

The Tombs of the Righteous and Cosmic Energy in Ukraine

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THE TOMBS OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND COSMIC ENERGY IN UKRAINE

INTRODUCTION

Most anthropological works in the field of pilgrimage studies concentrate on the pilgrims' practices, experiences, and narratives. I seek to go beyond this focus and examine the perspectives of people “on the spot” – local inhabitants who stay “outside” the pilgrimage but whose everyday lives are heavily influenced by the development of the pilgrimage industry. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted among the local inhabitants of the Ukrainian town of Uman,¹ which is important for Jewish heritage as a significant Hasidic² pilgrimage centre, I address the question of how residents respond to the town's growth as a mass pilgrimage destination. I trace and explore the notion of energy (Ukr. *enerhiia*, *enerhetyka*, Rus. *energiia*, *energetika*) used by some of my interviewees to explain their understanding of the impact of

¹ The article is based on data collected during ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Uman in 2012 (preliminary research), 2013, 2015 and 2017. The research in Uman was a part of a doctoral project *Polish-Jewish and Ukrainian-Jewish relations in the context of contemporary Hasidic pilgrimages to Poland and Ukraine. A comparative study*. The project was funded by the Polish National Science Centre under the grant DEC-2013/11/N/HS3/04965. Due to the comparative character of the research, which was carried out not only in Uman, but also in two other localities, Lizhensk and Lelov in Poland, the fieldwork consisted of several research trips that lasted up to one month each time. The research did not require ethics committee approval due to its non-interventional character.

² Hasidism is often defined as a Jewish religious movement, focused on mystical practices, which developed in the eighteenth century in opposition to the traditional Judaism of the time. However, as David Assaf (2006) claims, Hasidism was never “a movement” in a strict sense of this term, because it did not have a centralised structure. Instead, “Hasidism” works as an umbrella term for various groups emerging and developing throughout the years and centuries (Assaf 2006, pp. 14–15). As Marcin Wodziński (2017) points out, it is challenging to provide a clear and adequate definition of Hasidism, both in relation to its history and its contemporary form. Wodziński clarifies that defining Hasidism as a sect or a movement leads to a misleading understanding of Hasidism as read through the lenses of abstract and doctrinal categories. Instead, Wodziński proposes looking at Hasidism as a form of confraternity, taking into account the Hasidic practices of everyday life and their diversity, which is difficult to grasp through the use of doctrinal analysis (Wodziński 2017).

the pilgrimage on the town and its inhabitants.³ However, I attempt to overcome this representational and meaning-related focus on “energy” as a notion present in my interviewees’ narratives. Therefore, I study not only people but also other actors in the “natural” and material world, investigating their agency, and exploring the role that energy plays in the relationships between people and people, people and place, and human and other-than-human actors. My aim to open up my study to non-representational perspectives arises from the need for “anthropological tuning on emic ontological sensitivities” (Lubańska 2021, p. 49). Taking this premise into account, I take seriously the ontology shared by my interviewees, and explore, with their assistance, the ontological status and specificities of energy. This takes my analysis beyond the representational understandings of agency, which I explain later in this contribution. The non-representational inspirations I draw on in my work were captured well in the following suggestion by Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen:

The point is not to keep looking for new alternatives to what the world is like. Rather, it is to find ways to allow the world, as it expresses itself in the contingent ethnographic situations that we encounter as anthropologists, to show us how things could be otherwise (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, p. 68).

Uman, a town located in Central Ukraine, has 82,154 inhabitants today, according to state statistics (Timonina 2021, p. 45). Although the ancestors of some inhabitants lived in Uman before the Second World War, a high proportion of the local population consists of post-war settlers. The town’s residents mostly identify themselves as Ukrainians and speak Ukrainian, Russian, or *surzhyk* (a local mixture of Ukrainian and Russian languages). The town also contains two very small Jewish and Polish communities who had migrated there, had returned home after the Second World War, or who had survived the war in Uman, as well as their descendants. A growing Hasidic community has also emerged close to the tomb of Nachman of Bratslav, a Hasidic spiritual leader, whose tomb attracts around 30,000 pilgrims each year on Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year), with many others visiting throughout the rest of the year. Such a large number of pilgrims makes Uman one of the most-visited Hasidic pilgrimage destinations (Wodziński & Spallek 2018). Visiting the tomb on Rosh Hashana is an important element of the Bratslav ethos and this encourages devotees to take part in the gathering of pilgrims in Uman, called the Holy Kibbutz, even if this requires enduring great difficulties and confronting various travel risks (Biale et al. 2018, p. 322). For many pilgrims, travelling to Uman poses challenges related to visiting a culturally different, even alien, environment, one distinct on many levels, marked as it is with limited gender separation (what posits a challenge for the pilgrims coming from societies in which gender separation is one of the crucial

³ My interviewees were using these terms in both Ukrainian and Russian, depending on the language they spoke.

rules of everyday life), language differences, and associations with the Holocaust and a history of anti-Jewish violence (Epstein 2002; Marchenko 2017).

Although the pilgrimage to Uman started in the early eighteenth century, the pilgrimage really took off after the political changes of the 1980s and the break-up of the Soviet Union. These changes led to the lifting of travel restrictions on Hasidim coming from outside the Eastern Bloc. Thus, the revival of Hasidic pilgrimage to Uman after the break-up of the Soviet Union coincided with the Ukrainian proclamation of independence in 1991 and the subsequent years of nation-building processes, and lengthy struggles to stabilise the state (Wanner 2014; Mikheieva & Shevel 2021). Furthermore, significant changes developed inside the Hasidic community that influenced the pilgrims' needs and demands, for example the increase in popularity of Bratslav Hasidism, in which pilgrimage to Uman is an important practice. These developments also reflected economic and technological transformations of both a global and a local nature (Assaf 2008; Epstein 2002; n.d.; Stadler 2020, p. 30). Since the 1990s, then, the number of pilgrims visiting Uman for the Jewish New Year festival has been steadily growing (Akao 2003).

During my first visit to Uman in the late autumn of 2012 I met students from the local university who became my first guides in this town. They took me for a walk to Pushkin Street where the tomb of Nachman of Bratslav is located. The street is very close to the dormitory where the students were living, as well as to Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University, one of Uman's main higher education institutions. Before the pilgrimage developed, the street had been rather quiet, since it is located at some distance from the city centre, with many single-family houses and several blocks of flats. As the pilgrimage took off, a majority of residents, identifying mostly as Ukrainians, either started to rent their houses to the pilgrims or sold their premises and moved out. The number of hotels and hotel-type buildings also began to increase.

During our evening walk, the area of Pushkin Street and its neighbourhoods looked like the industrial outskirts of a small town, with construction sites surrounded by simple fences and walls. The streets were empty and dark, as only a few street lights worked. The atmosphere on Pushkin Street in November did not resemble the vibrant festivities I would witness the following year, when large halls would turn into bustling kosher eateries during Rosh Hashana. At Rosh Hashana 2013, the houses and hotels rented to the pilgrims came alive with the sounds of music and celebration. Crowds gathered around the kiosks and restaurants, and the entire length of Pushkin Street turned into one big promenade and dance floor.

I spent many hours on Pushkin Street during Rosh Hashanah, with a big camera on my shoulder, and a collaborator, a photographer and ethnographer, by my side, to somehow legitimise my presence there. In this way I was able to gain time to observe, photograph, and, when the opportunity arose, strike up a conversation with those pilgrims who were willing to talk and did not look away from me due to my gender. Among the pilgrims there was always someone willing to talk to me in English or Russian. I realised that my interlocutors usually perceived themselves as mediators and translators between Hasidic and non-Hasidic worlds.

Hours of observation during the festivities were also an opportunity to talk to those who, like me, observed the pilgrims: taxi drivers waiting for customers, those who were renting accommodation to pilgrims, the security guards directing traffic and checking access permits to the area,⁴ cleaners, translators, local shopkeepers among others.⁵ Many of the people who provide support services for the pilgrimage, both those undertaking basic, physical jobs, and those in more responsible positions, such as translators and guides, were curious about what was happening during festivities. Those who were working with the pilgrims exchanged anecdotes and information about Hasidic rituals, and knowledge about Hasidism gained from the Internet. Language differences, though, prevented many of them from engaging in close contact with the pilgrims. As noted above, most locals spoke only Ukrainian or Russian, so even when they met pilgrims who were open and willing to engage, verbal communication was rarely possible.

The mass character of the celebrations presented a number of problems. Conflicts sometimes broke out between locals and pilgrims, and amongst the pilgrims themselves. There were verbal and physical attacks by pilgrims on women who came too close to the Rabbi Nachman's tomb. Talking to the locals, I discovered that, for them, the festivities were full of tensions they did not always know how to interpret. What concerned my non-Hasidic interlocutors living in Uman was the impact of the pilgrimage's development on Uman itself and its inhabitants, as well as why pilgrims came at all and in such large numbers.

Energy was one of the words some of my non-Hasidic interviewees reached for in order to put the pilgrimage into a broader perspective and to explain it. As it turned out, almost everyone who used the notion of energy was able to elaborate on this concept when asked, and they provided me with an explanation that interestingly went far beyond Uman as a pilgrimage centre.

The energy my interviewees engage with brings together different scales and incommensurables and enables them to locate Uman within wider contexts, such as the Ukrainian nation, humanity, and the world as a whole. Energy also activates a complex field of relations between various actors in the present (that is, Hasidim and non-Hasidic locals) and the past (for example, Jews, Ukrainians, and Poles of Uman before the Holocaust). Consequently, it creates a common ground for exchange and influence in both space and time, where the borders between the subjects begin to blur. As Dmytro, one of my interviewees quoted later in the text, put it:

⁴ During festivities, the neighbourhood of the tomb of Nachman of Bratslav and the area of Pushkin street are fenced off, with access to them is controlled by guards. Except for pilgrims, press and law enforcement services, anyone wishing to enter the area has to present an access permit.

⁵ Interviews with Uman's local inhabitants were conducted in the following languages: Ukrainian, Russian, *surzhyk* (local mixture of Ukrainian and Russian languages), and interviews with the pilgrims were conducted in English or Russian. All respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and gave their consent to take part in it. The names of all interviewees have been changed.

When you think, you think, yes, you give out a certain amount of energy. This energy, it doesn't disappear. It gathers with the energy of the same direction, shall we say, the same action...

I suggest that the interviewees' explanations of the energy may be shaped by the ideas of cosmism that became popular in post-Soviet culture alongside the revival of spirituality (*dukhovnost'*, Terbish 2019, p. 3), both inside and outside Russia. Although this argument requires further research, it can be useful for framing my analysis and putting my ethnographic material into a wider cultural context, and so I elaborate on it in the following section.

COSMIC ENERGY IN POST-SOVIET CONTEXTS

Russian cosmism (Hagemeister 1997; Laruelle 2012; 2019) and the theosophical movement (Carlson 1993) that inspired it, together with mesmerism (Gantet 2021), provide cultural contexts within which the ontological status of energy, as experienced by my interviewees, can be considered. Cosmism's underlying assumption about the interconnectedness of spiritual growth and scientific progress, as well as its adherents' conviction that there is an intrinsic connection between a "macro" cosmos and a "micro" cosmos (Laruelle 2012; 2019), can be seen as enabling my interviewees to bring together different realms of knowledge and experience. Despite the fact that not every interviewee who spoke about energy used the term "cosmic", their understanding of what energy is and how it operates in the world shows the inclination to see material, biological, spiritual, mental, social, political orders, to name but a few, as inseparably intertwined.

Cosmism was born and developed in Russian intellectual circles during the early twentieth century. Scholars define it as a "scientific-utopian philosophy" (Smolkin-Rothrock 2011, p. 169) focusing on "the evolution of both humanity and the universe and the relationship between the two" (Siddiqi 2008, p. 265). Academic debate concerning cosmism's roots and the sources of inspiration for it emphasises that this interpretation of the universe was influenced by both western and eastern philosophical strands, especially theosophy, Pan-Slavism and Russian Orthodoxy. Although cosmism has significant connections with esoteric thought (Laruelle 2019, p. 30–33), it may not be fully justified to call it "occult" *per se* (Hagemeister 1997, p. 187).

Apart from its esoteric provenance, cosmism developed in dialogue with Soviet science and technological utopias, functioning on the margins of science or as an "alternative science" (Hagemeister 1997, p. 187). Important thinkers in cosmism were connected with technological utopians either through personal relationships (Siddiqi 2008, p. 284) or because they combined their own scientific work with religious and spiritual thought. Konstantin Tsiolkovskii, for example, tended to bring together mysticism with technological thinking (Siddiqi 2008, p. 288) and attempted to reconcile events described in the Bible with modern science (Siddiqi 2008, p. 267; Laruelle 2019, p. 28).

The quest to understand the connections between the material and spiritual realms manifested itself in the use of the notion of energy or similar concepts in cosmism philosophy. Michael Hagemester and Marlène Laruelle connect the interest in energy to the pan-psychism of cosmists' thought (Hagemester 1997, p. 187; Laruelle 2019, p. 33). Cosmism thinkers were focusing on the possibilities of "human control of nervous-energy flows" (Laruelle 2019, p. 33) or exploring the functioning of human reason as a "form of energy [that has] the ability to change [...] material processes" (Laruelle 2019, p. 44). As Hagemester puts it, for cosmism thinkers, "[t]he belief in and the practice of science as a means to uncover hitherto concealed, all-powerful psychic, nervous, or cosmic energies appears to be especially characteristic" (Hagemester 1997, p. 187).

According to Hagemester, the cosmists' belief in science was rooted in and inspired by occultism, a perspective built on the conviction that (secret) knowledge has magical power (Hagemester 1997, p. 187). The cosmists' belief in science may be also associated with the Soviet Union's reception of the philosophical writings of such German scientists as the chemist Wilhelm Ostwald (1853–1932) – who proclaimed that the basic principle of all natural phenomena is energy, not matter (Hagemester 1997, p. 194) – as well as with scientific activity in search of ways to develop the human capacity to affect external reality. Research on developing these capabilities took the form of experiments at the periphery of Soviet science from that time, such as research on "psycho-physical energy", brain radiation, mental suggestion, telepathy and telekinesis, led by scholars over the first three decades of the twentieth century.

The religious, mystical, and speculative dimensions of cosmism were politically rejected with the establishment of the Stalinist regime in the 1930s, when the focus on the fundamental sciences was replaced by the pursuit of applied science that emphasised industrial productivity (Siddiqi 2008, p. 285). However, according to Baasanjav Terbish, many cosmism ideas were still influencing philosophical thought, literature, art, as well as social practices (Terbish 2019, p. 3) for decades after.

At the beginning of perestroika, various religious, spiritual, healing and magic practices that had been present in everyday life came to light; though not visible in the public sphere, they had nevertheless been pursued privately and discreetly throughout the Soviet era (Lindquist 2006, p. 35). According to Hagemester, the sudden increase in popularity of cosmism in the 1990s away from the scientific environment "reflects the increasing awareness of crisis and the need for a theory that assumes the world to be a rational entity with humankind at its centre" (Hagemester 1997, p. 186). This post-Soviet continuation of cosmism may be linked, as Laruelle proposes, to the New Age movements that have been developing in Russia since the 1990s (Laruelle 2019, p. 46), a claim that may well apply to other post-Soviet countries remaining under the influence of the Russian language and Russian popular culture too. In any case, the heterodox nature of this phenomenon requires an approach that is sensitive to its local variations and idiosyncrasies. Cosmism in its popularised and heterodox forms, entangled with post-Soviet versions of New

Age, constitutes an important context, then, for understanding the notion of energy used by some of my interviewees in describing the impact of Hasidic pilgrimages on the town of Uman.

ENERGY AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE

Drawing on research conducted at Orthodox Christian pilgrimage sites in the post-Soviet region, several authors have explored the language of energy used by pilgrims to describe their religious experiences. Jeanne Kormina (2010) has discussed the Soviet popular culture provenance of energy in urban settings and its connections with New Age phenomena, while Stella Rock (2012/2013) and Magdalena Lubańska (2007; 2021) have examined Orthodox Christian theological expositions concerning “divine energies” and pilgrims’ interactions with the material culture of particular shrines. Drawing on her analysis of the intersection between Eastern Christian theology and pilgrims’ religious imaginaries, Lubańska claims that the refined theological concepts developed with respect to the material aspects of religious practices create “favourable ground for a synergic relationship of the faithful with these sacred objects and encourages an ontological conviction about the special healing powers of sacred objects and substances” (Lubańska 2021, p. 67). In the emic-oriented approach pursued by Lubańska, theological concepts and religious education not only co-constitute and moderate the religious experiences of the faithful, they may also be understood as sources of language that enable the naming and verbal elaboration of these experiences (Lubańska 2021, p. 50; 2007, p. 13–17).

An emic term, widely used in the discourse on pilgrimage destinations, is *namolennoe mesto* (in Russian) or *namolene mistse* (in Ukrainian),⁶ a term meaning literally “a place filled-in and activated with prayers” or, as Kormina puts it, a place that has “absorbed many prayers” (Kormina 2010, p. 276). My interviewees use it to describe shrines attracting many people who pray there with all their heart and leave their faith and prayers behind, contributing to the spiritual value of the place and strengthening its agency. A *namolene mistse* affects the experiences of other pilgrims, especially in a sensory and emotional way, and facilitates their contact with God.

The agency of a *namolennoe mesto* / *namolene mistse* is connected with the notion of *namolennost’* (Russian) / *namolenist’* (Ukrainian) – a quality that constitutes such a place. Kormina translates and interprets *namolennost’* as “antiquity”, highlighting its cumulative character, as such a place gathers the prayers of entire generations,

⁶ Agnieszka Halemba documented a similar expression in Medjugorje (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), a place of Marian apparitions, used by a Ukrainian Greek Catholic pilgrim from Transcarpathia. The expression used by the pilgrim was *premolenoe mesto* (through-prayed place). As Halemba explains, for her interviewee the pilgrimage places are blessed by God and humans have the responsibility to sustain the sacred status of these places through prayer. In order to keep various pilgrimage sites sacred, including ruined or abandoned cloisters or churches in Ukraine, the interviewee visits them regularly together with an informal group of believers (Halemba 2011).

consequently becoming a source of grace (*blahodat'*) or energy for others. Kormina interprets the energy of a prayerful place as a quasi-scientific metaphor, enabling the translation of religious ideas into the everyday language shaped by Soviet urban beliefs (Kormina 2010, p. 276).

Catherine Wanner enhances our understanding of the agency of prayerful places, arguing that such places have a common feature, an affective atmosphere of religiosity, thanks to which people attached to these places tend to understand both individual experiences and political events in “otherworldly terms”. Prayerful places are often employed politically (by shrine operators or in national ideologies for instance), and those places simultaneously activate understandings of the political in religious terms. For Wanner, however, the ontology of a place animated with prayer and its energies are enclosed within a theory of semiotic ideology (Wanner 2020, p. 79): “[P]eople anticipate and imitate the experience of energy and ascribe a transformative power to it. By doing so, they perpetuate the cycle of validating the energy’s power and reaffirming the status of a place as ‘animated with prayer’” (Wanner 2020, pp. 80–81).

Wanner’s explanation focuses on how the political and the religious are intertwined in places animated with prayer thanks to the accumulation of devotional practices. From this perspective, energy and its transformative power are matters of belief and interpretation. In this article, however, I go beyond this representational approach in order to understand the energy my local interviewees engage with. By looking through the lens of a knowledge-belief distinction, which is widely explored in non-representational critiques of “belief” (Holbraad & Pedersen 2017; Lindquist & Coleman 2008; Paleček & Risjord 2012; Risjord 2020), I explore the relationship between the agency of various actors (human and other-than-human) and energy, and the ontological implications of this relationship. Hence, I concentrate on the ontology of energy by drawing on the notion of animacy proposed by Tim Ingold, understood as a “dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence” (Ingold 2006, p. 10). From this perspective, energy is something that has the potential to transform other beings. Energy is also something that beings leave behind at different places and times. It is, finally, something that shows the commonality of seemingly incommensurable worlds, which “on the level of energy” turn out to be mutually comprehensible; energy, we must conclude, intertwines and binds beings together.

THE CULT OF NACHMAN OF BRATSLAV

What makes Uman unique on the map of Hasidic pilgrimage destinations is the cult of Nachman of Bratslav (Bilu & Mark 2012; Bilu 2020). The Hasidim come to the countries of the former Eastern Bloc to visit the tombs of their spiritual leaders, the *tsadikim*. A *tsadik*, as a holy, pious man (Ben-Ari & Bilu 1997, p. 69) and a sainted figure (Bilu 2010, p. 55) acts as “an intermediary between the Hasidim

and the Divine” (Bilu & Mark 2012, p. 48).⁷ Pilgrimage to a *tsadik* or to his grave had already been an important part of Hasidic religious life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Epstein n.d.). In contemporary Hasidism, pilgrimage to the countries of former Eastern Bloc to visit the graves of *tsadikim*, followed by particular Hasidic groups, remains a widely-spread religious practice.

The gravesite of a *tsadik* fits the definition of a place animated with prayer, as I will demonstrate. Indeed, several ethnographic studies of Jewish cemeteries in Eastern Europe have already presented impressive evidence showing that gravesites are treated as power places by some non-Jews who look for spiritual experiences or healing there (Cała 1995; Kaspina & Amosova 2009; Belova & Petrukhn 2007; Olędzki 1989).⁸

Although Rabbi Nachman (1772–1810) is buried in Uman, he spent most of his life outside the town and only moved there shortly before his death. As ChaeRan Freeze explains, Nachman chose Uman for his burial place “so that he could pray for the souls of the martyrs of the Gonta pogrom” (Freeze, n.d.), anti-Jewish violence that took place in Uman in 1768 that involved the mass murder of Jews and Poles during *koliivshchyna* (*haïdamachchyna*).⁹

The status of this rather niche figure of the Bratslav holy man, or *tsadik*, has undergone a massive transformation in recent decades (Mark 2010; 2015). This transformation is associated with the expansion of Bratslav Hasidism from a comparatively marginal stream of Hasidism into a thriving and diverse community that is attracting not only new followers but also huge attention through external publicity, media, and public debates (Bilu & Mark 2012, p. 48). In their comparison of Bratslav Hasidism and Chabad, Bilu and Mark (2012) interpret the appeal of Bratslav Hasidism as being due to the messianic features of Nachman of Bratslav (2012, p. 48) and to the fact that the community does not have a living *tsadik*, for most groups “a *sine qua non* of Hasidism” (Bilu & Mark 2012, p. 48). According to the authors, the absence of a presiding *tsadik* creates space for a wide range of autonomous activities around and approaches to his cult (*ibid.*).

⁷ Detailed discussion on the figure of a *tsadik* and its historical and cultural “prototypes” may be found in the work of Yoram Bilu *The Saints’ Impresarios: Dreamers, Healers, and Holy Men in Israel’s Urban Periphery* (2010) or in *Hasidism: Key Questions* by Marcin Wodziński (2018).

⁸ Igor Tourov proposes an interesting comparison of Hasidism and Eastern Christianity revealing thought-provoking convergences between the two traditions, such as the role of the *starets* (lit. old man) as a spiritual guide and the relationship to him after his death, as well as connections between Eastern Christian Orthodox mysticism (hesychasm) and Hasidic prayer practices (Tourov 2004). A comparative analysis of Hasidic mysticism and devotional practices of Eastern Orthodoxy would require further research. Such studies could, however, shed light on the connections between those distinct spiritual realms and would help to clarify possible inclusive strategies that Uman’s non-Jewish inhabitants pursue in order to understand and encompass the Hasidic pilgrims’ religious practices.

⁹ The term *koliivshchyna* (*haïdamachchyna*) refers to a rebellion (1768–1769) by Cossacks and Ruthenian peasantry against Polish nobility and clergy, as well as Jews perceived to be part of the Polish authority structure at that time.

LOCAL RESIDENTS AS PART OF THE 'CULTIC CONSTITUENCY' IN UMAN

Due to the revival of the pilgrimage and its intense development during the last forty years, the infrastructure for pilgrims has been constantly expanding and has changed both the local landscape and the local economy. The few anthropological publications describing and analysing the Hasidic pilgrimages to Uman in recent years have emphasised the impact of the pilgrimage on the political situation at local, national, and international levels (Akao 2003; 2007; Marchenko 2014; 2016; 2018). However, my research has focused on the local inhabitants' responses towards the pilgrimage. I have been inspired by scholars who have pointed out that pilgrims *as well as* other social actors, who for various reasons stay "outside", are involved in the development of pilgrimage cults. Such a broadening of perspective may lead to investigating pilgrimage and the shrine's sacred powers as having been constructed by varied representations and produced by diverse sectors of the "cultic constituency", including actors from outside the pilgrimage (Eade & Sallnow 1991, p. 5).

In comparison to the meanings attributed to the pilgrimage by the pilgrims themselves (Canetti, forthcoming; Marchenko 2018), outsiders' views about the Hasidic pilgrimage are prone to simplification and stereotyping. Many local residents in Uman, for instance, display limited knowledge about the cult of Nachman of Bratslav and even less about Hasidic pilgrimage as a religious practice. However, these outsider perspectives say a lot about how these residents – who identify themselves mostly with Orthodox Christian and Greek Catholic religious traditions – experience the pilgrimage's development, as well as and changes in the town that have been induced by this process in recent years.

Treating the local non-Hasidic and non-Jewish inhabitants, who are outside the pilgrimages or "orbit" around them, as part of a "cultic constituency" (Eade & Sallnow 1991, p. 5) encourages research that looks outward. As Simon Coleman (2002) suggests, we should appreciate the value of research that does not focus on the institution of pilgrimage itself, but which treats it as a case study through which we may understand human behaviours (Coleman 2002, p. 363). By looking through the prism of the pilgrimages, I examine how my interviewees construct the "cultic constituency" of the Uman pilgrimage centre, as well as how their everyday life, their economic situation, and their living-space are shaped by and "beyond" the pilgrimage. Hence, I investigate how, for my interviewees, the pilgrimage dynamics activate national and religious identity questions, as well as reflections on the contemporary world.

Thanks to the pilgrimage, Uman is perceived as a unique place not only by pilgrims, but also by the non-Jewish residents of the town, whose sense of belonging to this place is affected by the dynamics of pilgrimage and the local pilgrimage industry. In their study on the development of saints' sanctuaries as a mechanism of urban transformation in Israel, Eyal Ben-Ari and Yoram Bilu (1997) point out that:

[...] the *tsaddiq* accords the town an aura of sanctity, through which it is 'cathected' with the holy man's divine grace. In this way, the residents' sense of belonging to the locality acquires a wider meaning (Ben-Ari & Bilu 1997, p. 77).

This observation by Ben-Ari and Bilu in Israel encourages us to reflect on how Nachman's tomb in Uman might affect the local residents' sense of belonging there. It raises the question of whether the shrine is (at least) doubly alien for the residents, because of religious and national differences, as well as the fact that the pilgrims are, from a local perspective, outsiders.

For my interviewees, the pilgrimage, perceived by them as an influx of people from outside, is at the same time a direct driver of the town's development and a source of significant changes in its infrastructure, thus bringing to the inhabitants both benefits and problems. Apart from during the Rosh Hashana period, the area around Pushkin Street is a lively construction site, with new hotels and rental houses emerging. The space is changing, attracting increasing numbers of investors, while limiting the small entrepreneurship of those with little or no capital. Among my interlocutors were many people who had lived in this part of the city in the 1980s and 1990s, and their story of the growth of the pilgrim movement is, among other things, a story of loss. This loss materialises in the fences which enclose previously open spaces and courtyards. It is also a story about the need to escape from this place during Rosh Hashanah, when lights, music and the crowds of celebrating pilgrims make everyday life impossible. As a result, for the residents, the neighbourhood is becoming progressively more alienated from the city as a whole, which is reflected in the expression "Nachman City" that some use to refer to the Hasidic quarter.

The pilgrimage stimulates the economy of the city, though; hotels are being developed even outside the Pushkin area, the market in building materials and souvenirs is flourishing, the water-supply system is being improved, and the reconstruction of the local airport is anticipated (*Ukraine Crisis Media Center* 2017; Pomidorov 2021). Many students and residents of the city and surrounding villages find employment during the annual pilgrimage too. However, as my interviewees explain, the rapid development of pilgrimage markets also generates criminal activities associated with big capital in Ukraine, a sex-work market is developing, and the inhabitants are convinced that the growing pilgrimage is benefitting only those in positions of economic and political power. Although residents emphasise that the tomb of Nachman of Bratslav is a centre of authentic religious worship, they are concerned by the changes in the pilgrimage dynamics, explaining that Uman is like Lourdes, which first developed as a religious centre and then became highly commercialised (Coleman & Eade 2018).

The reaction of Uman's residents to the visiting pilgrims is strikingly similar to that described by Christopher McKeivitt, capturing the sharp divide between those attracted to Padre Pio's shrine in southern Italy and the inhabitants of the local town, San Giovanni Rotondo (McKeivitt 1991). McKeivitt claims that the cult attracted increasing numbers of pilgrims as well and led to a sense of alienation among local inhabitants, who also resented the growth of a tourism industry monopolised by foreigners (McKeivitt 1991, p. 87), ultimately viewing the shrine as primarily a centre of "secular power, represented by the outsiders" (Eade & Sallnow 1991, pp. 12–13).

Although there are a number of similarities between those living in San Giovanni Rotondo and Uman, then, I want to explore the impact of the pilgrimage dynamic on

the local space, religion, and spirituality through the lens of the energy of Nachman's tomb. I also want to go beyond explaining the dynamics of relations between pilgrims and local inhabitants solely in terms of secular power relations. My research shows that the relationships between locals and the Hasidim are mediated by the figure of Nachman of Bratslav, whose tomb is treated by the non-Jewish interviewees quoted below in terms of a place animated with prayer, and thus charged with the energy coming from the prayers of pilgrims and a growing, local Hasidic community. There are, however, other actors mentioned by my interviewees; the influential businessmen who make up the local structures of economic-political power; and those historical figures claimed by interviewees as the heroic leaders of the Ukrainian national liberation movement. In the following sections of the article I show how, thanks to their experience of the tomb's energy, my interviewees are able to identify intersections between local secular and religious power relations, connect with entities such as the nation, humanity, or the world, and link Uman's past to the present situation in the town as a pilgrimage centre.

THE ENERGY OF THE *TSADIK*
IN THE NARRATIVES OF UMAN'S NON-JEWISH INHABITANTS

At the time of my fieldwork, Dmytro was a small-business owner in his late forties who ran a shop in Uman. As he explained at the beginning of our first meeting, the pilgrimage generated a vast part of his income. Although our conversation focused mostly on the economic benefits of the pilgrimage industry and trade related to it, in his narrative he also employed the notion of energy to explain how he understood the impact of Hasidic pilgrimage on the town. He introduced me to "Gregor's field" (*pole Gregora*), explaining that it is a term used for an energy-information field; when people perform a certain activity, such as thinking about something, they release energy from themselves. This energy, as cited earlier, does not disappear but "gathers with the energy of the same direction, shall we say, the same action". As Dmytro clarifies:

it is very clearly seen in the animal world. Here are flocks of birds, shoals of fish, herds of animals, they do not agree among themselves where to swim or how to jump high or fly high. But they act, it seems, in a team. There is a shoal of fish, one fish turns, the whole shoal – op! They all are united by this Gregor's information field, so-called. Well, in principle, the science has already proven that it exists, but we know little about it, understand little about it.

Later on in our conversation he stated that this way of energy operating in the world connects groups of people as well, such as families. "You cannot release yourself from it, because it begins to drag you back. This is a power called Gregor [Gregor's field]."

Dmytro used this energy-information field theory to deepen his explanation of the development of the pilgrimage to Nachman's gravesite:

They [Hasidim] have spiritual leaders, it is written in the Talmud, in the Torah it is written that the physical shell which we are in, it is basically worthless. What is worth something, this is a soul, well, so to say [...] Why come here? Well, to the bones of the tsadik. Well, what do they [the bones] represent? His teachings might represent something, his soul might represent something, Gregor [Gregor's field] – this field that he [Nachman of Bratslav] created and thanks to which a certain number of people from all over the world gather together, these have some kind of power, not his bones.

Dmytro then explained the unique status of Uman on the Hasidic pilgrimage destination map by referring to the notion of *namolennost* (being filled-in with prayers). He argued that the recurring presence of pilgrims, and their prayers at the tomb, leads to an accumulation of the energy of prayers and thoughts:

But in any scripture there is such a phrase – ‘In the beginning was the Word.’ And that’s where it all starts. That is, the word is not just a sound that flew in and out, disappeared. It also has energy; it also creates something. But in order for a word to arise, there must be thought, and it too has energy, no less than a word. That is, you need to think correctly in order for the right events to occur around you – well, from the same area. Therefore, if you explore purposefully and are tying this to their prayers – yes, to any prayers – then why do they say a place filled-in with prayers [namolennoe mesto]? Because this is where it already works.

The value of the energy-information field of Nachman’s gravesite as a place animated with prayer can be intentionally boosted as well:

They [Hasidim] did not in vain hire the people who prayed there [at the tomb]. They needed to create this energy-information field in order to start pulling. The more people think, think, and pray, the more Gregor [Gregor’s field] grows.

Although consistent with the “logic” of the place animated with prayer (Kormina 2010; Wanner 2020), this statement introduces an additional dimension that individuals and groups can influence and enhance the status of such a place with their actions. Others, however, perceive it as oppression, the energy of Nachman’s grave, developed by prayers, turns out to be a source of pressure for Dmytro:

Gregor [Gregor’s field] can oppress. That is, let’s suppose it can oppress ... the other faith, the other course of action. That is, for example, the same [Gregor’s field] of anti-Semitism can oppress. For example, you even can’t have thoughts to say something bad to a Jew, because the Gregor [Gregor’s field] that they [Hasidim] created, it won’t let you do it. You will think that this is tolerance. No, this is actually the field they created.

The field created by the prayers thus became for Dmytro an explanation for abstaining from anti-Semitism as well. Thus, Nachman’s tomb as a place animated with prayer becomes implicated in Dmytro’s resentment of the Hasidic presence in Uman and is used to discuss the structure of domination to which Dmytro feels subordinated. This accords with the process described by Wanner, where places animated with prayer have the “political utility” of being able to arouse attachment to a contested place by providing new forms of place agency (Wanner 2020, p. 100).

Another key informant, Andrii, was also in his late forties when we met. He had worked both as a guard and a cleaner during Rosh Hashana in Uman. Both kinds of work required constant but specific contact with the pilgrims. As a guard, Andrii checked whether the people passing through a gate leading to a hotel or to a canteen possessed relevant documents, while as a cleaner he picked up rubbish from the street. During one of our long conversations, after a lengthy discussion on the energy of Christian Orthodox sanctuaries, I asked him about the grave of Nachman of Bratslav. Had he ever visited Nachman's tomb? Did he feel energy there similar to that experienced in the Orthodox monasteries he had visited many times? His reply was slightly evasive and told me more about how Andrii understands the ontology of energy rather than his attitude to Nachman's tomb:

The energies are all around, they act differently for different people. They act differently for everyone. Just, you know, this is what we have to respect, because this is as fire. Fire is also for everyone, right?

In response to my further inquiries, Andrii admitted that he did not try to get in contact with Nachman, because he was not interested. Although Andrii said that he was not interested in communicating with the energy of the *tsadik*, during our conversation he did reveal his interest in Hasidic religious practices:

You see, everything is practically prescribed in there [in the Scripture]. So, for him, he is a Hasid; he wants to live well; he is supposed to eat properly. God forbid, if you do not eat in a right way; that's it, you are already practically sinning. To wash yourself, to shave; well, to do anything. For example, even to use this kind of water or rain water, you are supposed to use rain [water], because it is natural, it is structured, it is healthy water for your health, for everything.

“Structured water”, which Andrii refers to, was water with a “regular structure of molecules” and therefore possessed positive energy. By using this terminology to explain Hasidic customs, Andrii created a common ground where Hasidim and those coming from other religious, cultural or national backgrounds like Andrii himself, might meet and understand each other.

Both Dmytro and Andrii talked about the energy of Nachman of Bratslav and his tomb. Dmytro focused on distinguishing various actors that, thanks to the *tsadik's* energy, developed their own energies which could operate in the wider world—the *tsadik's* soul and remains, pilgrims' prayers and thoughts, Uman as a place suffused with prayers. Andrii, however, explored the broader connections between various realms of the world and the various actors inhabiting them, such as the energy of “structured water” being universal, one's interaction with the shrines' energies as an outcome of one's openness to them, and “being interested” in the *tsadik* and his tomb.

The energy Dmytro and Andrii engage with constitutes common ground for communication between groups (Hasidim and Uman's non-Jewish inhabitants), between people and place (the shrine and the town of Uman), and between human and other-than-human actors, such as the tomb, water, and animals. Although “energy” often refers here to the agency of humans or a saint, it is clear that it is

also understood as the property of various actors; the narrative of energy created by Dmytro and Andriï rejects human-centric understanding. My interviewees' engagement with energy challenges the binary distinctions between knowledge and belief, sacred and secular, or culture and nature, and offers instead a world of mutual connections, where the whole variety of actors are immersed in and influence each other (Ingold 2000, p. 187).

ENERGY AS SELF-AWARENESS

To understand Andriï's narrative, recorded during my fieldwork in 2017, and what was happening in many of our conversations, we need to contextualise it within the political situation of Ukraine he referred to, that is, the protest movement of Euromaidan and the subsequent Revolution of Dignity in 2013–2014, followed by the Russian annexation of Crimea, and War in the East, as my interviewees named the armed conflict in the Ukrainian region of Donbas, involving Ukrainian national forces on one side, and local separatists supported by Russia with military manpower and material on the other side (Yekelchuk 2015, p. 141). The Euromaidan Revolution, a wave of protests, demonstrations and armed clashes in Ukraine, began on November 21, 2013 in Kyiv and were triggered by then-President Viktor Yanukovich's refusal to sign an association agreement with the European Union. The Euromaidan Revolution (which lasted from November 2013 until February 2014) preceded the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation (ratified by Russia's Duma in March 2014). The subsequent armed conflict in the eastern provinces of Ukraine (in April 2014), would take the shape of an undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine, and bring so much death and displacement to people over the following years (Wanner 2021, p. 1). As Serhy Yekelchuk clarifies, "[t]he fighting in eastern Ukraine or, to be precise, in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces combines features of a covert foreign invasion with those of a civil conflict" (Yekelchuk 2015, p. 5).

In the course of my fieldwork, consisting of several research trips between 2012 and 2017, I observed that the events of Euromaidan and the military conflict in Donbas became not only a poignant part of my interviewees' daily lives, as interviewees' family members had been sent to the front and many of Uman's inhabitants were involved in supporting the soldiers from the region by sending them parcels with food, warm clothes and personal protective equipment. The events of the Euromaidan Revolution and the fighting in Donbas also became for them an important point of reference when they talked about Ukrainian-Hasidic relations in Uman, juxtaposing the problems of Ukrainian statehood with local economic, social, and political challenges resulting from the mass pilgrimages and the growth of the pilgrimage industry. Hence, Andriï's description of Hasidic pilgrimage to Uman, the development of the pilgrimage industry and the tensions around these were deeply embedded in his broader concern about the Ukrainian political situation, Ukrainian society and its energy, understood as "national self-awareness". All of this Andriï incorporated

into a description of recent global changes, including the climate and refugee crises. Energy in Andrii's narrative is what unifies the political and environmental processes operating both globally and locally.

The Euromaidan Revolution, the Crimean annexation and the conflict in Donbas were instances of the challenges to Ukraine's sovereignty and the tensions of post-Soviet nation building (Wanner 2014, 2020; Riabczuk 2015; Mikheieva & Shevel 2021). On the local level, this political situation strengthened the ways in which Ukrainian national and civic identities were manifested. An event contributing to this process involved a monument being erected to Ivan Gonta and Maksym Zalizniak, who led the 1768 rebellion of Cossacks and Ruthenian peasantry (*koliivshchyna* or *haïdamachchyna*) during which the murder of Jews and Poles who had sought refuge in Uman's fortress took place. As a result of this event, Uman, as Paul Magosci (1996) clarifies, became "an important symbol in the historical mythologies of Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews, yet one profoundly different for all three" (Magosci 1996, p. 297). From the popular Polish perspective, the "massacre of Uman" is often seen as an example of the Cossacks' "barbarism" against Polish "civilisation". From the Jewish side, the event, as "the second Ukrainian catastrophe" (after the Khmel'nyts'kyi Uprising of 1648), materialises the traumatic history of anti-Semitic violence in the Ukrainian lands (Magosci 1996, p. 296–300). Hence, this event is often described by Jews and Poles in terms of martyrdom. However, for many of those Uman interviewees who identified with the Ukrainian national movement, "the capture of Uman" in 1768 symbolised a victory in the long struggle for national freedom. Yet, at the same time, Nachman of Bratslav, who was born four years after the massacre, chose Uman as his burial place precisely because of the events of 1768 (Freeze, n.d.; Magosci 1996, p. 299).

During fieldwork conducted in 2015 and 2017 in Uman, this historical event, the Euromaidan, and the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine were often mentioned during my interlocutors' reflections about Hasidic pilgrimage to Uman. These reflections compared tense relations, those between locals and Hasidic pilgrims to historic Ukrainian-Jewish and Ukrainian-Polish relations, to the events of 1768 (*koliivshchyna*). They also made reference to what they perceived as the driver for the Crimean annexation and the military conflict in eastern Ukraine, namely contemporary Ukrainian-Russian relations.

This narrative was based on the notion of "oppression" which was used by my interviewees to express their sense of a continuity in the dominance structure through various times and across different scales. With regard to the *koliivshchyna*, then, my interlocutors believed that the oppression back then was perpetrated by Poles and by Jews working for the Polish administration of the area before the Second World War. As for the recent military conflict in eastern Ukraine, the oppressor was Russia, while in contemporary Uman itself, everyday life was marked by the oppression wielded by the influential businessmen operating locally and controlling the pilgrimage industry in the town. Hasidic pilgrimage was seen by my non-Hasidic interviewees as contributing to the local structures of political and economic domination. The development of Uman as a pilgrimage centre meant for them that the interests of

the Hasidim were prioritised over others by the local authorities and business. As another interviewee put it: when 300,000 pilgrims come to Uman instead of 30,000 pilgrims, the Gonta and Zalizniak monument is sure to be removed.

The tense relations between the locals and the Hasidic pilgrims were also expressed in more direct manifestations, such as protests against the Hasidic presence in Uman that employed anti-Semitic iconography or conflicts around the cross erected by local national-civic activists over the lake where pilgrims gather and pray (Zatorska 2019). The energy that my interviewees described was also an aspect of their experience of their own identity. Through this energy they can connect with other people, nation-states, and events of various scales both in space (the interviewees themselves, Uman's inhabitants, the Ukrainian nation, humanity, the world) and time (the Polish colonial past, the 1768 rebellion by Cossacks and Ruthenian peasantry, and contemporary conflicts with the pilgrims). Energy as an aspect of identity, then, activates the complex field of past and present Ukrainian-Jewish-Polish relations and mobilises it into the present struggles that form part of the local experience of pilgrimage.

CONCLUSION

In this contribution I have sought to look beyond the dominant representational approach towards pilgrimage. Drawing on my ethnographic fieldwork conducted among the local inhabitants of the Ukrainian town of Uman, I have explored the ways in which residents have viewed the town's growth as a mass pilgrimage destination visited by Hasidim. I have shown how local non-Jewish inhabitants who stay "outside" the pilgrimage, but whose everyday lives are heavily influenced by the development of the pilgrimage industry, respond to this flock via their engagement with energy. I traced the notion of energy (Ukr. *enerhiia*, *enerhetyka*, Rus. *energiia*, *energetika*) to the tradition of Russian Cosmism and explored how it is used by my interviewees to explain their understanding of the impact of the pilgrimage on the town and its inhabitants. In the broader context, I argued that my interviewees' experiences of energy has enabled them to engage with the complexities of historical memories and traumas, reflecting past Ukrainian, Polish, and Jewish relations as well as the ongoing war with Russia over Ukrainian sovereignty.

For my interviewees from Uman who are neither Hasidic nor Jewish, the tomb of Nachman of Bratslav contributes to the town's unique global status and impacts their sense of belonging to the place. The shrine has become, for them, both a centre of secular power connected to Uman's rapidly-developing pilgrimage industry, and a place suffused with other-than-secular power, that is, energy or energies comparable to those they have experienced at Orthodox Christian sanctuaries. For them, the tomb of Nachman of Bratslav, as a place animated with prayer, accumulates the energy of both historical and contemporary activities and events, such as the 1768 rebellion and recent conflicts around the cross built over the lake. In this context,

the tomb, constantly reinforced in its *namolenist'* by pilgrims' prayers, becomes an actor in the local field of power relations; it attracts new pilgrims, it is the centre of an alienated territory, and it reveals the sacred inextricably entangled with the economic and political.

For my interviewees, the energy of Nachman of Bratslav, his tomb, the presence of Hasidim in Uman and pilgrim prayers and thoughts are ontologically connected with the energy of place and actors in the "natural" world, such as water or animals. This connection exists prior to any differentiation between spirit and substance or agency and materiality. As such, it blurs the distinctions between human and non-human, secular and sacred, political and spiritual. Moreover, the explanation of this interconnectedness goes beyond the question of the agency of human and other-than-human actors. Energy connects various actors and places, with each other and with the world, and is understood in terms of "animacy".

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The article was originally prepared as a workshop paper and further developed with the aim of entering a special issue of one of the leading social science journals focused, *inter alia*, on the post-Soviet world. During this process, the article went through peer-review and three revisions. The last stage of work on the article coincided with the Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. The final refinements of the article consisted of the editorial board editing the paper and providing comments and wording suggestions to the author, including a suggestion to exchange the term "war", used by the author to refer to the armed conflict in Donbas since 2014, for the term "conflict". At the same time, the editors asked for a theoretical paragraph devoted to the details of cosmism. The author provided the required theoretical paragraph and agreed to replace the term "war" for "conflict". However, the author also added a short passage of text explaining that the "conflict" discussed in the article had a status of "undeclared war", a claim backed up with references to academic scholars who are well established in the West: "which took the shape of an undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine, bringing a lot of people's deaths and displacement during the following years' (Wanner 2021, p. 1). As Serhy Yekelchuk clarifies, '[t]he fighting in eastern Ukraine or, to be precise, in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces combines features of a covert foreign invasion with those of a civil conflict' (Yekelchuk 2015, p. 5)." The paper was rejected by the editorial board in March 2022, with the explanation that the changes provided by the author did not resolve the problems they had with the article and (somehow) instead generated new ones that could not be worked on further, due to time constraints. The editorial board did not provide any other details regarding these new problems that had arisen from the amendments. The author assumes that the rejection of the article at this final stage of work may stem from political considerations related to the use of the term "war", despite the editorial board's attempts to eliminate this word from the article.

The article represents another reworked effort to balance any potential concerns, as well as a serious engagement with the purpose and approach of this special issue to speak to and from contemporary Ukrainian scholarship. The author would like to thank to the editors of this special issue, Julia Buyskykh, Joanna Mroczkowska, and Keith Egan, as well as the anonymous reviewers, for their encouragement in developing the final version of the article.

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MAGDALENA ZATORSKA

THE TOMBS OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND COSMIC ENERGY IN UKRAINE

Key words: pilgrimage; Hasidism; agency; energy; Ukraine

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in the town of Uman (Ukraine), an important Hasidic pilgrimage centre built around the tomb of the Jewish righteous Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, I explore the notion of energy employed by Uman's non-Hasidic and non-Jewish inhabitants to describe the pilgrimages and their impact on the town. I argue that for some of the Uman residents energy, as a part of a wider set of ontological convictions, explains the agency of human and other-than-human actors, as well as the animacy of the world they inhabit. In this contribution, I show how the notion of energy reflects the local and supralocal contexts, in particular the struggles for national identity and sovereignty and is employed in the process of co-creating the Hasidic pilgrimage to Uman by the pilgrimage's "others".

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