else. To make the scenario more complicated, people also believe that almost every type of bewitchment could be transferred from one person to another, which makes the number of possible interpretations practically unlimited. All this makes the local theory of bewitchment extremely flexible, thus offering a considerable room for negotiating the social relations of the parties involved. [2007:23]

Members of the family she studied negotiated this narrative to produce a version that offered them a more favorable social position and shifted blame from the victim, formerly a dissocial person, to the instigator. Hesz (2007:25) also notes that this process can be complicated because binding can be inherited.

Pócs (2004), meanwhile, views the bewitchment narrative as a means to social justice. She believes the objective of binding is to rectify a previous wrongdoing, or *maleficium*, and receive restitution for damage (Pócs 2004:176). In this theory, the local term for bewitchment, *megcsináltat*, is translated to mean ‘to have someone done in’ and is weighted with moral meaning as the curse can only affect the guilty (Pócs 2004:175-177). Those who feel they have been wronged consult a *kaluger*, (from the Romanian word for monk, *călugăr*, who are considered to have great power) to divine for and bind the wrongdoer. This binding can be carried out in three ways: the wrongdoer touching a cursed object, a vocal curse, and the wronged fasting against the wrongdoer (Pócs 2004:176-177). A religious curse is typically used rather than a ‘pure’ form of word magic as it calls upon divine authority; a pure form would say, “May you be paralyzed,” where a religious form would say, “May God paralyze you” (Pócs 2004:177). Therefore, any punishment inflicted from the binding would be deserved, God-given, and just. Finally, Pócs (2004:181) defines the one-sided nature of these narratives as the greatest analytic problem for researchers interested in the subject. She argues, in particular, that no final, theoretical statements can be made about these narratives until detailed research has been conducted “at the site of the priests’ *maleficium*, among priests and monks, in Romanian monasteries, to find out how they take part in it according to their reality, in their interpretation” (Pócs 2004:181).

With this research, I hope to unravel some of the information Pócs (2004) believes necessary to understand these narratives and, thus, binding and unbinding. To do this, I have examined the relationship between Romanian Orthodoxy and popular binding and unbinding practices. As with all research of this type, it is unwise to assume there is an unbroken continuity of practice and thought (especially one tied to Western Europe) at work in Romania. To help

avoid this, I observed how these magical figures practice in one place today.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

I explored this topic using qualitative inquiry as this research requires a “complex, detailed understanding” that can only be understood through a qualitative approach to individual stories (Creswell 2013:48). I have utilized a social constructivist epistemological stance informed by symbolic interactionism as I understand reality as foremost subjective and, therefore, meanings as being varied and multiple (Creswell 2013:24). To interpret these meanings, I have negotiated them through social and historical interaction creating a spectrum of interpretations (Bogdan and Biklen 2007:27-29; Creswell 2013:25). In turn, I have sought to understand and provide my own informed interpretation of these meanings. Therefore, I have utilized constructivist grounded theory as a framework which has allowed the flexibility to represent my informants’ interpretations as accurately as I am able (Creswell 2013:87-88).

PARTICIPANTS AND DELIMITATIONS

To be considered for this study, participants needed to be at least 18 years old, Romanian citizens or have lived in Romania for a majority of their lifetime, participate in local religions, and are familiar with Romanian culture and religion. Participants were initially purposely selected based on their prior association with my research advisor from previous fieldwork in Romania. From this initial group, additional participants were determined using theoretical sampling – a data collection process that allows for the early data analysis to drive the direction of data collection and where to find it – as well as reverse snowball and respondent driven sampling (Bernard 2011:147). Participants who completed the interview were provided with my research team’s contact information and asked for suggestions for others whom the participant

believed would be good candidates for this study.

DATA COLLECTION

Over five-weeks during the summer of 2015, research was conducted in predominantly rural areas of Romania by my research team. This team consisted of our advisor, one research assistant, three graduate students, and six undergraduate students as well as three translators. The interview dynamic changed as our fieldwork progressed. Initially, interviews were conducted with all members of the research group during the first week – all members attended participant interviews and could ask questions with the help of our translator. We quickly realized that with so many interviewers, each with their own research path, the interviews were not as focused as we intended, nor as concise. By the second week, the other two translators were hired, and our team split into smaller groups to conduct interviews. This resulted in a much more focused interview experience. At the end of the third week, most of the team returned home, leaving the three graduate students and three translators to collect additional data over the course of the next two weeks.

Data was collected by conducting informal and semi-structured interviews with magical figures, including witch priests, diviners, and others who bind and unbind, as well as those who consult them. Additional semi-structured interviews on the perception of these figures within their respective communities were administered to those within these communities and throughout Suceava County. This, among other things, helped to elicit local theories of bewitchment within each community (Hesz 2007:23). These types of interviews were chosen based on Bernard's (2011) suggestions and were conducted by members of the previously mentioned research group of anthropology students and advisor.

For this project, participants were asked to participate in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, each lasting roughly 1-2 hours in a mutually agreeable location. If more time was needed for the interviews, arrangements were made. Romania was a communist country until 1989 (Stan and Turcescu 2000:1467). As such, my research advisor informed me that the signing of “official-looking” documents may cause distrust and potential informants would unlikely be willing to participate in the study. When setting up the interview, the research team explained the purpose of our study to gain consent. Only after gaining verbal consent did the interview take place. With participants' verbal consent, the interviews were recorded with the intent of creating transcriptions to be used as primary sources for the project. If participants did not agree to be recorded, as the majority did not, notes were taken by hand.

For the interview, participants were asked about their personal beliefs and experiences. Each interview began with basic demographic questions and the conversation was built off of these (see Appendix A for the interview guide). Participants were encouraged to speak freely and informally as well as to provide anecdotes, thoughts, or any other personal information that they wished. The informal nature of the interviews led to a more conversational style and participants tended to share their stories more readily. After the conclusion of these interviews, carried out with an interpreter, each was transcribed. Fieldnotes were also kept and both interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed within two months.

Participants' names were collected during the interview; however each participant's name was replaced with a pseudonym in the final data to ensure confidentiality. Only members of the research team have access to the key that correlates names with pseudonyms. No personal information was collected such as date of birth or government identification number. All data is maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any

publication or presentation of the data. These files are stored electronically with password protection and will be kept indefinitely for future exploration of this topic or as a reference for future research studies. Only members of the research team have access to the data.

Participation in this project was completely voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any time for any reason without penalty or prejudice. By taking part in this project, participants were asked to discuss personal beliefs and experiences. By doing so, they had the opportunity to become more aware of how their experiences relate to others as well as understand the process of how or why they have reached their current beliefs. However, this type of in-depth discussion sometimes involved speaking about sensitive topics. If the participants felt at any time that they did not wish to answer a question because it was difficult to address, they were free not to answer.

DATA ANALYSIS

During the course of the fieldwork, a total of 52 interviews were conducted. Of these, 14 interviews were recorded with permission of the interviewee, and 38 were not recorded as per the interviewees' requests. Our research advisor had already given advance notice that many participants may dislike being recorded or receiving any "official-looking" paperwork, however those who did not allow recordings did agree to fieldnotes being taken as an acceptable alternative. Fieldnotes were taken during all interviews by all members of the attending interview team – as the weeks progressed, the group broke up into smaller and smaller interview teams as we gained additional translators and group members returned home. The interview teams recorded journal entries and memos to log the thought process and team meetings.

Data analysis involved the use of open, axial, and selective coding as suggested by

Creswell (2013:86). This type of approach has allowed the themes derived from the early data to drive the research direction as the fieldwork progressed. The first interview conducted involved two male priests who spoke of many, many topics which were used as a sort-of springboard to direct subsequent interviews. Each of these topics was coded openly, meaning that I created major categories from the interview, fieldnotes, and memos. One such category was the Orthodox lifestyle; here, one of the priests, Bogdan, spoke of Orthodoxy as an authentic lifestyle and the true faith because it carries down the original message of Christianity. When prompted as to why belief in witchcraft or magic prevails, he spoke of the message being carried down through tradition, similar to his view of Orthodoxy. I was already interested in the dynamic between religion and witchcraft as a primary research topic, so I knew this was a second category that needed to be further explored. Once the major categories were established, I reviewed the data for additional topics to research further.

The next step was to use axial coding by first identifying key open coding categories – called core phenomena – to focus on, then looking back to the data to create subcategories. There are four types of subcategories identified around the core phenomena: causal conditions: factors that cause the core phenomenon, strategies: actions that are taken in response to the core phenomenon; contextual and intervening conditions: broad and specific situational factors that impact the strategies; and consequences: outcomes from using the strategies (Creswell 2013:86). Using the prior example, from Bogdan’s interview, I identified the witchcraft-religion dynamic as one such core phenomenon and the prevalence of tradition/message as a causal condition subcategory. By linking these categories and subcategories, I began to position them within the emergent theoretical model.

Finally, selective coding was used to further explain and link these categories to allow for

the emergent theory and subsequent analysis. This involved reviewing the axial model for connections between the categories and subcategories and developing explanations to interrelate them. These explanations can then be expressed in the researcher's chosen format; I chose to do this in narrative form for this thesis. Throughout the data analysis process, the data derived was allowed to direct the next pathway the research took, as I felt it was important for the research direction to be respondent driven. I wanted to be able to represent the participant's experiences and thoughts in a model that utilized these experiences to the fullest extent.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Because none of the members of the research team spoke Romanian, all interviews were carried out with a translator. Therefore, it is crucial for readers to understand that in order to provide an accurate representation of participants' responses, translators must interpret and contextualize what is said. This means that any and all quotes given in this paper are translated and contextualized by the translator (see Appendix B for transcript example).

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was needed to conduct research with human subjects. The original research proposal focusing on witch priests was reviewed by the IRB and considered exempt April 21, 2015; the modifications made for this updated research have been reviewed by the IRB and considered exempt December 3, 2015 (see Appendix C).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

I would like to begin this discussion by stating that nearly every single participant was initially reluctant to address the topic of binding. Some were fearful of being overheard within their communities and asked to hold interviews indoors. Others were fearful of discussing the topic because they considered it to be ungodly. Every participant identified as Orthodox and the phrase, “I was born Orthodox, and I will die Orthodox,” was commonly used, even without prompting for their religious affiliations. Our group had to carefully negotiate our approach to the topic of binding. We found that it worked best to start by explaining our purpose and asking general questions about the person and Orthodoxy and when the participant would point out a contradiction between Orthodoxy and local beliefs or practices, we could delve deeper into binding (Appendix A). It was necessary to maintain this careful balance of what someone was willing to talk about and what they were not – in some cases, we would start to probe more deeply into binding and the interviewee would stop us to ask the purpose of our interview once more just to make sure our intent was good. Once we had offered this reassurance to the interviewee’s satisfaction, the interview could continue. As I will discuss, their fear of the topic was well-founded; inviting trouble can have negative consequences.

Throughout the interview process, both practitioners and clients agreed bindings can be placed upon a person in various ways. Of those mentioned, three common themes emerged: a person can inadvertently bind himself, for example: if he makes a promise and does not keep it; a witch can bind someone if another person requests it or if the witch intends to harm; and a priest can bind someone if he is harming himself and needs to be cut off from communion until he is absolved. It is important to point out that the negative connotation of ‘witch’ was usually linked with harm and malintent while priests were linked with salvation and purity. It is equally important to note the perception of the layperson’s role in binding: accidental and a way to

explain personal injustices.

Of these binding methods, the most common is the unintended binding caused by the victim himself. Binding is seen to be incurred very easily by those who seek help and are having a seemingly never-ending streak of 'bad-luck' while practitioners typically view this as an intentional, though not necessarily malicious, act of commission or omission. As Hesz (2007) notes, in these accounts, the run of 'bad-luck' is usually shifted from the perpetrator to an ill-willed instigator as an attempt to negotiate a more favorable place in the narrative. This type of binding transfers blame from the inadvertent layperson in an effort to minimize one's own role and mete out personal injustice.

The second most common binding type is witch-binding. A witch can be either male or female and the term is generally used among laypeople for any practitioner outside of the Church. These practitioners do not refer to themselves as 'witches' due to the term's connotation typically being considered inherently malevolent. When speaking of themselves or those they learned from, practitioners would say they were 'gifted' and only refer to their ability to *unbind* while downplaying any notion of their ability to bind. Most practitioners interviewed believe the gift was God-given only to a select few, while one such interviewee asserted that all humans have this gift, but few are strong enough to use it. Though the moniker has a negative meaning, witches are still perceived to have the helpful ability to remove ill-intended bindings. When speaking to laypeople in the communities, witches were spoken of with a sense of fear but also familiarity. Witches are seen as integral, known members of the community, though not necessarily trusted, and held to the same moral standard as the rest of the inclusive community. These witches or gifted people are viewed as necessary evils in the communities because they can counteract corrupt members of the clergy.

The third common binding type is that done by priests. Priests are thought to be the most powerful but can also be the most expensive to consult. It is not uncommon to consult a priest for help, but in rare accounts, priests who bind or unbind were believed to be immoral as it appears contradictory to Orthodox teachings. Most participants viewed priests as being held to a higher moral standard as they are believed to lead a purer life than most and often considered separate from the community. If a priest is a known practitioner, he could easily garner a heretical reputation, be shunned, and lose his congregation. A priest's reputation heavily depends on how the community views his ability. For the majority, those who believe the ability was a gift from God, priests are believed to be very holy and pure. Even amongst witches, priests are considered to be the most powerful because they have such a close connection with God. When asked if there are cases where someone could not be unbound by a priest, John, who is also a priest, said that even if the person came to the church and the prayer did not take total and complete effect, the person could go to a more powerful priest who could deliver him from the burden of being bound (May 25, 2015). This ability stems from the belief that when Jesus rose from the dead and breathed upon the Apostles, he instilled the power to bind and unbind within them. This belief is directly derived from the book of John (*Holy Bible*, New International Version 2011: 20:19-23):

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Priests are then able the channel this power once they are initiated. In this way, the power comes from a holy source and priests are simply the conduit. All priests interviewed saw themselves as being able to bind solely with the intent to keep someone from harming themselves and their

connection to God.

Something that was not immediately clear to me is that when a priest binds someone, he is not only restraining the person from committing harmful actions but also from communion with God. “The priest will bind you after you’ve confessed, and if you’ve confessed properly, you will receive forgiveness. After that you’ll go through a period of treatment where you’re held away from holy communion so that you can heal yourself (Victor May 22, 2015).” Bogdan, one of the first priests interviewed, also spoke of this instance in that binding needs to be understood as a method to “fix” someone, whereas unbinding is used to free someone from sin once he has atoned and is able to commune with God again. This theme emerges again in the book of Matthew: “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (*Holy Bible*, New International Version 2011: 18:18).”

When a person has been bound, the effects were described as overwhelmingly negative. One interviewee, Stella, said, “but nobody goes [to be unbound] with joy, but rather because they need to (May 29, 2015). Through analysis of the narratives, four primary topics emerged with the highest frequency in conjunction with binding: marriage, fertility, employment, and success. Difficulties with marriage centered on finding and keeping a suitable partner. If a person had very little luck in meeting the right person or had already found the ‘one’ but the relationship was suddenly not working out, this could be an indication of binding caused by romantic interest. “If someone cannot get married or has a health problem, you would go to a priest because your marriage got bound...The binding is sent by someone to harm you (Marie May 29, 2015).” Alternatively, if the relationship was going well but the couple were struggling to have children, someone may have bound their fertility. The third type, binding a person’s ability to obtain and

maintain employment, could mean the person had a string of unsuccessful job interviews or could not muster any willingness to work once employed. The notion of success is a component of the other three areas but was also spoken of independently. Success was considered as more of an overall binding; for example, if the person was able to find a suitable partner, have kids, and be employed, he might constantly be facing arguments with his partner, unappreciative children, and no achievements or breakthroughs in his job *plus* bad health, an endless series of bills piling up, his house falling apart, etc.

Though these effects are generally negative, the results of binding can have other intents and consequences. It is interesting to note that whenever binding is spoken of in a negative context, it is also referred to as ‘bewitchment’ or ‘cursing’ while in a positive context it can be referred to as a ‘blessing.’ As Pócs (2004:182) notes, while this binding negatively affects the targeted individual, from the viewpoint of the instigator, the effects are almost always positive. The implicated practitioner of the binding then is simultaneously one who blesses *and* one who curses, whether it is a priest, witch, or layperson (Pócs 2004:183). When viewing the negative effects through a positive lens of the instigator, infertility or little romantic success could be seen as a way to ensure the bound person does not end up with the ‘wrong’ person or someone who could hurt them in the future, effectively saving the bound person from misery. As for positive side effects to unemployment, it could be an indicator that the person is looking for a job in the wrong field and needs a push in the right direction. Overall lack of success is difficult to view with a positive lens, however, one interviewee noted that it could just be an indication that the person was meant for a completely different life. In this way, if everything was failing, the person might just leave everything behind and start fresh elsewhere.

When examining the positive and negative effects of different types of bindings, one has

to wonder: who is the person asking for the bindings and why? For bindings that are not caused unintentionally by the victim, bindings are initiated by someone contacting a priest or witch. Many of these accounts were framed as negative and cited jealousy combined with ill-intent as the common cause. “There are people who go to [practitioners] to do harm to someone, for love spells or for enriching themselves (Vitra June 4, 2015).” When we look at jealousy, envy, or greed as the motive, it becomes easier to establish the culprit. One practitioner we interviewed, Jimmy, spoke about several people he had helped and throughout his review, a certain type of person kept showing up: someone who has been slighted. Specifically, Jimmy viewed spurned lovers or previous employers as common culprits to these types of binding. Essentially, he saw slights, romantic or otherwise, as common cause to retaliate and negatively impact the offender’s life. Ergo, if you were experiencing bad luck with romantic relationships, it was likely caused by a slight against a previous partner or if the bad luck was centered on your work life, you had wronged someone in the workplace. Jimmy himself has been bound and recounted a slight he had committed against his wife as an example. About 20 years prior, he was a self-described ‘free spirit’ and left his home for two weeks to feel free. He told his wife he would only be gone for one week but extended the date indefinitely because he was so at peace. Eventually, his wife set a deadline for him to return home and when Jimmy did not take it seriously, he began to have difficulties in his life he had never faced before. Another priest, Lucian, points out typical early symptoms of binding are not being able to sleep or having nightmares and not being able to focus on anything, especially education or work (Lucian May 22, 2015). After a short time of this, Jimmy realized he was bound. Now, his relationships never work out, he has no children, and his home is physically falling apart. He used these examples as evidence against his mother-in-law, who he believes consulted a witch to bind him. In an effort to compensate his estranged

wife, he did not take any of his belongings after separating from her, meaning that he had to start again with nothing. Jimmy hoped this would help to mitigate some of the binding's effects as he does not have enough money to pay for a local priest, the only person he trusts and believes in, to unbind him.

Using Jimmy as an example and viewing the situation from the binder's perspective, there is a notion of social justice that comes forth. As Jimmy believes it was his mother-in-law who had him bound, this carries with it a belief that one can take justice into one's own hands when a slight occurs. These bindings are not so easily righted as leaving personal possessions behind for someone else's monetary benefit, instead they are believed to exact payment in the form of ruination in some aspect of life. This is where the phrase "the crime fits the punishment" comes to mind; Jimmy negatively impacted his ex-wife's life, so now he will experience hardship in his current and future life. In Jimmy's understanding of bindings, the question of who is culpable can be narrowed down based on the symptoms presented. This idea rings true throughout several of the interviews conducted and even with priests' understanding of their abilities. However, there are cases where the crime does not seem to fit the binding.

Accounts of unbecoming bindings were very rare but also seemed to stem from slights, just in a different way. The most frequently mentioned binding of this type were a layperson's cows no longer producing milk. It was believed that since cows themselves cannot commit intentional slights to humans, that it must be the cows' owners who have committed a slight in some way. Similarly, we heard of one account of a woman dying and her husband being bound by the woman's family so that he could never marry again. It was not clear whether the woman or her husband had already committed a slight against the family but it was believed that the family wanted to *prevent* being slighted by the husband remarrying. The only other accounts we

heard where the binding did not fit the punishment involved demonic possession and do not seem to truly involve binding and unbinding itself. Additional research on this topic would be needed to discuss further.

From the interviews conducted, very few clients or practitioners accounted for bindings from the 1940s to the 1970s. This could be due in part to the age of some participants; however a wide age range was used. Participants were anywhere from eighteen to ninety years old specifically as a measure to ensure we did not skew results. This gap in the narrative coincides with the Communist era in Romania and there were several participants who spoke about rising uncertainty when Communist rule began and ended. It is no surprise that the World Wars caused unrest and fear, however, I was surprised that during the Communist rule, many interviewees spoke of a period of not necessarily peace but one of certainty. One interviewee, Mara, stated that during the first few years after World War II ended, Romanian citizens were almost consumed by fear because they did not know what to expect. However, as things settled down, Romanians began to see the benefit in the certainty that was provided by Communism – “Every day you knew that you had a job to go to and be paid for; you knew that you could provide for your family; you knew what to expect from your daily routine.” According to Mara, this period of time was incredibly structured and left no room for ambiguity, so it stands to reason that as Communism began to fall, so too did the level of certainty. The few accounts of binding since the 1940s began to see a slight increase in the 1970s and a surge in the 1980s. This coincides with the rise of uncertainty and anxiety over the instability of the established community. It is likely that stories started appearing again due to the civil unrest caused by the impending revolution.

I soon began to understand binding as a tool used within the Romanian Orthodox church

and community to make sense of uncertainty during periods of change, enabling the people to define what is just and when to take justice into their own hands. The Romanian people led the Revolution of 1989, ending 42 years of Communist rule which could be interpreted as both a blessing and a curse (Stan and Turcescu 2000:1467). During interviews, many were thankful for the freedoms gained after Communism, yet lamented the loss of certainty in their lives that Communism brought. The findings generated based on the participants' shared stories of their lived-through experiences during this research connect this uncertainty to the four main areas of binding described above. Since these were the most often problematic aspects of life, it became evident to me that these are the most frequently bound aspects of life. This is confirmed in bewitchment narratives by the population studied.

LUCIAN AND DENISA: A CASE STUDY

Of the interviews conducted, none perhaps was more insightful than that of Lucian and Denisa, a witch priest and his wife. The research team interviewed the couple twice and were able to witness the powerful dynamic of their relationship, not only as husband-wife, but also as mentor-student and priest-congregant.

As a priest, Lucian has a public role in his community as well as an active role in the church. He leads church services several times a week including the Divine Liturgy and Communion on Sunday mornings and Great Vespers on Saturday nights as well as those at baptisms and marriages. However, he is a pillar of his community in more ways than one. He provides services that are not strictly sanctioned by the Church: he regularly participates in exorcisms and unbindings.

A fundamental element of this other role is Lucian's ability to read the *molifte*, a set of

prayers used for protection against and expulsion of evil. These prayers are both a blessing and a curse because while they implore the Devil and any evil to leave a person, they can simultaneously curse the power and spirit of the Devil. Further, “these prayers pretty much unbind anything that has been binded” (Lucian May 19, 2015). Clients will seek out Lucian and, his wife, Denisa when they feel that some aspect of their lives has taken a wrong turn; perhaps they cannot stop arguing, get married, their cows no longer produce milk, etc. or it could be a mental or physical problem. By the time they seek this type of help, clients have usually explored other means to resolve their issues but have come to the conclusion that they have been bound and need external help. Lucian believes that these people are bound by witches, “women who have the Devil on their side” (Lucian May 15, 2015). There are various methods used by these witches to bind others but the most frequent method is to take a string that has been tied around a dead person’s legs (similar to a ‘toe tag’ on a cadaver) and then physically bind an animal which represents the victim, thus binding the victim spiritually, mentally, or physically. The result varies based on the intended outcome of the binding itself.

When Lucian is consulted for help, Denisa will usually first conduct a numerology reading at their home for the client to determine the type of problem they have. This helps to calm the person down and become comfortable sharing their ailment. She believes clients ‘open their souls’ to her more so than in front of Lucian initially, so this a very helpful way of ensuring the client will share freely and truthfully. During this reading, Denisa will ‘open the book’ for the client, meaning that the client will open the *Evanghelie*, a holy book, to a random page of the client’s choosing and Denisa will interpret the scripture. Based on this interpretation, Lucian will also know how to best help the client. Denisa says that the readings are typically unscheduled but that it is not problematic; “If somebody has problems, the person can come whatever hour,

whatever date. [These] prayers last for thirty minutes, so they are read for half an hour and they are read three times, so three times in half an hour (Denisa May 19, 2015). Lucian believes that three readings are necessary to understand the binding and cure it. If the binding is strong, Lucian may have to read the prayers multiple times and the Devil may then manifest in some way, such as ringing phones constantly, in an attempt to distract Lucian. Lucian ignores these manifestations and says his only fear when reading for clients is that they may not believe in his gift. If a client does not believe, the *molifte* will not work properly and the curse can bring discord to his own home, causing arguments and tension between himself and Denisa. However, as they are quite experienced with this, they are able to successfully handle the situation.

Yet, reading the *molifte* does not come without serious risks. A priest must properly prepare himself to read these prayers as its effects may come back to and harm him. Several other priests and practitioners we interviewed spoke of the power the *molifte* have but also how dangerous they can be to invoke. Regular fasting and praying by the priest are preemptive methods used to keep this from happening, though many readings over time can cause long-lasting effects. Lucian has been reading the *molifte* on a daily basis since he became a priest and believes that it drains his energy:

JN: Has he ever used these prayers for his parishioners?

Translator: Yeah, on a daily basis. He almost knows them-

JN: By heart?

Translator: Yeah, he read them more than like ten thousand times. There were days in which he would read them six times.

JN: Six times a-

Translator: A day, yeah. He says that they're difficult to read.

JN: How does he feel inside when he reads these prayers to unbind?

Translator: He's very, very tired after reading these prayers. He says that he would read one and almost fall asleep because it would almost drain him of energy. So sometimes he had to take a break so he would read the prayers three times and then take a break and in the afternoon, three more times.

CL: Why does he get tired? Is it because it takes a lot of energy to...?

Translator: Yeah, he believes it's that those prayers need a lot of energy to work.

Over time, the repeated reading of these prayers has had a significant impact on his health. He needs to rest more and more frequently and feels sicker after each time. Even with these side effects, he continues to read. However, he has witnessed a steady decrease in the number of clients he has each year. His practice has declined to the point where he usually has just one client per week, so he and his wife do not view the negative effects he experiences as much a threat to his life and health. In their own way, clients try to mitigate some of the costs associated with the unbinding process; some bring small tokens of appreciation, such as food or chocolates; others give monetary donations if they can afford it, though Lucian and Denisa do not charge for their services.

Lucian views the recitation of these prayers as necessary even if it is negatively perceived by other priests. He believes that he is not viewed positively by other priests because of either envy or fear. All priests know, according to Lucian, *how* to read the prayers because the apostles were given this gift by Christ and passed it down through ordination but not all *can*; This energy drain can only be handled by a priest who has prepared himself correctly and has been given the gift from God; this usually occurs when the priest leads a pure life and is close to God. This could cause priests who do not have the gift to spurn those that do, though Lucian believes that it is more likely that other priests fear the potential negative effects. The gift is given by God but can also be taught or shared. Lucian and another priest used to read the *molifte* together until the other priest stopped coming, perhaps because he learned to read on his own or because he began experiencing negative effects. He has since attempted to teach other priests to read but so far there is little interest.

Lucian also describes what can happen if a person is bound and does not seek help. If a man has been bound and does not go to be unbound, he must somehow ‘sell’ the Devil –

meaning that the man must find a way to transfer the binding. Until this is done, the man's home and life will be utterly destroyed. Everything that he attempts to do will be hindered in some way. Even a peaceful death will be kept from him; his life will be prolonged, and he will die slowly and badly, unable to rest even in his grave. However, Orthodox belief maintains that apostolic power is passed to priests through ordination as described in the book of John (*Holy Bible*, New International Version 2011: 20:19-23), allowing priests such as Lucian the God-given ability to resolve bindings. As a last funeral rite, a priest can attempt to grant absolution to save this poor soul, but it is dependent on the person and, as such, is not always successful. This has been instilled fear into many members of the Orthodox Church in this region of Romania, ensuring that most bindings are resolved.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE STUDIES

Over the course of this research, I was able to gain an understanding of the duality of faith and tradition that exists within northern Romanian communities. Even before formally analyzing the data, it was clear that this is a culture wrought with the constant temptation of sin and attractively disguised appearances of evil; But, it also strives to be and do good. This idea of duality exists in many aspects, the base of which is absolute belief in Orthodoxy but continued use of practices that are not rooted in Christianity. Orthodoxy itself does not condone magic or belief in it, so why do so many self-described Orthodox members not only believe but also partake in magical practices? From the interviews conducted, many believe that the power to bind or unbind has a holy source; others believe the power is malicious and is rooted in evil. It was not surprising to find that those who believe in a holy source were much more open about discussing binding and differences in practice versus faith. What I did find surprising for those who were unsure of the source, is that there was an idea that some people, usually priests, had a divine source, while other practitioners derived their power from Satan. Ambivalence in the source seems to correlate with the most common types of binding mentioned: a person inadvertently binding himself, a witch binding, or a priest binding. Here again, there is evidence of duality – inadvertent and witch bindings were typically associated with malintent, while priest bindings correlated with protection and salvation. However, with an inadvertent binding, we start to see a different type of duality.

The notion of justice goes hand-in-hand with our understanding of binding. For the population studied, binding is a way to ensure that those who have committed offenses can be punished, even if just in a small way. On the other hand, binding is also a way to explain why someone is experiencing difficulty in life, transferring blame from the person who is bound to

the instigator of the binding. The areas most commonly mentioned in correlation with binding are marriage, fertility, employment, and success. Within these areas, binding can create a sense of uncertainty – both in the social and personal sense. In the same turn, it also creates certainty, either that punishment for an offence will be carried out or that a run of bad luck is due to a power beyond human control. It is a way to make frightening notions understandable and intelligible, not only for human justice but divine justice as well. It is a comforting thought that bad luck can be made to go away if you are able to be unbound.

There is also a tendency to only recognize the positive aspects of unbinding done by priests, but rarely is it ever mentioned that priests can also bind. This stems from priests' reluctance to be associated with witchcraft. As previously mentioned, many interviewees requested to conduct interviews indoors for fear they would be overheard by neighbors. If a practitioner was overheard openly talking about binding rather than just cautioning against it, he could garner a negative reputation very quickly. This is especially worrying to those who rely on their reputations to foster relationships and networks within their communities. This circles back to the source of power. For those who believe in a holy source, practitioners and laypeople alike, typically only unbinding was mentioned; however, for priests who also stated they could bind, they specified that this power comes from a holy source as a means to protect the bound person from doing harm to himself or his relationship with God. They further clarified that this means of protection comes directly from God through ordination and can only be obtained by members of the clergy. When asked about practitioners outside of the church who claim to bind and unbind, a minority of priests agreed that these people could be very holy and also blessed by God, while the majority considered them as charlatans seeking money from those who need help. Very few priests believed that other practitioners gained their powers through Satan – again, a

reluctance to in any way associate the power to bind or unbind with a diabolical source.

With both positive and negative effects, binding is a source of contention among the community studied. Belief that it is good or bad largely depends on the perception of the source and the effects of the binding itself. If the effects cause a positive or fair impact, a sense of justice is felt. From the opposite perspective, if effected negatively, the victim can utilize binding as a way to explain why something is not working out. At least in part, the notion of binding/unbinding exists to explain a loss of certainty and to take justice into one's own hands. The connection between justice and binding is especially true for slights or offences committed that cannot be pursued legally or financially. For the communities of northern Romania, binding provides an explanatory framework for good and evil and is a method to make an uncertain world familiar again through the use of local tradition integrated with Orthodox belief.

While these findings do not encompass all Romanian communities, they show that binding is a real, significant threat for the Orthodox people of northern Romania. This threat is present for those who have been or believe they have been bound, constantly testing their faith and beliefs. Those who unbind have been granted an ability to help, even if the ability is perceived negatively. However, for those who seek this help, practitioners such as Lucian are the last resort available. For many members of the Orthodox faith, those who practice unbinding provide stability, safety, and the potential for final absolution. Further research may elaborate upon these results, delving even deeper into the stability practitioners of unbinding bring to these communities. Future studies may focus on the comparison with other geographic areas in Romania to establish binding as its own body of literature. It will also be beneficial to generate Romania-specific material in English, as existing sources tend to focus on Western European witchcraft or are not readily available in English.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations of this study were largely due to time and cost. With additional time and funding, a research team would have been able to stay longer and gather more data. However, given the length of this study, we collected a significant amount of data that has almost limitless potential for research and publication. An additional limitation related to data collection was the group-nature of some of the interviews. With all members of the team present during the early interviews, these discussions touched on several topics, sometimes making the flow, when transcribed, seem disjointed. Yet, all topics discussed were relevant and useful to this research project.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Questions for Locals

1. Basic demographic information: name, age, hometown, how long he/she has resided in this community, occupation, religion, highest level of formal education, and ethnicity.
2. What does Orthodoxy mean to you?
3. How does Romanian Orthodoxy vary from one location to another?
4. How does Orthodoxy integrate local tradition?
5. If I had a problem with someone stealing milk from my cows or my marriage is bound (a method of asking about bewitchment), who would you recommend I talk to?
6. Have you ever been bound, or do you know anyone who has been?
7. Where does the ability to bind or unbind come from?
8. Is it something that only priests can do?
9. Is there anyone else that you believe I should talk to regarding binding and unbinding?
10. Is there anything else concerning binding and unbinding that you would like to share with me?

Interview Questions for Practitioners

1. Basic demographic information: name, age, hometown, how long he/she has resided in this community, occupation, religion, highest level of formal education, and ethnicity.
2. Where does your ability come from?
3. Have you ever been consulted for help?
4. How do you typically help your clients?
 - a. Is there a typical problem that you are consulted about?
5. Could you describe any unusual problems that your clients have consulted you about?
6. Do you have a usual type of client?
7. Is there a 'busy season' as for when clients come to see you?
8. (If the practitioner is not a priest) When would a client come to you instead of a priest?
 - a. How does your practice differ from that of a priest?
9. Could you describe any experiences you have had with these consultations?
10. Are your clients skeptical or hesitant of you and your practice?
 - a. If so, what do you believe influenced this skepticism or hesitation?
11. Do you believe that your clients are less skeptical or change their perception of you after consultation?
12. How would you say you are perceived within your community, generally positively, negatively, or somewhere in between?
13. How do you see your role within this community?
14. Is there a disconnect between how you view your role and how others view it?
15. Is there anything else concerning your practice or perceptions of it and yourself that you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT

This excerpt is from the first interview my research team conducted. It takes place about 1:30:00 into the interview and ends just after 1:40:00. We interviewed a priest and a deacon, referred to here collectively as “P” because it was difficult to distinguish their voices from each other in the recording. Our translator, Alex, is referred to as “A,” and “-“ is used to denote when Romanian is spoken.

JL: I've heard about binding and unbinding. Are people that are able to unbind, do they have a gift from God or is that also seen as evil as well?

A: -

P: -

A: He says he will talk about it practically again because then he can hear your guys'... There are people who will come to a priest and ask to be unbind. Unbinding from a curse, unbinding from, uh, an oath.

A: -

P: -

A: So when somebody's an alcoholic and they promised to themselves that they won't drink again and then they break that promise, they will come to a priest to ask for, to be, to be unbound from that oath that they made to themselves and to others. And then their holy book, they have certain, uh, prayers that they can say in situations. If we are to explain what evil is, that would be the reverse of blessing someone. And an oath, there are certain people who set certain limits for themselves and promise that they will keep up to them and then they're not able to. And when they feel they can no longer, uh, live up to those limits they set for themselves they come to a priest and they will ask to be unbind from that. Or when they accidentally, uh, go over that limit. Of course these things, these things come as a comfort for their own mind to give them hope again.

A: Yes, Brittany, you had a question.

Brittany: What happens if they don't go for help?

A: -

P: -

A: Um, your mind will be burdened by this. You won't be able to free yourself from the thought that you've done this; it will be on your conscience. He says we don't call these people, they come to us, it's their conscience who pushes them. Of course, if they have a religious education of this sort they will know that they can come to a priest with this.

A: Colin, did you have a question?

Colin: Yes, um, are priests, um, the only people who can do unbinding or are there other people, um, in the area that can or do?

A: -

P: -

A: There's a way for priests to do it that's in the scriptures – the Holy Scriptures. And it's one of the tasks that they have for their job. In the Holy Scripture we have, we find a lot of arguments where Jesus tells his apostles and only to them, however many things you bind, you will be bound in disguise as well. And all that you unbind will also be unbound in disguise. Because we are all powerless and that's why we need help. And this is the mission of the priest, to help others.

P: -

A: -

P: -

A: There's a difference between a help someone can give that is done through a relationship with God, so say for example, your conscience is full because you have done something that wasn't right. And I have two options: I either go to psychologist, he will listen, and they can give me certain advice, certain testimonies. The other alternative is going to a priest, I will confess all my sins, and God forgives me through the priest. Because God left the priests with this gift and he said all that you would unbind will be unbound in hymns. And the priest becomes a witness in front of God who will confess when it comes to the final judgment that all the sins that make the sins that we have confessed have been unbound. Again, it is not the priest who forgives the sins, but God. Uh, based on what he told the priest this will happen.

Colin: Do people ever seek anyone who is not a priest or a psychologist or a psychiatrist?

A: -

P: -

A: [1:40:00] We always ask for help when we are in a difficult situation and we ask, uh, we receive advice but there is a certain warranty that God has when a priest does the unbinding. It's a clear way that God knows. It's also a way to let people know that what they have confessed will be forgiven. If they go to a priest there's a certain way for people to know because God promised these things to the apostles and then to the priests. Because if you make a mistake and you talk to other people, people will listen and, but they will not be able to help in a sense that your conscience will still be, uh, burdened. Because I, I made a mistake in front of God, but when I go to a priest to confess, I have the warranty that God forgives me because God said what he said to the apostles and priests.

JN: Can some bindings be stronger than others?

A: -

P: -

A: Both evil and good have progressive forms, so of course.

JN: Ok.

APPENDIX C: FIGURES



Figure 1 Map of Counties in Romania. Source: <http://www.vidiani.com/large-administrative-map-of-romania-with-cities/>

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research Integrity
 Institutional Review Board (IRB)
 2000 University Avenue
 Muncie, IN 47306-0155
 Phone: 765-285-5070

DATE: December 3, 2015
TO: Brittany Short
FROM: Ball State University IRB
RE: IRB protocol # 834837-1
TITLE: Being Unbound: Forays into Romanian Magical Practices
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
DECISION DATE: December 3, 2015
REVIEW TYPE: EXEMPT

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on December 3, 2015 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

Exempt Categories:

	Category 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
X	Category 2: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior
	Category 3: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under category 2, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
	Category 4: Research involving the collection of study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

	Category 5: Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of Department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under these programs.
	Category 6: Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed which contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Editorial Notes:

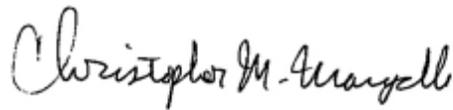
1. Participant Signature Required on Informed Consent (Audio Recordings).

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. **Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project.** Please contact (ORI Staff) if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (<http://www.bsu.edu/irb>) for review. Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

Reminder: Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), you and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.



Bryan Byers, PhD/Chair
Institutional Review Board



Christopher Mangelli, JD, MS, MEd, CIP/Director
Office of Research Integrity