

## **Economy and Ritual**

*Max Planck Studies in Anthropology and Economy*

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# Economy and Ritual

*Studies of Postsocialist Transformations*



Edited by

**STEPHEN GUDEMAN AND CHRIS HANN**



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**Map of Field Sites for Economy and Ritual Group**

*Source:* Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Halle/Saale, Germany.

*Cartography:* Jutta Turner.

*Base maps:* <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/europe/easterneurope.jpg>; [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/kyrgyzstan\\_pol\\_05.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/kyrgyzstan_pol_05.jpg); accessed 19 April 2012.



## Introduction

### *Ritual, Economy, and the Institutions of the Base*

STEPHEN GUDEMAN AND CHRIS HANN

From pig-sticking to displaying barrels of wine, from large private weddings to modest community festivities, and from helping kin dry tobacco leaves to offering a sheep's head in honor of a senior male, the rituals explored in this volume all have to do with economy. This is our puzzle and theme. What is the connection of economy and ritual, and what does it tell us about the changing postsocialist regions in which the members of our group worked?

The Economy and Ritual group consisted of six anthropologists who worked together at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany, during 2009–2012. After developing the theoretical background and agreeing on the main contours of the comparative agenda, each researcher carried out an extended study in a different area. During this field research we convened in Macedonia to share initial findings and to finalize a common questionnaire. Later, the researchers returned to the Institute to write up their results. Some returned to the field again later to fill in gaps. The questionnaire we used and other details about the research are presented in the Appendix.

All six researchers held Ph.D.'s and had extensive knowledge of the change from socialist to market economies in one or more countries. Several opted to work in a country that they already knew well, either because it was their native country or because they had carried out research there previously. Some returned to a small community that was already well known to them. We emphasized rural situations (in the one exception, the Macedonian town of Prilep, the focus was on recent immigrants who maintained close links to the countryside) in order to take maximum advantage of anthropology's traditional strength in conducting holistic ethnography of established, "face to face" communities. Despite their experience and

prior knowledge, none of the researchers had previously focused on ritual in relation to economy. We emphasized the need to keep in mind links to other settlements and the larger histories of regions and nations, not only the world-historical significance of socialism but also *longue durée* histories of political economy and of religion. However, our main focus was on the micro level—on house and community economy in relation to ritual. The results, as the reader will find, are not strictly comparable in a statistical, correlational sense. This was to be expected, given the great diversity in postsocialist conditions. The comparative process has led us to challenge any simple division between secular and religious rituals or between ritual and economy. The shift from socialism to market economy is not illuminated by the teleology of modernity and economic development.

### Economy and Ritual Viewed Broadly

For most economists, ritual and economy have little to do with one another in the contemporary world. Economy is treated historically as a realm of struggle, of material production on which ritual actions are a drain, a cultural barrier to efficiency. Numerous modernization theorists since Max Weber tell us that the rise of instrumental thinking and bureaucracies overcome and eradicate ritualistic practices. According to evolutionary schemes in anthropology since Edward Tylor and James Frazer, magico-religious thought declines with the advance of technologies of production and storage. A Nobel laureate in economics has recently proclaimed that magic and religion are nonrational solutions to economic uncertainty, which in his opinion can only be reduced by changing the institutional framework of economy to make it more rational (North 2005: 15–18, 59). From the opposite direction, anthropologists have made significant advances in studies of ritual by considering it separately from instrumental practices: ritual, they suggest, is first and foremost *performative*; it does and says something, usually with the help of tangible objects, but disconnected from mundane economic concerns and causalities (Leach 2000). Given these perspectives, our question about the relation between economy and ritual is problematic if not anachronistic: it has been answered. With the onset of modernity, as epitomized by economic development, connections between ritual and economy are severed.

But with a moment's reflection we can see that the separation is incomplete. Most rituals require the deployment of some material resources, in some cases minimal but in others extremely costly. One might expect elements of an economizing attitude to enter into the planning and even the execution of the ritual (what is the minimum number of expensive fire-

works that must be set off in order that the participants go home satisfied?). The relationship is no less complicated within the domain of economy. Much of our behavior as consumers is public and highly ritualized, e.g., when we watch sporting events in a stadium. If ritual is defined in terms of the cultural standardization of a habitual activity, then we engage in a simple secular ritual every time we pick up a knife and fork, quite irrespective of whether we have given the meal a religious meaning by the uttering of a grace. Clearly a great deal of production and distribution consists of highly routinized encounters between persons, and between persons and things. Perhaps some lucky individuals are able to cultivate a zen attitude and apply it to lend all their activities the quality of a ritual. An observer might insist on classifying them as exploited proletarians or *lumpen*-intelligentsia, but if a human being draws no subjective distinction between labor and “leisure,” we might conclude that he or she has successfully ritualized both.

We conventionally use economy and ritual as ideal types, the former associated with the short-term maximization of utility and the latter with something deeper, the accumulated long-term values of a society (cf. Bloch and Parry 1989). In following these conventions, we must be alert not only to the multiple ways in which each type is modified empirically, but to changing causal links between the two in concrete situations. For example, students in business schools are not taught to eradicate everything that smacks of ritual from the production process of a capitalist firm. Instead they learn of the virtues of organizing costly “away days” to boost team spirit in the enterprise and its subunits. Rituals did not vanish from the City of London with the “big bang” financial reforms of Margaret Thatcher: traditional “old school tie” patterns of sociality in the Home Counties may have weakened, but new forms of the cocktail party and international conferencing proliferated in their place. Cementing trust through rituals may be especially significant in the financial sector, but comparable practices can be identified in many nooks and crannies of capitalist industrial production and consumption, from obligatory politeness formulas to staff uniforms, from advertising slogans to retail sales campaigns at Thanksgiving. However, from the salesperson’s manipulation of a fashionable brand to the propagation by sophisticated managers and consultants of a distinctive corporate culture, the uses made of ritual in these examples are subordinated to the logic of efficiency and profit maximization. If an enlightened transnational corporation diverts funds to support some traditional ritual in a country where it is active, and the local managers participate in those rituals, this too is good for image and ultimately for shareholder value. But the incidence of ritual in economy cannot always be reduced to a logic of this kind. We are also interested in cases where there is no adaptive fit, where rituals persist (or are newly devised) not in order to maximize indi-

vidual satisfaction or to improve the functioning of households or firms in a domain called economy, but in order to express something of value to a larger collectivity known as society.

Anthropologists have analyzed the relationship between economy and ritual in societies very different from those of contemporary capitalism, but early efforts in this direction were not followed up as specialization set in within the discipline. The vast literatures on ritual phenomena and economic phenomena make little reference to each other, because *we* categorize them as separate domains. Evolutionists such as Frazer (1909) argued that magical beliefs and ritual taboos had an adaptive logic that facilitated the “growth of institutions” such as private property. However, sociologist Robert Bellah (drawing on historian Johan Huizinga) has recently suggested that ritual has its origins in “serious play,” where humans cooperate in a “relaxed field,” free of immediate economic pressures (Bellah 2011). In this account, ritual (together with myth and the later emergence of Gods and religion as we know it) is opposed to work and to selective pressures (at least at the primary level). However, the causalities remain unclear. Bellah notes that the elaborate rituals of tribal societies require considerable material resources, implying a need for storage facilities. Ethnographers have commonly argued that ritual is the key instrument in mobilizing large work parties to construct such facilities in the first place.

This debate has not advanced significantly in the last hundred years. Karl Bücher, Max Weber’s contemporary in the junior generation of the German Historical School, showed how the performance of work depended on what he called “rhythm,” exemplified by singing together to carry out tasks that were difficult or simply tedious (see Spittler 2008). One of Bronisław Malinowski’s earliest contributions to anthropology was to extend Bücher’s argument to magic and ritual for the case of Australian Aborigines (Malinowski 1992 [1912]). He returned to the theme repeatedly and the main subject of his last monograph on the Trobriand Islanders was once again “the relation between purely economic, rationally founded and technically effective work on the one hand, and magic on the other “ (1935: xx). Malinowski continued his Preface to that work with the ringing assertion that “No human beings, at whatever stage of culture, completely eliminate spiritual preoccupations from their economic concerns” (ibid.). It has become almost commonplace to suggest that capitalist consumption opens up a world of enchantment analogous to that of magic and traditional forms of religion. But Malinowski was writing about *production*, and his invitation to question the very notion of the “purely economic” has even wider validity, even though his own answers remained somewhat muddled to the end.

A decade before these formulations by Malinowski, Marcel Mauss had concluded his famous study of *The Gift* by suggesting that the rituals asso-

ciated with reciprocal giving might still play an important role in our own economies, even though these were dominated by markets and contract (Mauss 1990 [1924]). Karl Bücher had in fact made this argument even earlier (Bücher 1922). Later ethnographers found that embryonic entrepreneurs calculated how to take advantage of differing spheres of value and distort traditional modes of hospitality and feasting for their own commercial benefit (Barth 1967). But despite these and other voices, even in the subfield of economic anthropology the tacit assumption has been the modernist one stated above: economy and ritual have little or nothing to do with each other. We know from our mass media that certain rituals celebrated domestically, notably Christmas, have a massive impact on GDP, as do major public spectacles such as the Olympic Games. The tourist industry has long known that the rituals of others, staged and unstaged, can be very good for business. But how exactly are we to theorize the force of the “purely economic” in relation to actions that defy this calibration, the products of everyday sociality as well as deeper “spiritual preoccupations”? Is this relationship necessarily different in a complex contemporary economy, in comparison with a “tribal economy” such as that of the Trobriands? If so, is it constant across all industrial economies or might it differ in the variants we label capitalist and socialist? For example, what differences might we expect to find if we examine the relation between ritual and economy with reference to the Moscow Olympics of 1980 and the Los Angeles Olympics of 1984, each boycotted by the other side in the era of the Cold War?

The end of socialist planning and its replacement by capitalist market economies provided a unique opportunity to investigate the confluence of economy and ritual. Earlier studies by Gerald Creed (2002) in Bulgaria and Cynthia Werner (1999) in Kazakhstan were both concerned with feasting and hospitality. Werner found that such activity had increased with the end of socialism and the advent of markets. With the help of her informants, she interpreted this upsurge in terms of the need to strengthen social relations and trust in circumstances of increasing uncertainty. This was a return to forms of mutual indebtedness characteristic of the presocialist era but suppressed in the decades of collective farming. Creed, by contrast, found that hospitality rituals were undermined by the market relations that had come to dominate in postsocialist Bulgaria. The declining economic conditions, reduced state support, and loss of remunerative jobs left no funds available to sustain the ritual hospitality. While Werner stressed that investing in relationships was both a risk-aversion device for the community and at the same time a good “business” strategy for elites, in postsocialist Bulgaria it was not possible to fall back on earlier forms of community mutuality. Whereas Werner finds that behavior in a significant domain of ritual is ultimately subordinate to an economic logic, Creed suggests in a later pub-

lication that ritual (in this case the performances of folk mummers) can be a domain for resisting this logic and protesting against the broader phenomenon of postsocialist “cultural dispossession” (Creed 2011).

The differences between these scholars may derive from the timing of their observations, or they may have been due to enduring differences between the particular locations studied (but not necessarily between the wider regions), or to the different anthropological perspectives of the two authors. One of the starting impulses for our project was to investigate the apparent discrepancy in their accounts in a novel, comparative way. Building on an earlier model of “economy’s tension,” the dialectic between market and community (Gudeman 2008), we approach ritual in terms of notions of house economy and human sociality in order to offer an alternative, heterodox perspective on economic life. Before we describe these key points of theory and introduce our collective project and its six case studies, let us look a little more closely at the many referents of ritual.

## Ritual and Sociality

In the social sciences and humanities, rituals have been differently defined and viewed but rarely considered in relation to economy. We use the concept of ritual in a particular way because of this focus. All of our case studies are oriented to local economies of the house and community in the context of the larger historical and contemporary economies of which they are a part. Before relating how we view ritual, it may be useful to note other applications of the term, some of which overlap ours.

Ritual refers to a sequence of actions that we share with others as in a marriage or death ceremony, or a greeting, such as shaking hands and kissing on both cheeks. Similarly, ritual can mean a personal, repeated action or even a habit, as in a ritual performed on arising or going to bed. Some people have customs that they perform unfailingly, such as opening a door in a certain way, knocking on wood, or wishing good health to someone who sneezes. Habits can be seen as “economical” ways of acting: by eating the same food at breakfast or lunch, or wearing the same style of clothes, we spend less time deciding what to consume or wear, although the line between “compulsive repetition” as ritual and “rational repetition” as acts of economizing can be thin. Do we economize with such rituals? Are they an instance of “satisficing”? (Simon 1956) Or are they manifestations of deeper biological and/or emotional drivers?

By ritual we often refer to an expressive or symbolic aspect of life, such as praying to a divinity, pledging allegiance to a nation, or swearing fealty to a leader. Such rituals are not causal or mechanistic practices but acts of



commitment. Some of these rituals have reflexive effects, as in a consoling prayer or a joyous wedding that lifts the spirits. In relation to economy, these rituals may “assist” practices, such as prayers for help with a harvest, pleas to a saint to cure an illness or animal, or appeals that working with certain machines or chemicals should not prove harmful. Evolutionists such as Frazer and Bücher and functionalists like Malinowski emphasized effects of this kind, arguing that such assistance was indispensable to persuade people to work at all and conducive to raising productivity.

In relation to material economy, a ritual may cost time and wealth. For example, as prosperity increases, so may the size of a ritual as a form of display or thanks, as in weddings and birthdays. As wealth falls, ceremonial expenditures may decline. Are rituals involving ample expenditure—the extreme case being the Northwest coast potlatch—cost efficient in some fashion or irrational demands? Costly rituals are found in several of our studies and it is by no means obvious what they accomplish. Ritual in this expressive sense can still be a domain in which economic struggles and conflicting explanations of the world are played out. The soul can be sold to the devil for riches; spirits may possess humans who transgress standard practices or are forced into unaccustomed behavior. Ritual practices may express separation from or resistance to a market economy. In our cases, rituals may represent a reaffirmation of the connectedness of socialism vis-à-vis the divisive individualism of market economy.

Modern markets themselves can be studied from the perspective of ritual. In some markets participants must go through a rite of passage to enter and participate. The New York Stock Exchange is opened each day by the pounding of a gavel, and it is closed by ringing a bell. Trades take place only during this sacred time, except for after-hours trading; and traders must purchase a “seat” to participate. We do not directly find these rituals of entry and exit in our cases, but participation itself can be ritualized. In most markets everything is brought to the measuring rod of money, and those who participate must practice calculative reason. This requires a change of mentality on entering a market, equivalent in reverse to that required when entering a religious sanctuary or ritual.

The process of linking means to ends, and of ends to means, is the central act in markets and might be seen as a ritual for some of those involved. It is the opposite of enchantment in the Weberian sense of a world made by nonrational processes, but the instrumental linking of means to ends can have a ritualistic aspect when it involves compulsion and enchantment. Commercial and financial practices may be undertaken as complete, sufficient, and satisfying acts in themselves.

For us rituals are related to economy through the social connections they make and break. Rituals express, reiterate, and sustain social ties. They

can make and recognize commitments to others or sever them, as in rites of passage. Rituals are often essential for extending sociability, as in gestures of friendliness, hospitality, and words of kindness; and they can revivify or recuperate connections as in special gatherings. Rituals also can hide social ties and personal interests by veiling them as something else; and they may mystify wants and desires by presenting them as what they are not.

Rituals are no less fundamental to institutions, which as we shall elaborate are fundamental to economy. Institutions are made up of social connections, as epitomized by the house and the community. The state and the church are more encompassing institutions. Our case studies are not concerned with state holidays or church services but more intimate gatherings at the local level may be informed by these larger institutions. Some rituals may not be considered religious by the participants, but if pressed they may recognize a religious back cloth. Uncovering this entanglement of interpersonal sociability and the role of institutions is a central focus for us. In doing so, we resist a simple division of religious and secular rituals, and of ritual from economy. These separations are not those of the people in the house and communities studied, and for this reason alone it is important to question these categories.

## **Economy Comparatively**

The six economies studied in our project were all postsocialist. What is this condition? The many answers given by scholars have been strongly colored by their political perspective on socialism itself. Ernest Gellner, for example, considered central planning to be a key element of a monist project continuing the traditions of Byzantine Caesaro-Papism. For him socialism was the antithesis of the modern (Gellner 1994). This lack of modernity was demonstrated by the efforts, overwhelmingly unsuccessful, that socialist states made to promote both public and private rituals to legitimate their power. Socialist economies were caught up in an elaborate ritual performance that contrasted with the “reality” of the world dominated by market capitalism. We find this dichotomy much too simple and offer instead a view grounded in the social and economic changes that took place in people’s lives under socialist rule, and in their assessments of that era after it had come to an end and they were obliged to encounter capitalist markets. We are not arguing that there were no differences between the centrally planned economies of the Soviet bloc and Western market economies, but we should not mistake the models of each for the reality. A focus on the relationship between economy and ritual can help us to a better understanding of how these competing systems actually differed in practice.

During the Cold War, many Western universities offered courses in Comparative Economic Systems. Teachers of such courses pointed to the varieties of capitalism, such as the difference between the United States and Japan, but the dramatic chasm was that which separated capitalist from socialist economies. Such courses are now less fashionable.<sup>1</sup> Today, two decades after the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, we are more aware of the diversity that characterized the socialist camp. One of our field sites is in Macedonia, formerly part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which maintained a nonaligned stance throughout the Cold War. Yet even Yugoslavia, with its distinctive system of self-management and absence of collective farms, remained clearly socialist in its main contours, notably the social ownership and control of the most important productive enterprises. The Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian variants of central planning were also unequivocally socialist by this criterion, although they differed greatly from each other. The Moldavian and Kyrgyz republics of the Soviet Union had yet different histories but nonetheless shared many common features of that federation. The family resemblances of socialism in our six cases are clear.

Unlike capitalism, the origins of which have always been highly contested, it is superficially quite easy to trace the genealogy of socialism: to writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the nineteenth century, in which they developed their critique of alienation and exploitative class relations in the new capitalist industrial society. They supplemented this analysis with an evolutionist “historical materialism” that began and concluded with communism. Their critique of the economics of their age, however, offered few clues for the economic management of communist states in the twentieth century. The states of the Soviet bloc and Yugoslavia all claimed to be socialist, and disavowed having reached the higher stage of communism. Central planning was motivated ultimately by an emphasis on the community pole of Gudemán’s dialectic of market and community. It was encapsulated in the slogan “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” The extent to which socialists implemented the second component of this shibboleth is demonstrated by the evidence in this volume for the persistence of state redistribution at the micro level. Both components of the mantra reflect enduring impulses of community, as vividly demonstrated in Monica Vasile’s discussion in this volume of how wealthy wedding guests in Transylvania are cajoled into making more generous gifts as part of the “community endowment” of the newlyweds.

Administrative redistribution controlled by the state is by no means the whole story of the socialist period. Economic policies in Eastern Europe were shaped less by Marxist doctrines than by the overriding goal to industrialize backward agrarian societies as rapidly as possible, at a time when

Europe was divided by an “iron curtain.” As Johanna Bockman has recently shown, it was increasingly recognized by the planners themselves that the mechanism of the market and techniques of Western “neoclassical” economics were indispensable for ensuring efficient outcomes (Bockman 2011). In the pure world of economic models, successful accomplishment of the plan should be mathematically identical with market equilibria. In practice, many socialist economists drew on transnational developments in their discipline to critique “over-centralization” and promote less hierarchical models. Hungary and Yugoslavia evolved particularly distinctive forms of “market socialism.” The market form of integration was less well developed in the other countries covered in this collection but was never entirely absent. For example, the collective farm markets of the Soviet Union allowed villagers to sell the produce grown on their private plots at prices higher than those paid to the collective by the planners through the procurement system.

Socialism thus combined redistributive planning with elements of market mechanisms and this combination left significant space for individual or household economy, including the development of reciprocal and solidary links between social actors. The cases studied in this volume combine this socialist legacy with an enduring legacy of rurality. In some ways it was easier to implement communist ideals in village communities than it was in the city. The collective farm (Russian: *kolkhoz*) was a “total institution” charged with organizing the local farm economy and transforming it according to communist ideals. It is instructive to compare the workings and accomplishments of this institution with the “modernization” of rural societies in other parts of the world, for example with regard to rates of rural exodus and patterns of social as well as geographical mobility. Anthropologists were slow to turn their attention to Europe, however; socialist Eastern Europe could not be adequately investigated until research access improved, which in several states did not happen until the 1990s after socialist regimes had collapsed. In many regions it has only now become possible to look back on the socialist decades (several generations in the case of the former Soviet Union) and assess the full impact of socialist ideals and institutions. To stick with the example of wedding rituals: the pattern identified by Vasile in a forest community in postsocialist Romania bears similarities to what earlier ethnographers of the Mediterranean have documented, when communities previously oriented toward subsistence and survival gain access to new sources of wealth and accumulation. This suggests common patterns of development, largely independent of particular institutional forms.<sup>2</sup>

While acknowledging commonalities, we are suspicious of a universal telos of modernization. The economic institutions of central planning

obviously made a difference locally, despite all the intrasocialist variation. In addition to the space afforded at the local level by institutions such as the kolkhoz markets, the implementation of socialism was profoundly economistic in the sense that the highest priority was attached to meeting ever-inflated production targets. Lenin's embracing of "Taylorism" was as fervent as that of any contemporary capitalist. The abuses of norm-setting were endemic to all planned economies. They were most extreme in the Gulag system and persisted after its elimination in the 1950s. When levels of violence were reduced, the scope for rational calculation increased. Within the institutions of central planning, it was rational for farm leaders to negotiate plan figures with their superiors with the goal of maximizing the resources at their disposal and creating more room to maneuver for their members (Creed 1998; Humphrey 1983; Verdery 1996). Economists have no difficulty in understanding this kind of behavior; they can model the behavior of those who offer and accept bribes in capitalist and socialist systems alike. Some might insist on the irrationality of the planning institutions but claim that individual decision makers behave as rational maximizers within that deplorable framework (as does a Trobriand Islander when cultivating more yams than he can possibly consume, the ensuing surplus being disposed of in the form of gifts to affines, gifts that will in large part eventually be left to rot). Other observers might detect similarities between the plan negotiations of socialist farm managers with ministerial officials and price negotiations between capitalist farmers and their trusted agribusiness agents, although in both cases the "economic" negotiations take on a ritual aspect. Both are likely to be lubricated by alcohol, albeit different types and brands.

This brings us back promptly to ritual, the other key term of this volume. We have already noted how the scope of ritual in modern capitalist economies is defined to exclude the economy, and spectacular ritual events organized by the holders of power are the exception that proves the rule. At the level of the enterprise, support for the sports club or for the senior managers to visit the opera after the annual general meeting can be documented in yearly reports and incorporated into the accounts. The separation between the world of work and that of leisure is supposed to be sharp. One-party socialist regimes blurred these boundaries through a more visible and encompassing ritualization.

This salience of ritual, both public and private, was clearly related to the difficulty many socialist states experienced in satisfying the consumer wants of their populations. The "market socialism" of Hungary after 1968 was a partial exception to this misery, but the shops of Romania, Poland, and much of the Soviet Union remained poorly supplied in the 1980s, even in terms of material "necessities." This led to large "second" or "un-

derground” economies, and more or less elaborate discourses and rituals surrounding “questionable” transactions, for which *blat* became the generic name in Russia (Ledeneva 1998). Governments that could not find legitimation in the markets were almost obliged to compensate in the realm of ritual. Within the domain of economy more narrowly construed, they invested in rituals to boost production, such as those of “socialist competition” and the “communist Saturday,” which meant working voluntarily without additional pay. The sphere of consumption was heavily ritualized, for example in the conscious promulgation of new wedding practices. The Soviet Union attempted to create new ritual calendars for the state, and even to intervene in the life-cycle rituals of families (Binns 1979, 1980; Lane 1981). Between the state and the family, resources were also invested at levels such as that of the collective farm and the ubiquitous socialist institution of the Culture House, which was generally supported financially by the farm as well as the local state administration (Donahoe and Habeck 2011). The extraordinary high turnout achieved for noncompetitive elections at every level can be considered another form of ritual in a socialist system aptly characterized by Lane (for the case of the USSR) as a distinctive variant of political religion.

The effects of this socialist ritualization were pervasive. With the exception of small numbers of dissidents, by the last decades of the Soviet Union few questioned the system (Yurchak 2006). For example, compared with the meetings of a Western trade union, where the outcome of a debate over a strike proposal is indeterminate, the meetings of socialist trade unions at every level had a more formal quality, in the sense that the outcomes were generally known in advance and the speechmaking more formulaic. Yet even here the differences are not always black and white. Ritual infiltrates even the most democratic political organs, and the most perfect socialist choreography does not always proceed according to the script. It takes good fieldwork to capture the latter through careful analysis of “backstage” reactions and the informal, “subaltern” expression of what cannot be expressed openly and formally.

This volume is not concerned with ritual at the exalted level of the state, or with political ritual at other levels, but engages primarily with the level of the locality and the house. The focus upon house has many antecedents. Classical work by the Russian agrarian economist Alexander Chayanov (1987) has shown how the “family-labor farm” follows an economic logic that is quite different from that of a capitalist enterprise. These insights have inspired much later work in economic anthropology (Sahlins 1972) and peasant studies (Shanin 1990). Other strands of research in anthropology and history have prioritized the relationship between household and family, the composition of the domestic (residential) group and the

intergenerational transfer of property (Goody 1976; Laslett 1972). While some have approached the “house society” culturally (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995), others have analyzed how households articulate with changes in global political economy, specifically the rise of capitalism (Smith et al. 1985). All of these strands have shaped our comparative project. Of particular importance for the Ritual and Economy group is the way in which house economy has been theorized in opposition to the corporation in previous work of Gudeman (e.g., Gudeman and Rivera 1990). The house is built on the sociality of its members around its hearth. This principle of solidarity is older than the principle of market exchange, with which it necessarily has to engage more and more intensively in the course of capitalist penetration. The novelty of our case studies lies in the socialist and postsocialist context; we investigate the impact of these transformations on the models and practices of the house economy.

Concerning ritual, the main diagnostic is in principle the same regardless of the level of analysis: ritual is understood as a domain of marked behavior that cannot be reduced to the pragmatic criteria of a short-term logic of economizing, not even where its effects seem clearly conducive to efficacy in this domain. For all the emphasis on meeting plan targets and other indications of economism, many socialist economic institutions allowed surprising scope for rituals that evidently did not augment production, whose effects were the opposite of the Stakhanovite campaigns. Labor discipline was in practice modified in ways that Western managers would hardly countenance, for example through the custom of celebrating name days and birthdays at the workplace (Dunn 2004). In this volume, Miladina Monova explains how the socialist tobacco Kombinat in Prilep, Macedonia, allowed even its key workers to take extended leave when they needed to harvest their private tobacco fields. In the former East Germany, socialist brigades were required to participate in campaigns and accept propaganda disseminated from above; but even in urban contexts, many became a lively forum of sociality for their members, who kept very much the same company outside their formal working hours. Political convictions generally played little or no role (Müller 2007).

In addition to the ritualization observable inside socialist institutions, many other rituals persisted in the intimate confines of family and community. Despite the repression of religion in favor of scientific atheism, several of our researchers found that the feast days of local Christian saints were celebrated with great enthusiasm and expense under socialism. This took place first and foremost at the level of the household. It is now recognized that stereotyped images of the extended family household or *zadruga* in Southeast Europe have been exaggerated; far from being primordial throughout the Balkans, it came to prominence relatively recently in par-

ticular historical circumstances, which varied considerably from region to region (Todorova 1989). After allowing for some myth-making concerning this particular form (to which foreign scholars contributed substantially), it remains the case that celebrations of the *slava* were the central celebration in which the household constituted itself as both an economic and a ritual unit (see especially Monova's chapter in this volume).

Despite the imposition of collectivization, we found that secular rituals of the old independent peasantry such as pig-sticking continued to flourish and even to increase in scope (see Vidacs's contribution to this volume). Despite governmental condemnation of wasteful expenditure, in many regions the amounts spent on hospitality and weddings soared in the last, relatively prosperous years of socialism. No doubt much of this house-based activity was motivated by considerations that an economist could quickly grasp and begin to model: if one's neighbor has organized a lavish wedding party, then I must do the same in order to maintain my reputation. Economists can also understand how such expenditures resolve a collective problem: the community endowment is in effect a form of revolving credit association. Rituals are thus present in both socialism and capitalism. But the scope of ritual may have been greater under socialism, for two reasons. First, as noted above, for their legitimation purposes the new regimes promoted political ritualization through new socialist ceremonies in all domains of social life, from orchestrated parades on Mayday to the celebrations that underpinned the sociality of the brigade. Some of this ritual was alienating to those whose participation was required. Second, socialist economic life remained less "disembedded" from citizens' life-worlds than the outcomes of the "great transformation" wrought by capitalism. In spite of revolutionary pretensions, socialism in many places came to allow for deeper continuities with the past, and for the efflorescence of older forms of religion and community and the values and solidarities that they express.<sup>3</sup>

Much of this—not everything—changed very quickly following the encounter with capitalist markets after 1990. How significant are the path-dependencies between the socialist and presocialist periods? Are the communities documented in this volume still undergoing a protracted transition, such that we should be wary of drawing any general conclusions? Or do both the socialist and postsocialist "windows," because of the emphatic nature of their respective ideologies, afford insight into the more general, even universal character of the tension between community and market identified by Gudeman? What does the radical shift of recent years tell us about the relationship between economy and ritual?

Opponents of socialism represent it as a monstrous intervention in a natural economic order, a "constructed rationality," which, in the terms of Hayek (1944), leads ineluctably to both economic breakdown and political



“serfdom.” Those who uphold the superiority of the “free market” and provide the intellectual justification for the neoliberalism of recent decades allege that socialism has been tested and found wanting.<sup>4</sup> Some insist that all the dislocation of the present is due not to the new markets but rather to the legacy of the socialist interlude and, in particular, the propagation of beliefs and values contrary to those of the free market. Not only did socialism fail to promote modernity for its citizens: according to the conservative critique, by failing to deal with “moral hazards” through the rigorous specification of property rights, it undermined the chances of ever reaching the condition of modernity. Large populations, according to this point of view, have been erroneously led to believe that there is an alternative to a world based on the primacy of the market.

These debates are not new. When Friedrich Hayek was formulating his passionate defense of the free market, Karl Polanyi had only recently published his own devastating indictment of *laissez-faire*, as model and as reality. Polanyi showed in *The Great Transformation* (1944) that the heyday of liberalism in the nineteenth century was made possible only through the interventions of states, above all the British (the tight synthesis of state and market throughout history was also a key theme of Karl Bücher). According to this critique, the self-regulating market was a contradiction. The pursuit of this “utopia” destroyed the fabric of society and inevitably stimulated reactions, some of them benign, such as a trades union movement to defend the interests of workers, and some of them reactionary, such as populist or jingoist movements that targeted scapegoats. We view the socialist movement in its entirety as the most powerful crystallization of this reaction to the rise of market capitalism. For most of the twentieth century, most of the Eurasian landmass was governed by Marxist-Leninist-Maoist regimes (Hann 2006). They have now disappeared. With the exception of North Korea, even those East Asian states that still claim to be socialist have abandoned the old models of central planning and political religion. In their place, we find everywhere much greater reliance on market mechanisms. In assessing their impact, we must recall Polanyi’s message that these markets can never be truly self-regulating or “free.” Rather than follow the apologists of neoliberalism back into the ideological wars of the last two centuries, in this volume we ask on the basis of meticulous case studies whether the convulsions of the last two decades have contributed to moving the dialectic in the human economy forward a few inches. Or has it now become even harder than before to acknowledge that some activities are valued by humans for intrinsic reasons that cannot be reduced to a calculus based on efficiency or fitness?

Comparative methods have a long history in anthropology. Comparative projects within and between “culture areas” were common until the

middle of the twentieth century, as was the more general theorization of comparison. For a variety of reasons, some sensible and some not so sensible, this tradition withered. Perhaps it was the turn to history and away from social science, perhaps it was the rigors of mastering growing amounts of ethnography, perhaps it was the (postmodern) realization that anthropologists were not objective viewers and did not hold a privileged (scientific) perspective, or perhaps comparison did not yield the hoped for results, but this form of analysis and illumination largely disappeared. We aim to counter that trend, for we think that our large “culture area,” which stretches from the Balkans through Eastern Europe to the center of Asia and is home to differing postsocialist experiences and differing encounters with market life, offers fertile terrain for the comparative endeavor. Our studies may be most accessible to those already familiar with the historical and contemporary commonalities of this region; but we hope also to reach wider audiences and inspire readers to extend the comparisons beyond the boundaries of an Area Studies community.

### **Economy Institutionally**

Our perspective on economy is social, cultural, and comparative, and it is institutionalist. We are not New Institutionalists in the sense of that school within economics whose adherents look at organizations from the perspective of rational actors and (in many cases, including the work of Douglass North) evolutionary fitness. In anthropology the word “institution” is no longer common. A century ago, Frazer and Malinowski were concerned with developing an institutional approach, but their grasp of economy was weak. We are economic institutionalists in the sense of Karl Polanyi and, in an earlier generation, Karl Bücher and Thorstein Veblen. Proceeding from a substantive concern with material livelihood, in each study area the researchers break down the monolith “economy” into institutional domains. They distinguish the house economy from material life in community, and both from the domains of commerce and finance. All found the house to be a central site of economic practices in their field locations, and the varying house economies within communities became one baseline for comparison.

Of course we needed to take account of the larger systems of which the house and local communities were a part, especially the demise of socialism. For example, the continuation of state support through pensions, welfare, and small grants was important to villagers, nowhere more so than in the Hungarian materials presented by Bea Vidacs. In Macedonia, as described by Miladina Monova, a failing tobacco enterprise employed per-

sons willing to take insecure, poorly paid jobs because they offered the possibility of receiving a pension. Pensions and other state entitlements were also important supports in the Bulgarian villages described by Detelina Tocheva, where many family members had found more or less permanent employment outside the village.

National and international trade flows also influenced the communities studied by our group. For example, in the Apuseni Mountains of Romania studied by Monica Vasile, villagers have profited from opportunities in the lumber sector. Larger state and private enterprises offered some employment in many rural areas, though seldom sufficient to support a family. Cash cropping, as Nathan Light reports for bean-growing villagers in Kyrgyzstan who draw little benefit these days from state redistribution, is also encountered. But overall we can state that the impact of commercial markets in these rural areas was not as important as in other sectors of the national economy.

We might classify economies on an institutionalist scale from low market to high market. Malinowski's Trobrianders could be considered "low market." Truly small communities, such as lineages and feudal manors, exemplify economies articulated by social relationships, although these economies are never isolated from external relations. In contrast, high market contexts, with anonymous contracts, unaffected by cronyism, insider knowledge, price-fixing, and copying (as in bubbles), may be fewer than we imagine, although some financial markets, grain markets, and natural resource markets offer approximations. Pictured as a scale, the postsocialist economies about which we write mostly fall around the midpoint. Most were also nearer the "low market" pole under socialism, although Vidacs's Hungarian village has in some respects moved in the opposite direction. The "house economy" is necessarily constituted to a high degree through social relationships and commitments rather than contracts, although we emphasize that they are by no means self-sufficient.<sup>5</sup>

Looking outward from the house, we explore how this sphere of economy articulates both with communities and commercial markets. International markets for tobacco (Monova), beans (Light), wine (Cash), and timber (Vasile) had more impacts on these local economies than nonmarket forces such as NGO initiatives or foreign philanthropy. More broadly, financial markets with interest bearing loans, and metafinancial tools such as structured investment vehicles, fall outside our study because their local impact is negligible. Light notes that "interest rates" calculated in progeny on animals loaned in a Kyrgyz village are very similar to interest rates charged on local monetary loans, but he interprets this in a "reverse" way as evidence of the subordination of narrowly economic criteria to social relations. We do observe, however, that while financial institutions may

not be visible in the villages studied and did not directly affect loaning and “investments” in them, financial markets have had a “trickle-down” effect, for example through their impact on government supports and grants, employment opportunities and tourism, possibilities for securing loans from the European Union and elsewhere for local investment, and on wages. Invisible but influential, these larger economic institutions and markets have affected our regions, causing many to become more reliant on their house economies and state entitlements than before.

In each case, the researcher looked at the flows of material life: how people live, what they produce and how, what they eat, and how wealth is conceived and kept. As part of our institutional approach, studying and understanding transactions was a central focus, especially in relation to rituals. These relationships included sharing, reciprocity, barter, measured exchanges (such as sharing according to the amounts invested), and market trade. We took account of the historical and contemporary links between the rural areas and larger towns, cities and government structures, and of policies in other states and at the supranational level that affected the field sites, especially within the European Union. For example, the demand for Macedonian tobacco fell dramatically after the collapse of socialism due to EU restrictions on its import, while the production of wine after socialism in Moldova dropped with the curtailing of imports by Russia and Ukraine.

All this might be termed the structural dimension of our institutional approach. As the researchers became more familiar with their areas, they gave increased attention to local discourses about economy and the concepts and words, or cultural models, that people use to express and orient their material lives. This is the hermeneutic dimension of our institutionalism. The method of hermeneutics is conventionally associated with fields such as religion and ritual, but for us it is no less central to the study of economy; indeed it is the best way to appreciate the mutual embedding of economy and ritual. It may be helpful to distinguish multiple levels of hermeneutics. As argued above, ritual was conspicuous under socialism, which provided a common language rooted in the classics of Marx, Engels, and Lenin that filtered down to be expressed in every issue of every newspaper and at every general meeting of every collective farm. However, beneath the general exegetical principles, socialism was everywhere inflected to a significant degree by national discourses (“with Bulgarian characteristics”). Finally, the hermeneutic study of economy also requires an engagement with regional and local life-worlds. The case studies in this volume explore both the hermeneutic and the structural dimensions of economy at these multiple levels.

This institutional and cultural approach opens up key zones of ambiguity in the meanings and effects of rituals at the house and community levels of

economy. Ritual in relation to economy, and economy in relation to ritual, together have multiple effects. At times, ritual is a mode of economy, and at other moments economy becomes part of a ritual. Rituals may support or legitimate economic practices through the sociability they bring and by substituting for them. In almost all our cases rituals fill gaps in sociality between houses as the older socialist institutions have disappeared. But ritual can also be a façade or mystification of sociality that does not exist. Rituals, as Werner (1999) and Creed (2002, 2011) observe, draw on material resources sometimes with profit, sometimes at a loss and sometimes to attract economic connections and exchanges. Rituals in all cases help express house identity and resilience. However, they can also express economic power and inferiority. They frequently mystify community identity and cohesion, sometimes with barely concealed nostalgia.

It is hard to avoid using the words “ritual” and “economy” as if they were discrete ideas, practices, and institutions. On the ground, however, people do not define their activities in this manner. It may be only in high market situations that ritual and economy are separated, especially as the market realm becomes abstracted or “disembedded,” although disembedding can never be complete. One conclusion to emerge from the small-scale studies in this volume is that this conceptual separation in “modernity” (and in the disciplines that study it) is a result of our own categories and reflections on economy at a particular moment in world history.

## The Studies

The six regions on which we focus have been unevenly integrated into market life. Five of them are villages and the sixth is a small town surrounded by rural life. All have suffered twice economically: first from the demise of socialism and the slow “advance” of new forms of market life, and second from the global crisis that erupted just as we began our fieldwork. As the six areas are located at the margins of developed market economies, the effects of the great crash may have been less significant than elsewhere, but this insulation only speaks to the often precarious material life of these communities.

In chapter 1, Jennifer Cash tells about economic and ritual ambiguity in a village of southeast Moldova. During the socialist period a principal form of livelihood was growing grapes and making wine for export to other parts of the Soviet Union. This trade no longer exists, and the privatization of collective farms has left village households with surplus wine and little cash. Across the presocialist, socialist, and postsocialist periods, wine produced by village houses has symbolized their independence. Together with bread, wine forms the base of the house economy. Serving wine to visitors

is a ritual of hospitality, and serving it to workers in the fields is sometimes part of a larger exchange of noncommoditized labor. However, wine also flows into the domain of the market. In the recent past, it was a commodity within the socialist system; in the postsocialist period it now accompanies the payment in cash made by houses to hired day labor, and sometimes it is the sole means of payment. Wine payments, however, raise moral concerns and the houses that pay for their help in wine often express the wish that these workers would accept food instead. Do wine payments merely exploit the alcohol dependency of workers? Or, is there a more subtle relationship between ritual and economy reflected in the ongoing negotiation between a house and its workers over whether payment will be made in cash, food, or wine?

Wine offered can indicate a social connection, it can signify hospitality, equality, and a gift economy, or it can point to a market-like transaction. There are continuities between the use of wine as a house ritual of sociality and as a payment for work. Workers who request only wine wish to be respected by those who hire them and in village society, but the request itself indicates that the worker lacks his own wine—the very substance that symbolizes and engenders respect among men who share it. Why do some people “work for wine” when most houses that run short of wine acquire it through barter or purchase, displaying it as their own? Do wine payments ritually restore respect to the poor, or do they mystify the reproduction of social inequality and marginalization?

In chapter 2 Nathan Light describes the decay of infrastructure in the community of Beshbulak in Kyrgyzstan after the collapse of socialism, including the collective farms, and public support for many local institutions. Cash cropping, especially of beans, has helped provide an economic basis for the village, but as in socialist times and before, the main focus of economic life is animal breeding. With the demise of socialism and the connections made through its institutions, as well as the lifting of Soviet constraints on ritual practices, the raising and use of animals at rituals has increasingly helped to make social connections, and the frequency of rituals for different occasions has increased. The house, which bears some physical resemblances to a yurt, especially in the way it is used during rituals, remains the center of material and social life. Much of ritual life, focused around multiple rites of passage from birth through marriage to death, has to do with the household and the connections it makes. Even more than was the case under socialism, marriages have become important moments for social rearrangements, and kin outside the house have become more prominent in providing help and material support.

With the slow rise of market activities, animals remain the symbolic if not the sole material thread of the economy. Most households do not

sell many of the animals they raise. They are a social currency that connects houses. Ritual occasions with their provision of meat attract visitors from far and wide, so making and reinforcing alliances. At bridewealth celebrations, often held long after the wedding itself, large numbers of animals pass from the groom's side to the bride's. Although the bridewealth is supposed to consist of animals, in their absence money may be provided; however, this money has to be represented as if secured through the sale of animals, rather than derived from cash cropping. Animals are thus valued as wealth, for their ritual uses, for their place in making sociality, for their ability to reproduce and multiply, for their products, and for their symbolic representation of an autonomous, self-sufficient house. In some ways they replace money, but as Light observes, the rate of interest for borrowing an animal is now far higher than external rates of interest for borrowing money. The animal rate of interest dominates, for it seems to pull up the cost of money loans in the community.

Animals in this area of Kyrgyzstan are rather like wine in Moldova, for they are the symbolic if not the actual backbone of economy. The Kyrgyz put a high premium on large-scale events and human skill in exchanging large animals, while in Moldova skill is expressed in the production and sharing of valued wine. In both we find a contrast between a ritualized economy and the commercial economy that dominates outside the community. The ritual transactions are either separated from (as in Kyrgyzstan) or used to mystify (as in Moldova) market relations; in both cases the villagers have much freedom in their interpretations.

A striking contrast to this form of relationship between economy and ritual is presented by Bea Vidacs in her study from Eastern Hungary (chapter 3). Like most of the other settings, this village has suffered economically since the end of socialism. In earlier decades, households maintained gardens for growing crops, raised animals, and engaged in labor exchanges. Unlike many other collective farm members, those studied by Vidacs did not cultivate a plot on collective land, but instead received maize from the collective to feed their animals. In return, some of the house animals were sold through the farm, where a large number of villagers worked. With the end of this socialist symbiosis, the infrastructure of the village has declined, jobs in the village have become scarce, younger people have left to pursue education, and many people now subsist by combining a pension with welfare and workfare provided by the village. The land was privatized, but most people rent their plots to one of two large farm enterprises.

With the decline of resources and community enterprises, as well as low productivity of house farms, what has happened to ritual life? Pig-sticking, an important practice in traditional household economy, has declined, while a communal ritual modeled on this practice now attracts the participation

of outsiders. In the past, this work required the aid of at least one other house, but it was primarily an arduous house activity that helped support the family through the winter. With only a few ritual elements, such as sending fresh meat products to kin, neighbors, and friends, this was an important, material event in the house economy; pig-sticking was practiced before the socialist era and only late during socialism were freezers introduced that helped pave the way for a change. Pig-keeping has since diminished, and people now buy meat for consumption, because it takes less time and does not require arduous dirty work.

Beginning in 2007, pig-killing was cultivated as a ritual at the village level. It is the central event of a community festival that draws on the contributions of village houses, associations and clubs as well as the local state. Involving the slaughter of several pigs, with at least one done by traditional methods, all the pig products are cooked for the festival and enjoyed by the participants, for a money price. The event draws visitors and attention and may return some money, if only because the labor of mounting it is unpaid. But what is this shift from household practice to community ritual all about? Vidacs explains that the event is differently interpreted by insiders and by outsiders, and that insiders differ in their views concerning the way it creates sociality or expresses power. Either way its persuasiveness comes from presenting an act of household economy as if house economies still existed, as if the village were a solidary unit, and as if its economy were still viable. This transformation of an arduous household economic practice to a festive village ritual is an obvious mystification of the rather bleak reality of material life in the village today.

As in Moldova and Kyrgyzstan, serving food or drink and eating together is an important part of the Hungarian ritual. The three rituals all have a material base. In every case ritual is redolent of house values, such as hospitality, inclusion and friendly relations. But the ritual in Hungary has shifted to the community level as the viability of the house economy has diminished in the new economy; it seems that sentiments of connecting to others can only be kept alive through the invention of a new ritual.

Detelina Tocheva studied the village of Belan, high in the southern Rhodope Mountains of Bulgaria. Her study highlights a different aspect of the economy-ritual relation, and the way villagers are coping with significant changes in their lives. From well before the beginning of the last century, most of the people of this area lived from sheep flocks as owners, shepherds, or associated craftspeople. After the Second World War and political revolution, flocks were collectivized. They remained so until 1992, though villagers were allowed to hold small numbers of animals privately. During socialism villagers took wage-labor jobs at collective farms and other new organizations inside and outside the village. They combined this



income with house provisioning of field crops, supplemented by the milk and meat of their privately held sheep and cows. The *kurban* ritual that Tocheva describes is a sacrifice, observed by both Muslims and Christians, with celebrations at houses as well as the church and mosque. When socialism ended, all the collective assets were sold, many to buyers from outside the village. Today, the house is the principal economic unit. It survives through a combination of activities and sources: wages, pensions, and a few salaries in local administration. Some houses host tourists, especially in the summer months. Almost all undertake some small-scale farming, usually in a house plot, and keep animals.

In the summer sheep are kept in a cooperative—not a collective—herd. They are milked together, with the daily yield going to one or another house. The amount is carefully calculated, so that each participating household in the rotation receives the share that is its due according to the quantity of milk its animals contribute to the flock's total yield. The method used to determine a share is traditional, but the reasoning is familiar and modern. Everyone receives a share based on calculation of the proportionate contribution: return is mathematically correlated with input. Due to the rotation, the milk available is sufficient for one household to convert into yogurt and cheese. Some of the flock's milk is rendered to the shepherd, and some is contributed each year to the village *kurban*.

In contrast to the calculative reason employed in managing the flock, the contribution to the central ritual event of the village is a collective donation. The ecumenical *kurban* ritual is valued for itself and for the prosperity and protection it offers. Animals are sacrificed and their meat is cooked and served for free to anyone who attends. Food must be eaten on-site and in the company of others. The entire affair is rather low-key as people arrive from within and from without the village, and then eat and leave. This ritual, first performed in 1992, is an adaptation of a presocialist collective ritual performed in spring "for the sheep." As in Vidacs's Hungarian village, commensality at the village level is emphasized, but in this case the ritual depends not on associations and the local state but entirely on donations (mostly in cash) and help from villagers who are members of households.

The *kurban* ritual in the remote mountains of Bulgaria plays out what is patently not the case in everyday practices. It creates the semblance of equality in all spheres of life, acknowledges the shared need for prosperity and well-being, expresses full openness to outsiders, and relies on household commitment and volition for its success. These values are expressed through material goods (ewe's milk and mutton) that were once the basis of the local house economy. The ritual is a new affirmation of community in radically changed economic conditions. A competitive, individualistic

economy of households is transformed to a ritual economy of sociability. Through the ritual a part of the local economy is “re-embedded” in society (to adapt Polanyi’s expression). The secret of the *kurban* ritual does not lie in organized religion (for both Christians and Muslims participate) but it nonetheless has transformative effects on everyday material practices. Is it going too far to view it as an expression of resistance to the fragmenting impact of markets? The changing economy has affected sociality, but economic practices are now turned to sociality in an attempt to renew precious community cohesion.

Focusing on weddings in a study of another upland region recently integrated into the European Union, Monica Vasile takes us in chapter 5 to a village in the Apuseni Mountains of western Romania. Considered part of a poor, even “backward,” area through socialist times, the community she studied has experienced a remarkable spurt in wealth. The economy improved in the 1980s and then underwent a veritable boom when market relations became possible, for the village could now draw on a bountiful resource: timber. Its house economies depend primarily on felling trees, milling the wood at home, and sending the lumber to urban areas where it is sold to satisfy market demands spurred by a building boom. This village, despite its traditionally marginal position, is now highly integrated into the national market economy and is no less vulnerable to global economic conditions than our other field sites. Just as the boom at the turn of this century lifted the economy and spirits of the community, so economic times in the wake of the worldwide crash were becoming more difficult as Vasile finished her fieldwork.

The relation of this house economy to ritual has remained the same “underneath” but dramatically changed on the surface. Weddings traditionally served to endow a couple with some of the wealth necessary to make a new household economy. As most people were poor, weddings involved relatives, neighbors, and friends who could provide small sums of money for the event. Newlyweds borrowed money for the wedding feast but received more in contributions than its cost. The result was a communal endowment. Under the guise of a ritual, the money was presented as a gift but was also the counterpart to the investment in the feast by the couple, paid for with borrowed money that was repaid after the contributions. The number of wedding guests and the costs and returns of a wedding have now exploded, perhaps 100-fold. The pattern, however, is the same. The conjugal fund is rather like a rotating credit fund, except that couples are paid first and then have to repay (give to others) for the rest of their lives. The sanctions for its continuance are both social and semi-religious, as demonstrated in the exhortations used. Through the ritual, money loans are transformed to monetary gifts that are used to pay back the money bor-

rowed and yield a surplus that provides the foundation for a house. Ritual transforms economic relations to sociability and back.

Yet, as Vasile shows, this ritually invoked economic practice contains within it a tension between the sociality of house members and sociality between houses. If the support for a wedding is not the same for all members of a family, house sociability suffers. Compared to the rituals examined in previous chapters the wedding ritual in the Apuseni mountains has been more heavily economized if not financialized. This ritual is at once embedded and disembedded from society, which manifests the tension that comes into view with the transition from socialism to market economy.

Securing funds has become a perpetual problem in the town of Prilep in Macedonia, as described by Miladina Monova in chapter 6. The tobacco factory, which was the major employer during socialism, has shrunk in size and the payment of wages is intermittent. Houses are the principal units for organizing material life. Many now raise tobacco in nearby fields for sale to the factory, and some of this work is accomplished through family assistance in the harvesting and stringing (or drying) of the leaves: sociability is turned to economy. Ritual life is vibrant. The number of days celebrated since the end of the socialist period has expanded enormously. Even if the amounts expended for a particular ritual have not, overall expenditure has. Many rituals are centered on the house, and others require house participation. We encounter an apparent paradox. The town economy has tumbled, employment is increasingly insecure, tobacco growing is supported by government subsidies, and this support may disappear due to lack of money and European Union pressure. Why do people take time from work and money from scarce resources to participate in an active ritual life? As Monova shows, through ritual life people make and remake social connections, which in turn are information sources, pathways to work, potential sources of loans, and ways to find help. Ritual life, through the sociality it makes, provides a kind of “safety net” that the market system needs. It offers the flexible support that flexible capitalism apparently requires. Ironically, and perhaps against expectations, ritual life is strengthened—not as a flight to beliefs and an escape from economic reality—but as a stabilizing force and buffer for the house in uncertain conditions. Declining economic circumstances lead to a rise in rituality and sociality, which in turn become ties of economy.

Monova draws out this change by turning to what she terms the “tobacco growing configuration” and the “*slava* feasting configuration.” Both are founded around the house and they overlap. One is a practical work group, the other is a ritual configuration that perdures, for a *slava* celebrates the patron saint of a house and can be passed from father to son. The two are not simply separated as the profane to the sacred, for *slavas*, if now

smaller, have multiplied in number and can be expensive to offer; the more prosperous houses are expected to offer larger ones.

Unlike the Hungarian case in which a house practice became the model for a community ritual in face of economic collapse, and unlike the Bulgarian example in which the *kurban* ritual helps bring together a disparate collection of households, in Prilep communal *slavas* have diminished in favor of more frequent and smaller house *slavas*. It is precisely the house economy with its many tendrils on which people have come to depend, rather than the shrinking tobacco factory that dominated the local economy in socialist times. Yet, ritual life in Prilep is vibrant almost to the extent that it takes away from productive endeavors. The *slava* ritual asserts a world of equality and mutuality as opposed to the unequal world of tobacco growing. But membership of the two assemblages overlaps, and ties through *slava* can help secure favors or part-time work in the larger economy. The two intermesh; the shorter-term ties of the practical material side of life are transformed through ritual to sociability, establishing a precarious balance (or perhaps a continuous tension) in an increasingly uncertain economic situation.

## Transformation and Its Aftershocks

The ideas and realities of social transformation that we engage with in this book are by no means specific to the postsocialist countries. Let us recall that American economists first experimented with shock therapy to counter inflation in Chile, before applying essentially the same prescriptions to Eastern Europe. Government subsidies had to be withdrawn, price controls lifted, and the market allowed to operate. Even if the implementation seldom came anywhere near to approaching this blueprint, this theory influenced policies in the postsocialist states, partly through the pressure exerted by supranational entities. Joseph Stiglitz (1993), an expert on imperfect information in markets, argued that a structure for the transition had to be put in place. Like many others, he urged that a stable system of property rights needed to be established in law and enforced (to counter cronyism); social supports or “safety nets” should be in put in place to ease the shift in employment from government to private enterprises. In effect Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate economist in the mainstream of the profession, was arguing against a neoliberal or market fundamentalist position, by insisting that markets require an appropriate institutional structure for their operation.

We agree with Stiglitz concerning the importance of social institutions as part of economy, but observe that the 10,000-meter view of most econ-

omists still misses the importance of bottom-up institutions and fails to appreciate the enormity of what happens when local relationships are demolished. In the course of its professionalization, economics has become mathematically and statistically more sophisticated, but it has lost the connections it formerly possessed to concrete worlds of work, commerce, and consumption. Markets depend on social relationships, at all levels, and thus social relationships are part of economy. Our six team members have focused on the increased importance of the house and local community relations following the eradication of socialist institutions. At the community level and beyond, many mechanisms of economic and social support collapsed, but the house remained resilient as the final buffer, “safety net,” or building block of sociality. During socialism it had been an important component of economy, in a more or less symbiotic relationship with the collective organizations. With the collapse of socialism, households suffered, and through the 1990s and beyond they faced greater risks and uncertainty. In some cases, notably that of the Kyrgyz as studied by Light, new institutions of market (cash cropping) and community (based on both kin and neighborhood) emerged to replace those of the socialist farms. Little of this was “stabilizing” (as it should have been according to the neoliberal discourse). In many rural locations the results included not only unemployment but also worsening alcohol addiction, heightened mortality rates, and a decline in general health as social and health services shrank.

Our studies of the intimate links between economy and ritual must be set against this back cloth. In all six cases, economy exists through sociality, starting with the sociability of the house, on which most people are even more dependent than before. This local sociality, from which larger institutions start and on which they must depend, sustains material life that by means of ritual becomes human connections. We reach this conclusion through comparative research that is based on an institutional perspective, with both structural and hermeneutic dimensions, applied at multiple levels between the house and the global economy. Thus, we offer these studies as a fresh contribution to illuminate the economy-ritual nexus, as a return to the comparative method that we think enriches both anthropology and economics, and as an anthropological critique of the dominant economic paradigms of the postsocialist moment in world history.

## Notes

1. They have been partially replaced by courses such as “Varieties of Capitalism,” but the number of varieties recognized tends to be small, e.g., a “liberal” Anglo-Saxon variant and a “corporatist” continental alternative.

2. A similar pattern of inflation of wedding gifts was described by Mihály Sárkány (1983) in the last decades of Hungarian socialism; see also Vidacs, this volume.
3. The metaphor is an allusion to the substantivist tradition in economic anthropology, and in particular, to Karl Polanyi's argument that the free market destroyed the connectedness (embeddedness) accomplished by other "forms of integration." See further discussion below, Polanyi 1944, and Hann and Hart 2009.
4. This is the position to which Hungarian economist János Kornai has gravitated over a long career, which began in the era of Stalinist central planning and continued throughout the decades of market reform in that country. Kornai eventually concluded that piecemeal reform was an illusion without more radical market freedoms underpinned by strong private property rights. See Kornai 2008.
5. We explore this theme in greater detail in a separate volume with the same authorial team: see Gudeman and Hann, forthcoming.

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