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## **Magic Journey of Serbian Subjects of Traditional Birth Ceremony. Theoretical Assumptions**

In rite—moral complex of Serbian traditional birth a concept of a journey as well as the rite subjects themselves, can be put in two research perspectives. First of them concentrates on rite phases and searching for the answers to questions about the beginning of birth rites and their course, locates the journey in the real world and connects it with the crossing of defined points in space (in the time anticipated). It also sets the pre-rite phase of Serbian birth rite during the wedding reception, where by using magical acts a newlyweds fertility is defined.<sup>1</sup> That understanding of a journey defines also the rite subjects, who are only the mother and a child (pregnant woman, birth giving woman, woman in confinement, newly born child) creating a rite and ritual unity.<sup>2</sup>

The main assumption of the second research perspective is an explanation of a way in which actions and words influence reality and that is a question of the genesis of their presence in the birth rite. In opposition to the first one, which takes interest in determinants of the phases of the transfer rite, border places and a role of a figure of a way in a process of a status change, the second one searches for a source of actions, acts and words. It find them in mainly in the theory of magic and deeply rooted in Serbian folk culture the cult of ancestors. In this frame *magical* means possible to achieve thanks to

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<sup>1</sup> J. Rękas, *Między weselem a narodzinami, czyli gdzie ma swój początek serbski tradycyjny obrzęd narodzin?*, in: Człowiek w świecie, (eds.) M. Chołody, W. Hamerski, M. Telicki, Poznań 2006, pp. 209-219.

<sup>2</sup> J. Rękas, *Serbskie tradycyjne narodziny jako wyraz obrzędowej jedności matki i dziecka*, in: *Wielkie tematy kultury w literaturach słowiańskich*, Wrocław 2007, pp. 11-19.

the analogy between the form of an action and an outcome expected<sup>3</sup> and is semantically connected to the cult of ancestors. A magic cult is therefore an act of communication of a human with chthonic reality. It is given a name of a journey, which the rite subjects undergo with the use of a sacrifice and verbose magical behaviors. Sacrifice offered to the ancestors spirits makes a connection set up with them possible and guarantees their favors, while the verbose magical behaviors chase away the bad spirits of sickness and ensure the define future for the mother and the newly born. It is therefore a journey between the world of living and the dead, which is the world of ancestors spirits from whom we expect the support. "Between" because during the time of the whole rite it is done continuously. This connection of both realms is done by rite subjects (magical perpetrators): woman pregnant/in labor, her husband and midwife.

## **Magical perpetrator**

### **Pregnant woman, woman in labor**

Magical acts of a pregnant woman can be divided into three concentric circles, according to the criteria and the degree of mediation between the woman, the outside world (family and society) and the chthonic one. Within the first one, the closest, there is food, second consists of the elements found within the direct contact with the woman, and the third is made out of those with whom she has no direct connection.<sup>4</sup> To one of the most important actions to which a pregnant woman is obliged is the percept of eating only the defined foods and drinks, going out and looking at the determined elements of animated and unanimated nature, detangling, tying and all other acts which through the analogy to the form of a magical act (or observed phenomenon) in the belief of the traditional Serbian society positively influence the mother and a child.

Unlike the pregnant woman, magical acts which are carried out by the woman giving birth are directed towards the enabling of a quick and safe birth to a descendant. That is why she concentrates on enclosing her space, not admitting the unwanted people and supernatural creatures within it, she draws the window curtains, lighting up candles, closes doors, hides away magically isolating herself from the neighborhood. Her every action, walking under certain objects, threading, pouring out, jumping over, tearing apart, opening, together with accompanying it magic formulas, is dedicated to the

<sup>3</sup> J.G. Frazer, *Złota gałąź*, transl. by H. Krzeczowski, Warszawa 2002, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Б. Јовановић, *Магија српских обреда у животном циклусу појединца. Рођење, свадба и смрт као ритуали прелаза у традиционалној култури Срба*, Нови Сад 1995, p. 56.

superior aim of a quick and successful birth giving. Individual actions are accompanied by the creation acts, which are to allow the intended targets to be achieved on the basis of the analogy between contained within them descriptions and existing situation.

### **Husband**

Opposing the woman, a future father of a child very rarely gets involved in magical practices of the birth rites and his participation is limited to the complicated births. Performed by him magical acts concentrate on walking under the defined object, blowing (the husband blows three times into the mouth of a birth giving wife) and spitting into a palm.<sup>5</sup> There was also a known custom of *kuwada* (*muške Babine*); a husband lays down next to a birth giving wife or for 7 days lays in a place of her after birth rest) magically easing the pain and making the birth quicker.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile if to take under the consideration a connection of Serbian folk religion with the cult of ancestors and tied with it the sacrifice as a way of communicating with the world of the dead, we get a different explanation of *kuwada*. An action of lying down on the ground accompanies the situation of a change of a state or the threat of a change of a state. In a moment like this a man symbolically dies to be reborn.<sup>7</sup> Laying on the ground by a father is therefore a magical act of giving the life, in exchange for that the spirits of ancestors will allow his creation, the birth in new status. A man expects that thanks to that sacrifice they will agree to accept him again to the family but this time as a father, not only the husband. *Kuwada* is then, in my belief, a magical act of gaining by the man the sympathy of the ancestors spirits and aggregation into the old family but in the new status.

### **Midwife, *bajalica***

The role of a midwife, concentrated seemingly on medical care, has also a magical aspect which does not end with the baby's birth, but lasts for forty

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<sup>5</sup> Милићевић М.Ђ., *Живот Срба сељака*, „Српски Етнографски зборник”, књ. I, Београд 1894 [репринт: Београд 1984], р. 195.

<sup>6</sup> Ђорђевић., *Кувада*, „Босанска вила”, 6, Сарајево 1908; Т. Вукановић, *Прежици у косовско-метохијској покрајини*, „Гласник Музеја Косова и Метохије”, VII-VIII, Приштина 1967; Ш. Кулишић, *Необични обичаји*, Београд 1968; Хасанбеговић Р., *Мађијски и емпиријски елементи у народним обичајима око рођења*, „Гласник Етнографског музеја”, 36, Београд 1973.

<sup>7</sup> L. Stomma, *Rytuał pokładzin w Polsce—analiza strukturalna*, „Etnografi a Polska”, XIX, sheet 1, Wrocław—Warszawa—Kraków—Gdańsk 1975, p. 63.

days of purification and introduction of a woman in confinement and baby to the community. She takes the part in most important rites of that phase; takes the baby to the temple, she is present during its first bath, giving of a name on the eighth day, rites of the fortieth day and christening, but it is also the midwife who prepares the feast which is supposed to convince *Rodzanicas*<sup>8</sup> to allot good fate for the child and sleeps with the woman and the newly born throughout the whole period, in which the danger of a bad influence of the demons called *Babice* exists. She is believed therefore to be an unusually strong defender of a baby against the evil forces.<sup>9</sup> What is interesting is that in the literature she is mainly mentioned as a helping woman avoiding naming her magical engagement. If however to quote at least a few examples of ascribed to her rite acts, to which their verbalization in a shape of a magic formula is linked, a midwife turns into a woman undoing charms, healing, chasing the demons of illness away from a person. In this case she is given the name of: *Bajalica*. Performed by her magical acts are accompanied therefore by formulas, which from the act of creation in a shape of: *Вода из кућа, а ти ћемућа*<sup>10</sup> changes into a typical spell casting aimed at chasing the demons of illness away from a body of a birth giving woman and exactly the result of a cast charm: *Дим, смрад и мирис у собу, а чини из тебе!*<sup>11</sup> *Роду', умеси', испеко', бабице претеко*<sup>12</sup> is verbalized directly after the birth and is assumed to chase the evil forces away. Together with the magical formula there is a presence of a strict dependence on rites, on the concrete act which accompanies it. In the first case a midwife orders the woman in labor to hold on to the door and in the mean time she is censuring her witch an incense to which she added a few of the pregnant woman's hair ad in the second one a young mother spits into her palm and with a little bit of flour makes *kołacz*<sup>13</sup> which the midwife bakes and gives back to the woman in confinement to eat. She is also the one, pronouncing to the world the fact

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<sup>8</sup> *Rodzanica*—invisible demons of fate.

<sup>9</sup> С. Зечевић, *Митска бића српских предања*, Београд 1981, р. 88.

<sup>10</sup> В.Ст. Караџић, *Српски рјечник иступачен њемачкијем и латинскијем ријечима*, Београд, Беч 1852 [репринт: Београд 1975, с. 652-653, entry: *родити*].

<sup>11</sup> С. Милосављевић, *Из Среза Хомољског*, Српски Етнографски зборник", XIX, друго одељење, *Живот и обичаји народни*, 11, Београд 1913, р. 92.

<sup>12</sup> С.М. Грбић, *Српски народни обичаји*, „Српски Етнографски зборник", XIV, Друго одељење, *Живот и обичаји народни*, 8, Београд 1909, рр. 107; Ј. Релић, *Обичаји и веровања везани за животни циклус. Рођење, брак и смрт*, „Гласник Етнографског института", књ. 62, Београд 1998, р. 57.

<sup>13</sup> *Kołacz*— a kind of bread.

of a new born and automatically she casts a spell: *Чуј, пуче и народе! роди вучица вука, свему свијету на знање, а ђетету на здравље.*<sup>14</sup>

## Magical objects and behaviors

Magical journey which in the rite of birth carry out its objects create therefore acts which are aimed at establishing the communication with evil forces (and generally with spirits of ancestors) and giving them adequate information. That is why their character is mainly symbolic, ritual and may be explained as a nonverbal text. It consists of acts made out of one or few actions, which are always carried out with a defined aim so they have a function given to each one of them.<sup>15</sup>

### Water—bathing

Water has a magical power of purification resulting from its purity and controlling fertility thanks to the inhabitation of it by the spirits and demons.<sup>16</sup> In keeping with the wish of the rite object an influence on fertility can be, on one side, a result of thanks for just taking interest in them (performing defined actions exactly in the place of their inhabitation) but also because of the fact that it is a place in which they can quench their thirst. There are beliefs according to which in the empire of the dead the eternal thirst rules,<sup>17</sup> which can be reduced by pouring the water on the ground.<sup>18</sup> Apart from this water also becomes, within this meaning, a sacrifice for the souls of the dead which enables them quenching of their thirst and, what is important for a man, to win their favors. If for Rodzanicas was a feast prepared to persuade them to define the child's fate well, it seems logical, so frequent in spell casting, chasing the demons away into the water, so that later they can repay with the help in the fertility control. In folk beliefs water is also a way of communicating between the human world and the supernatural which is

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<sup>14</sup> Караџић В. Ст., *Српске народне пословице и друге различне као оне у обичај узете ријечи*, Беч 1849 [репринг: Београд 1975], р. 350.

<sup>15</sup> Љ. Раденковић, *Народна бајања код Јужних Словена*, Београд 1996, р. 77.

<sup>16</sup> К. Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian. Tom II. Kultura duchowa. Część 1*, Warszawa 1967, pp. 278-279.

<sup>17</sup> В. Чајкановић, *Стара српска религија и митологија*, Сабрана дела из српске религије и митологије, књига пета, прир. В. Ђурић, Београд 1994, р. 82.

<sup>18</sup> Д. Бандић, *Народна религија Срба у 100 појмова*, Београд 2004, р. 66.

the world of spirits<sup>19</sup>—objects put in it during the infants first bath and a woman's in confinement can be explained as a sacrifice for the souls of the dead ancestors.<sup>20</sup>

### Ground—laying

Analogous to water, ground is the point of meeting of both worlds known to man. Its characteristic is though different because it makes an altar on which the most important sacrifice is made—the newly born baby. The first element of the new reality which the new born could touch was the ground, that is why woman gave birth standing or kneeling down but never sitting or laying.<sup>21</sup> Often even despite winter the child birth took place outside so that after sweeping the snow away the baby would fall onto the ground<sup>22</sup>, there was also a known custom of putting the soil collected from the place where the baby fell into its mouth.<sup>23</sup> Mirea Eliade emphasizes that:

... conceiving and labor are microscopic versions of an act which is a model way Earth fulfills: human mother only repeats the primeval act of the birth from the earth. Therefore every mother must be in the direct contact with the Great Mother, so that during the fulfillment of this mystery—a new birth of life—lets her lead and enjoy her motherly protection. ... When the new born or the dying is laid on the ground it means that it is the earth itself who is to decide is the birth or death important, are they to be accepted as a fulfilled act.<sup>24</sup>

However this researcher also notices a connection between laying on the ground with the fact of a re-birth: “This rite marks new birth. Symbolic burial—partial or whole—has the same religious—symbolic meaning immersing in water—christening. A sick person is thanks to that renewed, reborn.”<sup>25</sup> Laying the baby on the ground is ascending it to the role of a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> K. Moszyński, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>21</sup> С.М. Грбић, *op. cit.*, pp. 107; В.М. Николић, *Етнологишка грађа и расправе из Лужнице и Нишаве*, „Српски Етнографски зборник”, XVI, друго одељење, Живот и обичаји народни, 9, Београд 1910, p. 166.

<sup>22</sup> Н. Благојевић, *Обичаји у вези са рођењем, женидбом и смрћу у титовоужичком, по-жешском и косјерићком крају*, ГЕМ, 48, Београд 1984, p. 218.

<sup>23</sup> Тројановић, *Главни српски жртвени обичаји*, „Српски Етнографски зборник”, Живот и обичаји народни, II, Београд 1896 [репринт: *Главни српски жртвени обичаји*, уред. С. Вел-мар-Јанковић, Београд 1983, p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> M. Eliade, *Sacrum i profanum*, transl. by R. Reszke, Warszawa 1999, p. 117.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

sacrifice and directing a request to the spirits of ancestors to accept it within the family. Sacrifice is understood here as a symbolic return of a new born to the world, to which it still belongs and humble waiting for the ancestors agreement to accept it to the world of living. Thanks to the new born baby's sacrifice which is made to propitiate the ancestors spirits a baby is born again. After destruction—creation, after symbolic death (giving the child to the ancestors spirits)—re-birth.

### **Fire, smoke—burning, censuring**

A magical meaning of the fire comes mainly from its features of purification out of ritual impurities, places in which the souls of the dead are and the means of chasing the demons away.<sup>26</sup> During the pregnancy time the fire mainly protects the community from the bad influence of a pregnant woman while she herself should avoid it if she doesn't want to cause the body injuries to the baby. Meanwhile already during the child's birth, in the room where it is happening and where the woman in confinement and the baby are, day and night a candle is alight. This rite though explained as chasing the bad spirits away, in the case of the birth rites can also have a different reason because this light is not visible but hidden and guarded from the strangers sight. Unfading fire inhabited by the ancestors spirits is in continuous contact with the woman in confinement and a baby, allows the rite objects to gain the ancestors favors and their acceptance into the family community. On the other hand demons coming under the cover of a night, even if they can locate the place where the new born is, will not attack it because of the presence of the light. Candle light is also an apotropaic resource, in which presence demons can't attack the woman in confinement and a baby.

The fire is given the reversing properties surely not only because it scalds and burns but also because by dispersing the darkness gives the light which the evil forces usually avoid.<sup>27</sup>

Бабице се боје светлости. Зато да би породиља и дете били заштићени од њих, „не смеју се никад остати без светлости.” На Косову, „ако би случајно, због неке велике нужде, породиља морала после заласка сунца или после вечере да изађе из куће, сама или са дететом, она понесе дело (светлост) са собом због бабица.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> В. Чајкановић, *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 64-66, 80, 120, 180.

<sup>27</sup> К. Moszyński, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>28</sup> Т.Р. Ђорђевић, *Животни круг. Рођење, свадба и смрт у веровањима и обичајима нашег народа*, уред. Б. Јовановић, Београд 2002, p. 120.

In the meantime the purifying power, mainly of the actions of bad spirits but also of chasing the demons away, has the smoke and continuously present in the birth rite censuring. Left in the yard after the sunset dippers have to be shaken over the fire in the hearth, so that the bad spirits gathered in them will be chased away.<sup>29</sup> Properties of the smoke are intensified by adding to it the suitable objects or plants. In this way a magical power of chasing the sickness demons and birth impurity away is given. Smoke chases away from a given place, human, animal or object all evil, sickness and so on, exactly the same way as it smokes the insects, reptiles or other creatures from caves, flats and so on. Because the evil and so called impurities in the peoples concepts tie together very tightly, so everything whatever is “impure” is purified with the help of the smoke, censuring this “impurity”<sup>30</sup> out. Censuring during the child birth is repeated also just after the birth and puts on a form of a sacrifice:

Оду [неко из породиљине куће] на ђубре, па нађу стари *опанак*, или какав *ђон*, па га *намажу катраном*, а узму и говеђе балеге па запале. Леуса устане и стане на тај опанак или ђон, а једна од жена говори: „Бежи, болести, од смрадности”! Тако је са дететом *каде* три јутра, а осталих враџбина држе се дана.<sup>31</sup>

In this case it is strictly connected with the act of undoing, with spell casting, chasing away the demon of sickness. There is also a birth censuring, which scares off the demons without the spell casting formula:

Све до крштења кућа се сваког петка и недеље кади крпом од кошуље или залогом од опанка, а неке жене узимају за то и ка тран. ... За четрдесет дана од порођаја око породиље и детета сваке вечери се посипљу божићне трице и кади се крпом, сумпором и катраном да не дођу бабице.<sup>32</sup>

## **Knot—tying, untying, closing, opening**

According to the rules of homeopathic magic tying, closing and so on intersects or hinders an uninhibited course of events and an action like that has to hinder or stop everything that is happening within the vicinity.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> С.М. Грбић, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>30</sup> К Moszyński, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

<sup>31</sup> С. Тројановић, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>32</sup> С.М. Грбић, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-116.

<sup>33</sup> J.G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-193.



Therefore during the birth giving a woman cannot have anything tied on her, she undoes her hair,<sup>34</sup> tears the shirt... Sima Trojanovic also emphasizes:

Значај чвора, као чврсте обавезе, временом се претворило у магички чвор, зато се код Срба код породиље морају сви чворови на оделу зарзешити, да јој се крста »растворе«, што значи раздреше, и да се лакше астави са дететом.<sup>35</sup>

Magical actions of tying an untying—as their opposing sides—are related (in a respect of an aim, to which they are used in the birth rite) to closing and opening but also with stitching (sewing in) and unstitching (unpicking), emphasizing that the last one is usually applied mainly during the pre-rite phase done during the wedding reception. There are also ways of magical elimination of evil, which is also done through breaking and generally through the destruction.<sup>36</sup> Function of magical closing fulfils, within the birth rite, mostly a line which at the same time joined by the red color is one of the most widely spread apotropaic means. Indispensable in this case color is defined as the most important in the whole traditional culture.<sup>37</sup> It is mainly tied with the blood and fire what causes that it is connected on one hand with the fertility and on the other with the protection against evil spirits. However its most important meaning is connected with the properties of stopping charms, bad looks and protection against demons. That is why if a pregnant woman goes out after the sunset or goes to see the deceased she ties around her finger a red string, an umbilical cord is also tied solely with the red thread and a red colored object is put into the bath.<sup>38</sup>

*Црвени конач* (алтернира се с *црвеном траком*) има вишеструке симболичке могућности: као нит којом се плете, настала увртањем вуне, памука, свиле, конопље итд., симболизује кретање и промену [...]; може да исказује осу и границу, може да буде мера реалија, може да буде веза

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<sup>34</sup> “The rule obliging to undo the hair ... In some magical and religious ceremonies comes out most probably from the same fear of stopping or obstructing the action in process because of the presence of a knot or something binding the head or legs of the person doing this action” (Ibid., pp. 191-193).

<sup>35</sup> С. Тројановић, *Психолошко изражавање српског народна поглавито без речи*, „Срп-ски Етнографски зборник”, књ. LII, Друго одељење, Живот и обичаји народни, књ. 22, Београд 1935 [репринт: Београд 1986], р. 139.

<sup>36</sup> К. Moszyński, *op. cit.*, р. 290-291.

<sup>37</sup> Љ Раденковић, *Симболика света у народној магији јужних Словена*, Ниш 1996, р. 291.

<sup>38</sup> *Српски митолошки речник*, Кулишић Ш., Петровић П.Ж., Пантелић Н., Београд 1970, р. 40, entrance: *боја*.

и преносилац између два комуникатора. Црвена боја даје концу обележје хтонског елемента и присуства хтонске стране.<sup>39</sup>

Red string (thread, belt) takes on also protective meaning regarding the presence of the ancestors spirits.

### **Egg—rolling, dropping**

Within the magical act of Serbian traditional birth rite using the egg, which in “folk magic plays ... absolutely superb or even an extraordinary role,”<sup>40</sup> most often repeated is rolling between the birth giving woman’s breasts (analogical action take place during the wedding reception) and dropping it to the ground. Using it for the magical purposes results mainly in the belief that a shell is inhabited by the demons and one of its main functions is the protection against the spells.<sup>41</sup> It magically facilitates the birth giving in regard for its power of separating and moving the evil force from the social space (inhabited by humans) into the non—social one (beyond the reach of humans)<sup>42</sup> This power is activated with the help of one of the variations of a magical touch, that is the rolling which takes away from the birth giving woman’s body all of her powerlessness, transferring it into an egg and closing it within it.<sup>43</sup>

An egg had right from the beginning a character of many—sided means and that is thanks to the enclosed within it “life” ... thanks to its “fullness” ... thanks to its resemblance to the huge cereal seeds, thanks to presenting a natural confinement.<sup>44</sup>

There also exists another explanation of this rite, arising on one hand from the mentioned earlier natural confinement of an egg and on the other hand from the fact of breaking it:

Инспириран принципом имитативне магије, он има за циљ да посредством одговарајућих супституата, *кошуље* и *живог јајета*—који представљају породиљу и дете—магијски утиче на порођај и приуведе истоветно деловање.<sup>45</sup>

Breaking the egg therefore has a task to magically provoke an easy birth of a baby from a woman’s womb but also destroying the evil, which blocks the birth and protects against it the mother and a baby beforehand.

<sup>39</sup> Ј. Раденковић, *Симболика света*, p. 298.

<sup>40</sup> К. Moszyński, *op. cit.*, s. 281.

<sup>41</sup> *Српски митолошки речник*, p. 155, entrance: *јаје*.

<sup>42</sup> Ј. Раденковић, *Народна бајања*, p. 128.

<sup>43</sup> К. Moszyński, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>45</sup> Б. Јовановић, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

**Sieve, riddle— sieving through, pouring**

Both objects have the same the same meaning in magical acts carried out during the birth rite: “имају подједнаку религијску вредност и значај, и у култу еквиваленти су и између њих не прави се разлика.”<sup>46</sup> During the child birth mainly used is their function of separating, which should magically influence the separation of a child from a mother, the safe and quick birth.

Пошто су *округлог облика* и са великим бројем ситних отвора (чимесе исказује идеја *затварања/отварања*), и обављају радњу одвајања чистог од нечистог, *сито* и *решето* су по тим обележјима погодни пред-мети за преузимање и неких функција у народној магији.<sup>47</sup>

It is mainly visible in the rite of pouring the water through the sieve, drinking it and pronouncing the words: *Као што лако пролази брашно кроз ситом тако лако и ја да родим!*<sup>48</sup>

Function of separating elements defined by man as impure and dangerous from close and friendly to him, results from the sieves function as of an object which, depending on the size of the holes, lets through only that what is best,<sup>49</sup> finds its magical usage with chasing out the demons from the new born and still crying baby. Act preceding the spell casting and connected with the sieve is carried out by a mother but the formula itself is spoken by the midwife while the magical influence of the sieve is enhanced by turning it upside down what prevents against the influence of the evil forces.<sup>50</sup>

Окрену наопако танур, столицу и сито. У сито мати детиња стави пепео па га, жмурећи, иза себе просеје. Чим ставе корито да купају дете ставе на сва четири угла његова по мало просејаног пепела. Кад баба узме дете да купа, она обори у воду детињом ногом прегршт просејаног пепела са једног угла корита и каже „куче”, кад обори други каже „маче”, на трећи „пиле”, затим „свиња”, или „крава”, „теле”, „ждебе” итд. Тамо се нађу длаке, „влакна” што су у детету биле. Оне су тамо доспеле још кад је мати била трудна на тај начин што је мати ногом ударила мачку, куче, пиле, свињу итд.<sup>51</sup>

Magical participation of a sieve in healing infants illnesses and securing them against the actions of the evil forces has also its reflection in holding it

<sup>46</sup> В. Чајкановић, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>47</sup> Љ. Раденковић, *Народна бајања*, p. 145.

<sup>48</sup> С.М. Грбић, *op. cit.*, pp. 105.

<sup>49</sup> *Rečnik simbola. Mitovi, snovi, običaji, postupci, oblici, likovi, boje, brojevi*, Gerbran A., Ševalije Ž., prev. P. Sekeruš, K. Koprivšek, I. Gordi, Novi Sad 2004, p. 833, nentrance *sito*.

<sup>50</sup> Љ. Раденковић, *Народна бајања*, p. 91.

<sup>51</sup> Д.М. Ђорђевић, *Живот и обичаји народни у Лесковачкој Морави*, СЕЗ, LXX, друго одељење *Живот и обичаји народни*, 31, Београд 1958, p. 431.

above the baby, especially during the first feeding and putting the new born family member into a riddle.<sup>52</sup>

### Two objects, hole—threading

In Serbian traditional birth rite the meaning of threading, for which an object is only an enhancement of its magical action, can be considered at two grounds. First of them is symbolic ostensible leaving the world by a man in the aim of freeing oneself from the presence and actions of evil forces. Second is characterised as a necessity for eliminating of opposition human—evil forces.<sup>53</sup>

Да би се човек ослободио опасног утицаја демонске силе, он привидно мора да уђе у њен свет прелазећи неку границу која се прихвата као симболичка граница људског и нељудског света. Најраспрострањенији начин таквог „прелажења” је, по свој прилици, поступак *провлачења*.<sup>54</sup>

This way threading becomes an extremely vital component of spell casting; action which is carried out and joined by verbalization of a determined magical formula that enables getting rid of the sickness. So it is necessary during the child birth and the whole postnatal period because it does not only protect the healthy infants but most of all heals.<sup>55</sup> It also makes a magical form of aggregation of a child in the family community; separating it from the previous world and accepting into the new:

Подиге се српски цар Степане  
из Призрена, места убавога,  
...  
нађе чедо у гори зеленој  
...  
однесе га у господске дворе,  
прометну га кроз недра свилена,  
*да б' се дете од срца назвало.*<sup>56</sup>

A border where the world of humans and the supernatural meet, is mainly made of elements of animated and unanimated environment, which Serbian folk believe are defined as places of living or temporary staying of souls or demons. Confrontation of both mentioned realms is also possible

<sup>52</sup> В. Чајкановић, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>53</sup> Ј. Раденковић, *Народна бајања*, p. 77.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>55</sup> *Српски митолошки речник*, p. 246, entrance: *провлачење*.

<sup>56</sup> В. Ст. Караџић, *Српске народне пјесме. Књига друга, у којој су пјесме јуначке најста-рије*, Беч 1845 [репринт: Београд 1975], p. 29.

thanks to objects, plants, animals and body parts of which form symbolizes the separation.

У односу на сам порођај, ова врста магијске радње конституише неку врсту паралелне реалности из чије се перспективе успелом имитацијом настоји да произведе истоверно дејство на потоњи порођај.<sup>57</sup>

An act of threading enhanced by magic influence of a cherry tree as an object helping in achieving the desired aim, plays already an important role during the infertility treatment. Women desiring offspring were walking therefore under the wrapped branch of a wild cherry tree, the tree which in a Serbian traditional man gives the power of creation,<sup>58</sup> inhabited by the demons of the altar on which sacrifices are given to the evil forces,<sup>59</sup> so in that way to guarantee having the children:

... нађе дивљу трешњу у шуми, да јој савије једну грану, три пут да се провуче испод ње и сва три пута да рекне: „Како ти ниси јалова у свој род, тако и ја да не будем у свој род!<sup>60</sup>

Women during the final stage of birth rite were led between the glowing coals marking, according to the magical meaning of fire and smoke, a border at which the world of a woman in confinement meets the world of evil forces. Important is also a practice of a walk in between the cattle water trough because magical (marked by living in it demons) meaning of water increases with its flowing out of the enclosed space of a house. Basic meaning also had leading the pregnant woman between the broomstick and an axe. First one is an object especially attracting the souls of the deceased ancestors and at the same time protecting against demons although it is also inhabited by the souls which are dangerous and unfriendly towards people.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile the axe was treated as a tool protecting from the bad demons. To make the birth giving easier women would even drink the water in which it was cleaned.<sup>62</sup>

To protect the children from the birth demons, they were passed under the handle of a pot what Ljubinko Radenkovic explains as follows:

Котао може да представља „границу”, јер он преобраћа *сирово* у *кувано* (туђе-своје), а важна је и његова веза с *ватром*, односно

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<sup>57</sup> Б. Јовановић, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>58</sup> В. Чајкановић, *Речник српских народних веровања о биљкама*, рукопис приредио и допунио В. Ђурић, Сабрана дела из српске религије и миологије, књига четврта, Београд 1994, p. 199.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-126.

<sup>60</sup> С. Милосављевић, *Из Среза Хомољског*, p. 84.

<sup>61</sup> В. Чајкановић, *Стара српска религија*, p. 84, 226, 264.

<sup>62</sup> *Српски митолошки речник*, p. 202, entrance: *секира*.

*огњиштем*. Он виси на *веригама* чинећи тако саставни део *осе* небеско-земаљско.<sup>63</sup>

Sick newborns were pulled through the wolf skin<sup>64</sup> an animal exceptionally demonic<sup>65</sup> closely related to the evil force and possessing features of “border” creatures<sup>66</sup> (between two worlds):

Овај поступак иде у круг широко распрострањених магијских поступака *провлачења*, као вида симболичког умирања и поновног рађања.<sup>67</sup>

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### **Magic Journey of Serbian Subjects of Traditional Birth Ceremony. Theoretical Assumptions**

#### A b s t r a c t

Awareness of ubiquity and unusual activity of ancestors spirits leaves its lasting mark on the form of accepting to the community its new member and re-aggregation of the old one. An image of Serbian traditional birth world is closely dependant on accepted form of communication with the deceased and communicating with them is done mainly by offering a sacrifice. As an outcome of the awareness of a need of their help without which the birth rite could not be fulfilled, it is also a form of emphasizing by people the memory of the ancestors souls and continuous search for their acceptance.

Magical journey of the objects of the Serbian traditional birth rites, is possible thanks to a defined set of magical oral behaviors and magical ritual acts, it is therefore submitted to chthonic realm, from which a new born child comes. Its presence is an outcome of a fact, that a baby must part with it in a defined way and get a permission to cross to the world which will teach it the ways of communicating with the “old community.”

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<sup>63</sup> Љ. Раденковић, *Народна бајања*, р. 81.

<sup>64</sup> Д.М. Ђорђевић, *Живот и обичаји*, р. 433.

<sup>65</sup> *Српски митолошки речник*, рр. 82, entrance: *вук*.

<sup>66</sup> Љ. Раденковић, *Симболика света*, р. 81.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, р. 93.